

Operation Blue Dragon - Prolog

David Birney hefted the two heavy cans of ammunition, lifting them carefully from the back of the GMC Sonoma High Rider pickup truck. He didn't want to throw his back out, so he was careful to shift his feet rather than turn at the waist to move the cans over the cart. He squatted rather than leaned over to set the ammunition on the cart he used around the place for hauling such things he didn't want to carry. He did the same thing six times, adding two cans of .308 ammunition each time to the cart.

A few minutes later he reversed the process, adding the cans of ammunition to the stacks already sitting beside one of his gun vaults. David made two more trips, each one moving fourteen of the ammunition cans from the truck to the underground shelter located a few feet away from the basement of his house.

Each of the cans held two-hundred rounds of 147grain full metal jacket .308 Winchester ammunition. The ammunition was in 6-pocket cloth bandoleers, two 5-round stripper clips per pocket, plus one guide per bandoleer, for a total of 60 rounds. Enough to reload three 20-round magazines.

The new cans brought the total of his .308 ammunition to over 100,000 rounds. It wasn't all in the vault in the shelter. He had ammunition caches in several places so he could get to some under just about any circumstances.

But the .308 ammunition wasn't the only ammunition he had. He had a like number of .30 Carbine rounds and 12-gauge shells, plus about a fourth that number of .45 ACP and .50 BMG rounds. All civilian equivalent standard military loads.

That was just the backup ammunition he had in store. There were hundreds of loaded magazines for the rifles and pistols included in his assortment of arms. Even the others in the Preparedness Mutual Aid Group he was a member of had no idea of the amount of ammunition he had.

For that matter, they didn't know about most of his other preps. Only the one year supply of everything that was a requirement for membership in the MAG. He suspected some of the other members had more than they let on, too. But that was okay. More than okay. It was good. It meant that there would be much less chance of any one of them having to carry another for a time if a situation came up that could last longer than a year.

David needed someone to watch his back, in return for watching theirs, but he had no intention of carrying someone on his back because they failed to prepare adequately. But the MAG had good members, David thought, so that wasn't much of a worry. Of course, the things he was preparing for went far beyond what most of the others considered a possibility.

David's biggest worry was considered an impossibility by the others. Even most of those on the Preparedness Forums thought the danger was less than miniscule. But David believed, wholeheartedly, that the Chinese, perhaps the Russians, too, would one day try to invade the US.

There was no doubt in his mind that the invasion would fail, but that didn't mean they wouldn't try. China was making it very clear that they intended to rule the world at some point. David saw no reason to not believe they would try. And the Russians were likely to use that drive to further their own ends, up to the point that they turned on China so Russia would be the dominate country in the world.

The general thinking was that the supply lines would be too long, the US Navy was too strong and numerous, we had more nukes than they, and there were too many guns in civilian hands for an invasion to work. Which was true, David believed. He didn't think it would be a successful invasion.

But he didn't believe that the Chinese would see it the same way. David believed the Chinese leadership would be willing to accept the great losses they would undoubtedly suffer during an invasion. He felt the Chinese believed that the ends would justify the means, in a manner of speaking.

As to the nukes and the Navy, well, the President would have to authorize their use, on a timely basis, or they would become much less a deterrent in David's mind. He wasn't sure the President would authorize the use of nukes in the early stages of the invasion David envisioned. And if the Navy was held in check for too long, they could be neutralized, contained, or diverted before they had the opportunity to destroy the supply line that would be stretched across the Pacific.

And David believed that the Chinese would believe that the mass of the American population would be too fearful and weak to put up a real defense using hunting rifles and shotguns. Yes, there were many 'assault rifles' in the hands of US citizens, but the majority of the millions of guns that American's owned were, in fact, hunting and sport weapons. And few of those gun owners had more than a few rounds of ammunition for each weapon they did have.

Those owning arms suitable for a sustained fight with enough ammunition to make a difference got all the attention in the US media, but they were not representative of the majority. Which China knew, even if the US media didn't.

David still believed that US Patriots would win out, using all the different types of weapons in their hands. But as long as the Chinese believed they had a chance, David was sure they would take it in his lifetime. Probably fairly soon. So he was buying preps, with full intention of participating in the defense of the US from any foreign invader.

That's was where he stood on that Saturday evening when he sat down in the living room of his small house and turned on the television to watch the news. David felt himself go pale and get a chill when the talking head announced the new joint military exercises that Mexico and China would conduct. It would take place in approximately a year. In the meantime, China would begin moving appropriate personnel and material to Mexico. And since they would be there, they would assist Mexico with controlling the drug cartels that were creating so many problems.

David waited for a companion piece outlining what the Pentagon and White House thought about the announcement, but one didn't come. The news moved on to the heightened

tensions between North and South Korea, and the growing unease in the Middle East as Iran got closer and closer to having deployable nuclear weapons.

