



CHAPTER ONE

January 1968, Ft. Benning, Georgia, home of the UNITED STATES ARMY INFANTRY CENTER (USAIC) at the height of the Vietnam war. Capt. McCune, the commanding officer of Headquarters Detachment Scout Dog U.S. Army, sat at his desk wondering how he would follow the orders handed down to him by the Infantry School Command. He thought to himself, "This is impossible. There is no way this many qualified people with the type of clearance that is needed in so short a time. What the hell do they think I am, some kind of a god damn magician? I can't pull troops out of anything out of a hat!"

Disgusted he reaches for the phone and proceeds to dial the number to his commander. Listening for intelligent life to answer, at the opposite end he finally hears a Specialist say, "Colonel Treadwell's office, may I help you, sir?"

"Yes this Captain McCune. I would like to speak to Colonel Treadwell," using proper military courtesy as well as demonstrating his power and authority over the man answering.

"Stand by sir. I'll see if the Colonel is available," the specialist replied, quickly putting Capt McCune on hold before he can object.

"Don't put me on hold," Capt. McCune yells too late. "Damnit, I hate that.

"Yes Capt. McCune I see that you have received the orders I sent you." Colonel Treadwell said in his commanding voice.

"Yes sir. I did receive the orders to form two new scout dog platoons for deployment to Vietnam by June. You do understand that it takes several months to find qualified people and obtain clearances for seventy troops, sir?"

"Yes Capt. McCune. I do understand this; however, the Department of the Army says you must have these scout dog platoons operational by June 1, 1968." Treadwell ordered in a stern military manner.

"But how, sir?" McCune asked, knowing that completing the orders were next to impossible.. Jumping out of a plane without a parachute and landing safely would be easier, he thought to himself.

"Capt. McCune, you do understand there are approximately eight-hundred NCOC(Non Commissioned Officers Candidate school) and OCS (Officers Candidate School) drop-outs in the 8th Casual company awaiting orders," he told McCune. "You can screen and choose as many of the troops as you need."

"But, sir, most of those guys aren't just drop-outs, they're a bunch of rejects, troublemakers, and misfits," McCune said, trying to make the colonel understand his situation. "These men were unable to complete NCOC and OCS, so how do you expect them to complete the twelve weeks of rigorous physical and psychological endurance of scout dog training.

"Look," the colonel said irritated. "You screen them and choose whoever you want. If you have a problem with any of them, send them to me, and I'll handle them personally. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, sir. I understand and will start the selection immediately," McCune said and hung up the phone. "It ain't gonna work," he says aloud. "It'll take a miracle. Like turning coal into diamonds."

"Orderly." McCune shouted still shaking his head.

"Yes, sir." The orderly answered sharply.

"Find Sergeant Mendez, and tell him to report to me immediately." McCune ordered with his authoritative voice, and trying to figure what he was going to tell Sergeant First Class (SFC) Mendez the NCOIC (Non Commissioned Officer In Charge) of training.

"Right away, sir." The orderly answered wondering what was so important.

A short while later there was a knock on Capt. McCune's door. "Enter." Capt. McCune said, expecting it to be SFC Mendez.

"You wanted to see me, sir?" Mendez asked as he entered the CO's (Commanding Officer) office a little unsure of what was happening.

"Yes, Sergeant. We have a very difficult mission ahead of us. We have been ordered to choose enough troopers from the 8th Casual Company to make up two scout dog platoons. I personally don't think they won't work out. I need your help in figuring out how we can successfully accomplish this task." Capt McCune ordered in a somewhat pleading voice.

"Where are the platoon commanders coming from?" Mendez asked curiously.

“They will be coming in from headquarters along with two platoon sergeants to make up the command. They should be here tomorrow.” McCune answered, wondering what his NCOIC had in mind.

“Well, if they are going to be the commanders let them choose who they want. This will take that burden off our backs.” Mendez said in a cool calm voice of the seasoned NCO that he was.