In other news, Russia announced a series of new programs to open up the northern shore of Far Eastern Russia from around the mouth of the Kolyma River to the town of Pevek. Once known for the Gulags and mining, with the warming of the East Siberian Sea, the area would become the staging area for fishing and shipping endeavors.

What wasn't said was the fact that the operation would include a huge military component. But those that could read between the lines suspected as much. David was one of those people. To him, the elements of a two pronged invasion of the United States had just been created. Such things take time, however, and many people forgot about the two situations when the news quit covering the operations, due to news blackouts instituted by Mexico, China, and Russia.

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David didn't forget, despite the many things that happened in the three years since those two announcements. The MAG was stronger than ever, the numbers having swollen as the Administration continued on the course of action started in 2009. Things had not proceeded as well or as quickly as wanted by those in power, but they were making steady progress.

David wasn't sure which would come first, a new US Civil War or the invasion he foresaw. What news was trickling out of Mexico, China, and Russia about their military buildups led David to believe that the invasions were imminent.

David was as ready as he could be for either situation. Or both, if it came to that. He'd slowly liquidated his inheritance, such as it was, and put it all into preparations for war.

"Come on, Valerie Vance! Give a guy a break. I'm hauling twice as much as you are."

Valerie looked back at David Birney. He'd offered to help Valerie with field skills when she joined the MAG a few weeks previously. He was a nice guy, and hadn't hit on her at all, unlike a couple of the other single guys in the MAG.

"Okay, David. I'll slow down." Valerie slowed her pace, allowing David to catch up to her.

"Thank you," David said, breathing heavily but evenly. "It's important to pace yourself. Or myself, in this case. Push come to shove in a real situation I'd cache the carts and we could move fast and light. But we don't need to do that in this exercise. We're out here to learn other field skills. You've got the movement part down pat."

"Okay, David. Thanks. I'm just eager to get to the campsite."

"We'll get there. In plenty of time to set up camp and practice a few skills before nightfall."

The trail they were on in the National Forest widened and David began to walk beside Valerie. She matched her pace to his and found she was breathing better and the cargo cart was riding better behind her.

She had to give David credit. He really was hauling more than she was. More than the double he'd said. More like triple. She'd brought what she thought she'd need for the exercise, but that was all. David had what he said was his full kit.

And it was easier to talk, for both of them, at the slightly reduced pace. "Sorry about that, David. I'm just anxious to start learning more."

"You're a quick study. You'll learn what you need to know in plenty of time." David winced slightly when he realized what he'd said.

“Time for what?” Valerie asked. “You sound like something is about to happen.”

David sighed. “Me and my big mouth. Well... Yeah... I’m convinced we’re only a few weeks away from an attempted invasion.”

Valerie’s eyes widened in surprise. “But the others in the MAG say they’re just getting ready for natural disasters. And the economy tanking, of course. I’ve heard some of the guys talking about an invasion being impossible. That no country will try it.”

“It is the generally held belief, I know. But with what is happening in Mexico and Far Eastern Russia has me really worried.”

“But that hasn’t been in the news for ages. Aren’t the Chinese just helping the Mexicans with internal domestic issues? And the Russians, with the price of gold so high are opening up some of the old mines.”

“That’s the news,” David said. “Can’t fault your reasoning. I just don’t believe it. I think there is a great deal more to it than the US media is reporting. I listen to European shortwave broadcasts in English, and read some articles in English from a few foreign news sources. Some of those sources are now questioning the activities of the Russians especially. Not too much on the Mexican situation, as it is outside their area of interest.”

“So, what do you think will happen?” Valerie asked, more than a little curious. David had been a quiet one in the MAG meetings. She’d had to ask him specifically to help her train when some of the others indicated interests other than just training.

“I’d rather not say,” David replied cautiously. “Time will tell. I will tell you that I’m prepared to fight a foreign invasion force, no matter who it is. That includes the UN Peace Keepers that the President is talking about bringing in to help enforce the new policies.”

“Yeah. That I know about. I don’t like it much either. We should be handling our own problems. We don’t need the UN sticking its nose in our business.”

David smiled at the intensity in Valerie’s statement. “I feel the same way. But there are enough people that don’t believe that... That have agendas of their own, that would benefit if these new policies are carried out. And there is a strong chance that many of our own troops wouldn’t carry out their orders to fire on US citizens.”

They both fell silent as David slipped behind Valerie when the path narrowed and began to rise sharply. The area that Valerie had picked for the first night’s camp was just over the ridge, partway down into the valley on the other side. David had coached Valerie through the use of their topographic map to find the spot. It was the one he would have chosen himself.

Once there, the teaching/coaching process continued. David guided, but let Valerie do all her own work erecting a tent, laying out a perimeter alarm, hoisting their food bags high in the trees, and then finally starting a fire, after gathering the materials needed.

This first night the details of the fire were in the preparation of tinder and kindling. Other means of starting fires would be covered later. When Valerie had her fire makings set up to suit David, she pulled out the butane lighter and pressed the button. The flame she directed into the fluffed up piece of Wet Fire tinder that was under the tipi of fatwood sticks, around which were log cabin stacked pieces of twigs and small limbs.

When the fire was going well, David showed Valerie how to keep adding larger items to the fire until they had a small blaze suitable for cooking over. The weather was mild so they kept the fire small.

A while later, with a shared Mountain House Beef Stroganoff meal, each was seated on a tote from their respective cargo cart. Valerie looked around the tiny camp and suddenly asked David, "Why do you have such a large and expensive tent?"

"Same reason I have a quality sleep system," David replied, a half smile on his face. "I like my comforts in the fair weather, and in severe weather, this type of equipment can be the difference between life and death. I have the capability of carrying the heavier gear, with the cargo cart.

"If I was packing everything on my back, I'd be using a different system. Still a four season tent, but not as large; and high quality mummy style sleeping bag rather than the semi-rectangular one. It would be coupled with a lighter, three-quarter length sleep pad rather than the extra thick, full length one I'm using now.

"I would be the same with much of my other equipment. A titanium cook set and utensils rather than the stainless steel. The stove would be the same that I have with me, but only two bottles of fuel instead of four. Things like that all through my equipment. Lighter and more compact versions of almost everything. I would be carrying the pack that I keep on the cart rather than the smaller one I used today."

"I see. But if some of those things are just as good, why don't you use them, even with the cart?" Valerie asked.

"I don't feel the other choices are just as good, given the same situation. They are better if you need to use them for some reason. Take the titanium cook set and utensils. They heat fast, but cool fast, too. An uncoated titanium skillet tends to burn and stick in my experience. Now, I use a titanium kettle for hot water because it does heat so fast and is light. But the stainless steel pots and utensils I'm using are heavier duty as well as being heavier in weight.

"The tent and bag, like I said before, go to my comfort level, which lets me get better rest than the lighter, more compact models. And with the larger tent I can have more gear unpacked but under protection than with a small bivy. I'm not out to see how little I can get by with. I've already done that. And it isn't very comfortable. At least for me.

"No insult to the ultra-light crowd. More power to them, as a matter of fact, as they are the ones pushing design limits and coming up with good ideas that can be adapted to my style of

gear to lighten it up and make it more compact without giving up the reasons I have it in the first place.”

“I guess that makes sense,” Valerie said. She’d finished her meal and suddenly yawned. “Wow! I guess I’m more tired than I thought. I think I’m going to turn in. After I go to the bathroom. I don’t want to have to get up during the night.”

“Good thinking. But it doesn’t always work. If you do have to get up, use a flashlight and wear your boots. And don’t set off the alarm.”

“Okay. I’ll be back in a few minutes,” Valerie said. She stopped at her tent for a moment and then picked up the e-tool sitting on her cart and disappeared into the darkness outside the light from the fire.

David emulated her after she returned and crawled into her tent. He banked the fire and then went to his own tent. It took him only moments to undress and get settled in his sleeping bag since everything was made ready when he set up the tent.

The next three days went much the same way, with reinforcement of the previous day’s lesson, with additional lessons added. Valerie learned how to make fuzz sticks with which to start fires, how to lay for bigger fires and even smaller ones than they had the first night.

She learned to use regular fire steels, a Blast Match fire starter, a fire piston, and even a fire drill that David brought with him. He pointed out the need to have several means to make fire with one all the time, because the natural materials so often suggested for use in the field weren’t available everywhere.

Each fire starting method had been developed in an area that had the right materials available for that method. That didn’t mean they would be available everywhere. There were areas that really didn’t have the means to make fire from natural materials.

“It’s the same with wild edibles,” David said as they moved along the trail, on the lookout for that very thing. “The more primitive civilizations that existed by hunting and gathering went to where they knew the game and the edible plant foods were. They aren’t everywhere, and even where they are, they aren’t always in the edible stage.

“It’s fine to supplement your meals with something you find, but don’t expect to live on wild edibles long term in most places. Anything edible is better than nothing, but unless you are in one of the areas where wild foods are abundant, you’ll eventually starve, if you don’t die from exhaustion or something else because you are so weak.”

“I understand,” Valerie said. “Definitely better to have the means than depend on nature.”

“Yes. But you need to learn how to use the things Mother Nature provides, in case they are available and other means aren’t.”

Valerie nodded. “What’s next?”

“Water,” David replied. “Water. Just as important as fire.” And so another lesson began.

Each evening David had been having a pipe of tobacco by the fire while listening to Amateur Radio and shortwave broadcasts on his multi-band all-mode handheld receiver. It was a Yaesu VR-500 with a Miracle Ducker TL tunable whip antenna. He kept the batteries charged every day with a Brunton SolarPort 4.4 with BattJack charger. Things had been pretty much the same night after night, until the night before the two were planning on going home.

The first signal he checked on each evening was WWV, the Time Standard station in Fort Collins Colorado to check his watch setting. It transmitted time signals, but also Amateur Radio propagation information, on several frequencies.