“Sergeant, you are a genius, thank you. As soon as they arrive we will allow them choose the troops they want. That way if any of them gives us a problem, it will be their responsibility.” McCune said in a much more confident voice.

“This will give the CO’s and PLT Sergeants a little command experience from the beginning.” Mendez said, thinking what a relief, he took the first suggestion.

“Theta’s all, Sergeant.” McCune said in a much happier voice, and a kind of small smirk on his face, as he watched Sergeant Mendez do a snappy about face and leave the room.

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It was a normal morning at the Scout Dog school, the clerks typing up the reports, the first sergeant shuffling important papers, and trainees running in and out for various reasons.

“Excuse me private,” Lieutenant Stockdale said as he entered the room and stood in front of the clerks desk. “Where do I sign in?”

“Who are you?” The clerk asked without looking up from his typewriter, and just kept on pecking out the morning report.

"I'm Lieutenant Stockdale." The Lieutenant replied in his quiet easy voice. "I've been assigned here to command the 47th Scout Dog platoon."

"I'm Lieutenant Misajon." The other Lieutenant said stepping into the room, from almost out of now here the private thought.

"Sorry, Sirs. I have to get these reports out ASAP, the first sergeant is waiting for them.

The clerk continued typing for a moment, then jerked the paper from his typewriter with one motion. "I'll be right with you." He said then turned and walked rapidly toward the first sergeant's office.

Moments later he returned with a sign in sheet. "Just sign in here the clerk said." Shoving the form in front of the two anxiously awaiting officers.

Lt. Stockdale felt a sharp tap on his shoulder, as he turned this voice from several inches below him asked. "Excuse me sir is this where I sign in I'm SFC Sprowl and I've been assigned as platoon sergeant for the 47th Scout dog platoon."

Lt. Stockdale looked down to the sergeant who was several inches shorter, and replied, "yes it is, and I'm Lieutenant Stockdale, I'll be your commanding officer."

"Glad to meet you sir." Sergeant Sprowl said in his gruff commanding voice.

"I'm SFC Otto and I'm the platoon sergeant for the 59th Scout Dog platoon." Otto said as he towered over SFC Sprowl.

"I'm Lieutenant Misajon I'm the commanding officer of the 59th Scout Dog platoon." Lt. Misajon said introducing himself to the other soldiers.

“Gentlemen the Captain McCune will see you now.” The first sergeant said interrupting the men while they were getting aquatinted. The men followed the top sergeant in the CO’s office.

“Gentlemen. First I would like to welcome you to the 26th Infantry Platoon (Scout Dog), known better as the Scout Dog School. I know you are anxious to get started, so let me say that you have a big job cut out for you. The command has decided that you will have to choose your troops from the 8th Casual company. I’m sure you are familiar with the quality of personnel that are assigned there. First of all I want you to know that this is not of my doing, I am all against it. I think it is a big mistake.” Capt. McCune stated in a disgusted tone.

“Excuse me, sir, I don’t understand what the problem is. I’m not familiar with this Casual company.” Sergeant Sprowl said in a curious voice.

“The 8th Casual company is full of NCOC and OCS dropouts and rejects, they are for the most part rejects, misfits and troublemakers.” Capt. McCune said feeling angry that higher command had even thought of such a thing. “It is hard enough to train good volunteers that really want to be dog handlers, much less ones that are just trying to get over on the Army.”

“I’ve been in the Army for seventeen years and I haven’t seen the troops that I can’t handle.” Sgt. Sprowl said in a very sarcastic and commanding tone, which made Capt. McCune do a double take at him.

“Never the less You will be choosing the troops that you want from these troops, and you will handle any discipline that needs handing out. Is that clear!” The Captain ordered in his sternest commanding voice. “I don’t want to see any of your troops in my office. Is that clear.”

“Yes, sir.” Came the reply from all four soldiers in unison.

“If there is no more questions, I suggest that you get right to your task.” The captain said in his powerful military tone.

The four saluted, did an about face, and headed out the door to start their impossible mission of selecting the personnel that would be in their command.