But tonight, there was a repeated announcement that all Amateur Radio Operators were to make themselves available to local authorities. All the Amateur Radio Operators were now under Federal control and were to be silent until further notice. The bands would be used for important government traffic only. The bands would be monitored and harsh penalties would result for those that violated the ban.

“This is not good,” David said aloud.

Valerie was just coming into camp from a latrine trip and asked, “What isn’t good?”

“They are shutting down Amateur Radio communications. Federalizing them, more accurately.” David set his pipe aside and began to tune to some of the regular frequencies he listened to. There was an eerie silence on all the bands.

Valerie took a seat near him as the sun faded. She added a few sticks to the fire. David switched to the International Shortwave bands. There he found the usual stations on, but nothing much out of the ordinary was being said.

“Something is going on,” David said, turning off the radio. “The government wouldn’t shut down Amateurs without a reason. I think it is a good thing we’re going home tomorrow.”

Valerie nodded. Seeing the concern on David’s face sent a shiver down her back. She went to her small tent and slipped into the sleeping bag, hoping it would help the cold feeling.

When she got up the next morning and exited the tent she was surprised to see that David had already packed up all his gear and was sitting on a tote monitoring his teakettle on the multi-fuel stove. The fire was out and dispersed.

“I’m not rushing you, Valerie,” he said when he saw her, “but I’d like to get an early start. I’m heating water for coffee. Thought we’d eat a cold breakfast.”

“Okay,” Valerie said. “I’ll hurry.”

Twenty minutes later and both had had breakfast and were putting on the tow harnesses for the custom made cargo carts. Valerie thought he would set a faster pace when David headed them for home, but it was his same pace he'd used coming out. The difference, she learned, was that the rest stops were shorter and they only had some jerky, gorp, and water for lunch.

They reached the trailhead at three in the afternoon, well ahead of the original planned arrival at six or so. They had the carts loaded in the back of David's pickup in short order and were headed for Valerie's place to drop her off.

"Let me know what you find out?" she asked when David turned to go back to the cab of the truck after he helped Valerie unload her cart from the back.

"Yeah. Same goes with you. Let me know anything you find out." Valerie waved and David was gone.

The first thing David did when he arrived home and unloaded the truck was to turn on the computer and try to access several of the prep forums he frequented. Not a single one of them was up.

He tried several other sites of interest to him and found perhaps half were up and the rest unavailable. The internet was going down, one piece at a time. David leaned back in the comfortable desk chair and swiveled it around so he could see the television. He turned the TV on with the remote and went to Fox news channel.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," said the announcer, his hands resting one on the other on the top of the desk. He looked right at the camera. There was fear in his eyes. "I may not have long. A two prong physical attack on the United States is eminent! Russian forces are coming down through Canada, while Chinese forces move up from Mexico, with Mexican assistance.

"In addition, Fifth Columnists are already in the process of attempting to take over key resources. The internet is being taken down, as are all other forms of open communication. We are under government orders not to give any military information that might aid the enemies. The most I can tell you is that US military forces are being mobilized.

"I repeat, the United States..." The man's words faded when he looked over to his left. There were sounds of multiple shots, and the man fell backward, blood spurting from his chest. Seconds later the screen went white and then dark.

"That tears it!" David said under his breath. He turned back to the radios on the desk picked up a microphone. "This is Rolling Rock Seventeen. Anyone on?"

"Seventeen," came a woman's voice. David recognized it. It was Valerie. "This is Thirty-three. I just saw what happened on Fox. What do we do?"

"I suggest Plan M. Can I get some confirmation? This is Rolling Rock Seventeen."

A booming voice came through the speaker of the small radio. "All Rolling Rock members... All Rolling Rock members... Plan M is in effect. I say again, Plan M is in effect. Please acknowledge."

There came a steady set of replies consisting of a simple acknowledgment from over twenty of the members of the MAG. A few minutes later David was back in his truck, headed for the firing range where the MAG usually had their group meetings.

When he arrived there were people milling around, waiting on more to arrive before any action or even discussion was conducted. After fifteen minutes, with no one else in sight, the members that were there arranged themselves and the discussion began. There wasn't much discussion and David was greatly disappointed. The consensus, long before it was his turn to speak, was to just sit tight and see what was going to happen.

He almost spoke up to tell the rest that he wasn't going to just sit tight and wait. He was going proactive. He would be fighting the invasion to the best of his ability. Better none of the others knew of his resolve. Let them think he was doing just as they were. Waiting for a 'better time' to become involved. "Got nothing to add," was all he said.

David saw Valerie in the crowd. She looked as disappointed as he felt. When she saw him she maneuvered over to join him. "Can you believe this?" she whispered. "Are you really going along with all this?"

David looked around. "No. But this isn't the place to talk about it. Let's get out of here."

Valerie nodded and followed David toward the parking lot. Several people turned to look at them, as they were the first to begin leaving. A handful followed after watching for a moment.

"Yo! David!" called Lenny Gaston. "Hold up!"

David reluctantly stopped and turned around. He was surprised to see five men and two women approaching, led by Lenny.

"You aren't going to just sit around, are you?" Lenny asked. The question was in the other's faces.

"No. But I'm not about to discuss it out here, especially where the others might get the idea we were up to something."

"Yeah. Yeah," said Carol Worth. "Let's meet at my place. Talk this over some more."

There were nods all around and the group broke up and headed for their vehicles as the rest of the MAG members made their slow way toward the parking lot.

Several minutes later car and truck doors were being closed and those that had approached David were following him and Carol up to the front door of her house.

"It's a mess," she said. "Don't pay any attention to it, please." When she opened the door her husband, Avery, looked up in surprise. "Hon, take the kids downstairs to play." Avery nodded and did as Carol asked; coming back upstairs before the group had all entered and found seats in the living room.

"What's up, Baby? I thought you were going to a special MAG meeting?"

"Yeah. I did, Avery. It didn't go the way I expected. Most of the members are going to play the wait and see game. There are a few of us that think otherwise. Isn't that right?" she asked and looked around at each individual.

All returned her gaze calmly and said yes or nodded.

"How many saw the Fox News man get hit?" asked David. Most had, but those that had not got a quick description of what had happened at the Fox News studio. A couple mentioned other, similar happenings, though none with the bloody end of the Fox News event.

"We've got Fifth Columnists to deal with, as well as the actual invasion forces," David said when the rest grew quiet again.

"How do we know who they are?" asked Valerie. "The Fifth Columnists, I mean."

"That might not be too difficult. At least at first," David replied. "They are going to be pressing for all sorts of things that are at odds with our beliefs. Once they start dying, the others will become much more low key."

"Hey! I don't know about this... You're talking about killing people," said Nick Carter.

"What did you think we were going to be talking about?" asked Denise Smith. "The rest of the MAG is just going to sit back and let whatever happens come to them. I'm not waiting for them to come get my guns and supplies. I intend to fight. Soldiers and Fifth Columnists alike, wherever I find them. The others will be fighting from their homes. I don't intend to let anyone get that close."

"That's the way I feel about it," Carol said.

The others all nodded or said similar things.

"You in or out?" David asked. "We need to know right now."

Nick looked around at the others. "I'm in," he said finally. "So, what is the plan?"

"I'm going south to fight the Chinese and Mexicans," David said immediately.

"I'm with you," said Willy Anderson. "I think they'll be the first on our soil, according to what little we know. I don't think the Canadians are going to let the Russians through without at least some resistance."

“Don’t count on it,” David replied. “But you could be right. And there are the forces in Alaska. I’m sure they’ll be popping over the Rockies to try and slow, if not stop, the invasion.”

“What do you mean? Aren’t the Russians just going to go across the Bering Strait to Alaska?”

“Not with the way they built up in Far East Russia. The logical thing will be to hit Canada, keep their right flank up against the Rockies as they travel south.” David looked over at Avery. “You have a globe or map?”

Avery hurried downstairs and was back in a few moments with an eighteen inch globe. David began to show the others what he was thinking. “On a flat map it doesn’t look the same. All Russia has to do is swing out slightly to stay away from the North Coast of Alaska, though they might just hit Barrow, because of the oil fields.

“Either way, I think they’ll come up along the Mackenzie River for most of the way and then continue with the Rockies on their west side and just cut a corridor through Canada. I have no doubts that Canada will fold if Russia doesn’t really take the fight to other parts of the country. If it is just that corridor to get to the lower Forty-eight, I think the Canadians will just put up a barrier force and let the Russians have at us.

“Once they hit Montana, they will have room to spread out and start setting up for a prolonged campaign. There aren’t a lot of forces in Montana, Wyoming and the Dakotas. Everything on the West Coast would have to have to come across the Rockies and wintertime is coming up. The Russians know how to conduct winter operations.”

“Oh, My!” It was a barely breathed statement from Denise. “I think you could be right. I have family in Montana!”

“So do I,” Lenny said.

Denise’s husband, Ted, had been fairly quiet up to that point. But he spoke up when his wife turned fearful eyes on him. “We’ll be going North. As soon as we can get ready.”

Denise moved close to him and he put an arm over her shoulders.

“I’d rather fight in the cold as the heat,” said Nick. He looked at Ted and Lenny. “Okay if I tag along?”

“You’re more than welcome. We’ll get together after this and decide on our plan of action.”

“I know you aren’t going to like this, my dear,” said Avery, looking at his wife. “But I think I’ll just go along with the Smiths and Nick and Lenny. We need someone to stay behind and take care of local business.”

“Now, Avery...” Carol said, some heat in her voice. But she looked around and fell silent. “We’ll discuss it.”

Doug Clements finally spoke up. “Me and my boys will be going south. Got relations that will put us up and lend a hand.” He looked over at Carol. “Angelique and the girls will be glad to help out on the home front.”

Carol frowned a little, but nodded.

“I guess that’s that, then,” David said. “Though...” he looked at Valerie. “You sure you don’t want to go along with Denise?”

Valerie bit her lip. “I think I’d do okay down south.”

“No question there,” David said, and meant it. “I just thought that two women together would be better than one travelling with several men.” David smiled and added, “And two women together in some situations are worth three or four guys.”

Valerie let a small smile show. “You have a point.” She looked at Denise. “You want another woman’s company?”

Denise nodded. “Thank you. It really will make it easier.”

“That being the case,” David said, “I’m going home to get ready and head out.”

Doug looked surprised. “Aren’t you coming with me and the boys and Willy?”

“I don’t think so, Doug.” David looked at Will and continued. “I’m more a loner. I may be taking some risks. I don’t want to put your family or Willy in jeopardy. And I want to get there as quickly as possible.”

“Understood,” Doug replied. “We’ll be moving slow and sure. That okay with you, Willy?”

Willy nodded. He preferred the slow and sure course of action better than David’s gung-ho approach, though he didn’t say so.

David nodded, too. “Okay. Before I do leave I’ll stop here and get radio codes and such, if that’s okay.” He looked at Carol.

She nodded. It seemed she had accepted her role as home base.

The meeting broke up and headed for their own homes to get things ready to go to war. David was good as his word. He showed up two hours later and knocked on the front door of the Worth house.

Avery opened the door and ushered David inside. A quick look at Carol and David was sure she'd been crying. But she didn't let on as she and Avery went over the contact procedures that those leaving would use to communicate with those staying.

"No more than five minutes on any frequency and then we hop to the next on the list," David replied. "I do not want to give the Chinese a chance to triangulate on any of us. And you will want to use some alternate locations, here, too. I brought a portable unit over similar to the one I'm taking. Will that be doable?"

Avery looked at his wife. She nodded. "We'll get it done. I've talked to Angelique and she will be helping me. Between us, we'll maintain central contact. Safely."

"Okay. Avery, you lend me a hand with that radio?"

"Sure," replied Avery and the two men headed for the front door. A few minutes later the wheeled cart with a Yaesu FT-897D radio, deep discharge battery, solar panel, battery charger, antenna tuner, antennas and antenna mounts was in the Worth garage.

Carol came into the garage from the kitchen, carrying little Lisa Anne. "I'll show you the ins and outs of this thing," David said. Carol handed Lisa Anne to Avery and looked on with interest as David went through the operating capabilities of the portable radio unit.

"Okay. Now this Yaesu has been broad banded. Very illegal, but I don't think that will be a problem now. You'll be able to talk across the entire frequency range at high or low power. You can charge the battery off AC, vehicle, or the solar panel when in the field.

"Vertical whip goes here," David said, pointing out the mount for the long folding whip antenna in a carrier on the side of the cart. "And you have the 6-reel Yo-Yo dipole that can be strung out and adjusted for direction and band with enough coax to mount it wherever the best location is."

"I've got it. Not that much different than our set up in the shelter," Carol said.

"Good," David replied. "Then I'm off. Don't know what kind of travel restrictions, if any, there will be."

"You be careful. This lone wolf stuff has me worried," Avery said. He shook David's hand.

"Don't worry. I'll be careful. I plan to come back here when this is all over in the same condition I'm leaving. Most of the time no one will even know I'm around. You guys be careful up North. And Carol, stop the radio contacts if you get any type of official order to do so."

Carol nodded and then David was gone, walking quickly to his classic GMC motor home. The compact GMC Sonoma High Rider pickup truck, now with a tarp over the bed covering the things he'd loaded up from his place was secured on a tandem wheel trailer. The trailer was completely loaded down, with a set of heavy tarps covering everything in the space the truck

didn't take up. Avery and Carol watched him drive away, wondering if they would ever see him again.

Operation Blue Dragon – Chapter 2

There wasn't much traffic on the roads, but neither were there any road blocks. David had smooth sailing all the way to the Texas border. That was where he ran into the first sign of anything amiss.

A pair of Texas State Troopers had the road blocked at the Texas border. "Sorry. You'll have to turn back," one of them said when David slid back the driver's window of the motorhome.

"I'm here to join the fight," David replied, not sure just how this situation might go.

The two Troopers looked at one another. Then the same one spoke again. "You sure you want a piece of the action? And will you be more of a hindrance than an asset down there?"

David smiled slightly. "I'll be an asset," he replied. "And I do want a piece of the action. I've seen this coming for a long time and I'm ready. I'd show you what I have to fight with, but you'd probably just confiscate it."

"I see." The two Troopers looked at one another again, and the second one nodded ever so slightly.

"Keep you powder dry, dude. And don't say we didn't warn you. Which we didn't, I guess, since we didn't even see you."

"Hang tough," David said and put the truck in gear again. He began looking for a place to pull off the highway well before dark. Moving at night right now could get him shot by a local. According to his map there was a rest area not too far ahead. He was surprised at the number of vehicles in the rest area. There was considerable traffic going away from the border. He'd seen all manner of rigs piled high with personal possessions headed away from the war zone.

It became obvious that he wasn't the only one headed for the fight. But he stayed away from the others, parking at the furthest point on the property he could get. The GMC was self contained so he didn't even go to the facilities building.

No one bothered him as he prepared and ate supper, watching the traffic through a side window of the GMC motor home. Toward the war was light. Away from it was getting heavier. He made his first contact with Carol at the scheduled time and had no problem getting through. The bands were fairly quiet.

Since they weren't supposed to be using the amateur bands, David had given Carol a list of the Low Band Business Band frequencies he had in his business band handheld. The radios in the motor home and truck were also broad banded Yaesu FT-897Ds, which let him get out with a great deal more power than the handheld could do on those frequencies.

The contact was over in seconds. David hung up the microphone and put the radio into search mode, looking for information. There wasn't anything on the AM or FM broadcast bands

and the Amateur bands were quiet except for an occasional CW transmission lasting only a few seconds. David couldn't understand it. It was in some form of code. But it told him that there was something going on somewhere.

The next morning, early, David got up and ate his breakfast. He was gone before any of the others in the rest area were stirring. He eased out onto the road and headed for the battle. There was still a heavy flow of traffic in the opposite direction, though David began to see vehicles stopped on the side of the road. There was a string of people walking, loaded down with suitcases, duffle bags, and back packs. "Out of fuel, or broken down," David muttered.

He'd managed to fuel up not long before the rest stop so hadn't touched any of the fuel he was carrying. It was problematical he'd find any more on the way. Chances were that the refugees would have taken it all by now. But he pulled into the first station he found, just to see. Sure enough, there was a sign out that they were out of fuel. But there was a clerk in the C-store and David fished for information as he picked up a few things to snack on, to give him the opportunity to talk to the clerk, as well as the few people that had staked out a place for themselves at the station.

"Got to tell you, man! Things is crazy! They're coming! Really coming! I seen the choppers go over but they didn't come back. I'll give you all I got to get a ride out of here. They'll be here soon! Man! My rig broke down! We gotta get out of here!"

"Sorry, dude," David said, side stepping around the anxious man. "I don't think you want to go where I'm going." A woman and two children were standing behind him, obviously scared. The man went on to someone else, begging for a ride.

David put his selections on the counter and asked, "Know anything about how the battle is going?"

The young woman shook her head, eyes downward. "That'll be twenty dollars."

David felt his eyes widen, but didn't object. He had perhaps five dollars worth of goodies. The prices were obviously going up as he got closer to the warzone. He paid without a word and hurried back out to the motor home. There were several more people asking for a ride. They all drew back in fear when he told them he was going toward the fight, not away from it.

When he got back onto the interstate, the traffic was now one way on both sets of pavement. Huge numbers of people were fleeing the fighting. David didn't get onto the interstate. He just went down the off ramp after going up the up ramp and stayed on the service road. The GPS was still working and he found an alternate route.

The rest of the way would be on secondary roads. Even they were pretty slow going, with most traffic headed toward him, often in both lanes. He took it easy. He wasn't about to die in an accident before he even got to the front.

He did stop a few times to question the refugees and found out that the Chinese had pushed up to Interstate 10 west of San Antonio. David gritted his teeth. It was going to be close,

then. His plan to stop at an old friend's place to stash the motor home might not be doable. Finding a safe place for it could be difficult.

The closer he got to San Antonio the more military traffic he saw. Both going and coming. And all manner of military aircraft were also to and fro. He was more than a little surprised he wasn't stopped. He only saw a couple other civilian vehicles going his way. He had to shake his head.

One of them was a crew cab pickup truck with six people in the cab and another eight in the bed. The truck slowed and the men gave David and his rig the once over. All had long arms of one type or another. And beer. At least those in the back of the truck were yelling and downing beer like it was going out of style. Then the truck accelerated away, weaving in and out of the oncoming traffic. David had a feeling several, if not all of them, would not be going home.

The closer he got to San Antonio the heavier the outbound traffic became. A steady stream in both sets of lanes, every person and vehicle loaded to the maximum with personal goods. With a sigh of relief David took the turn off to go around the city, headed for Lytle. He made it to his friend's place just before dark.

To his surprise, Andy's old Chevy pickup was loaded to the gills, just like the other vehicles he'd seen leaving the area. Andy had quickly picked up a rifle when the GMC turned onto the driveway up to the house. He set it down and greeted David solemnly when David stepped down to the ground and stretched.

The two men shook hands. "You heading out?" David asked quietly. He'd fully expected Andy to be his spotter and back up during the coming battle.

Andy dropped his eyes for a moment. The two turned when a woman called from the house. "Andy! Who is it? We have to get going!"

"My new wife," Andy said.

David could see she was in the last trimester of pregnancy, her belly swollen hugely. David nodded, fully understanding why Andy was choosing to leave rather than stay and fight. No way would he send his pregnant wife off by herself in the circumstances.

"I'm sorry, David... I..."

"It's okay," David replied quickly. "You take care of your wife and soon to be baby."

Andy nodded and moved to help Cindy with a suitcase. It was the last item to be loaded. Andy helped Cindy into the truck and then got in on the driver's side. He looked at David for a moment, and then said. "Use the place like it is yours. There's no telling when we'll ever get back."

David nodded and watched as his friend headed for safe haven. David did a quick walk around of the place, re-familiarizing himself with the layout. He wondered about Andy's horses. They weren't on the property.

Satisfied he could find his way around, in the dark if necessary David pushed open the barn door and drove the GMC and trailer inside. The rig just barely fit. It was full dark by the time the Sonoma was off-loaded from the trailer. It was time for a radio check in and David used the radio in the Sonoma to make contact with Carol. It was a quick conversation, with David simply saying he'd made it to his destination. After he turned off the radio he parked the Sonoma inside the barn beside the motorhome. He took a bag into the house and settled in for the night.

He was up early the next morning. He had a large breakfast, aware that he might not get anything else for some time. He took his time out in the barn as he unloaded a few things and made them ready.

Dressed in khaki work clothes, with a brown wide brimmed hat on his head, David swung his leg over the frame of the ROKON Trailbreaker two wheel drive motorcycle and started it. He snugged up the chin strap of the hat and headed down the driveway to the county road and turned left. Toward the distant sounds of a raging war.

Making sure he was seen before getting too close to any of the people he met on the road, David finally found a military unit. It was a Texas National Guard MP unit guiding more refugees away from the approaching battle. When he finally managed to snag one of the enlisted men he asked to talk to an officer. The Guardsman, looking frightened, pointed toward a command tent set up at the edge of a horse pasture.

David walked over. There were two guards at the door of the tent and it took a minute for David to convince them to let him see the officer in charge. A Captain Donald White.

"I don't have time for this, buddy," the Captain growled when David stepped into the tent after one of the men got his permission for David to enter.

"What can I do to help?" David asked.

"Leave the area. Make my job easy. Just leave and get as far away as you can," said Captain White.

"Not going to happen. I'm here to fight. I just need to know where I can do the most good. I'm a sniper and can really reach out and touch someone at a distance. And I have a wideband radio. I can sit and watch anyplace you need under observation or need harassing fire."

The Captain ran a hand wearily over his face. "Okay. No way I can effectively stop you from going out there and getting yourself killed. Just go out there and find a spot between my people and the next unit to the west. We're spread thin. Perhaps you can actually be of help as an observer. Get with Garrity in the communications tent and he'll give you the civilian interoperability frequencies we're using to communication with nuts like you."

"Thank you, Captain. I won't be a hindrance, I promise you."

“Yeah, sure. Get out of here.”

David left the tent and asked the guards about the communications tent. He was pointed in the right direction and had the frequencies and communications schedule a few minutes later. Back on the ROKON he headed west on the road, passing small groups of the Texas National Guard setting up a defensive line at the road. When he found the last outpost of that guard unit he searched for the best location to set up to give long range support to the Guard position.

Satisfied with the location, David turned the ROKON around and headed back to Andy's place. It took him a few minutes, once there, to take the ROKON single track trailer from the motorhome trailer and hook it to the ROKON Trailbreaker. Another few minutes and he had it loaded with selected equipment and supplies for a several day stay at his chosen battle point.

After securing the motorhome and its trailer, and the Sonoma, David headed off for war.

He avoided all the military units on his way back to his chosen defensive point. It was full dark when he was satisfied with the fighting position he'd dug and camouflaged with the things he'd brought with him.

With a perimeter wire alarm set up, David ate a cold supper, and then, wrapped in a poncho with Ranger Rick liner, stretched out to get some sleep. Nothing happened that night.

Nor the next day. Twice Guard personnel travelled within a few yards of his camouflaged position and the camouflaged ROKON rig, but took no notice of either. Of course, they were concentrating on the horizon to the south west. Occasionally jets high in the sky would go past, and helicopters, much lower, and a few minutes later there would be the sound of exploding warheads.

But fewer aircraft were coming back than were going in. And a few of those that were coming back, especially the helicopters that were within detail viewing distance were showing signs of damage, from light to heavy.

Still no sign of the Chinese approach at noon, so David took a break, ate something, and sacked out. Unless he missed his guess, the Chinese would approach and attack that night. At least that was what he was hearing on the small Yaesu VR-500 all-mode, all-band receiver he had in the fighting position with him.

He'd told Carol on his last contact with her that he would be out of touch for a while, so he made no effort to leave the fighting position. He had a plastic container with tight fitting lid he used to go to the bathroom without leaving. David set it well out of the way so it wouldn't get disturbed no matter what happened.

As darkness began to fall, and artillery shells began to fly overhead going both ways, David readied himself and his armament. Other than the emergency shelter at his house and the vehicles, the armament he had set up was his biggest single system financial investment.

He had a Barrett M-82A1 .50 BMG semi-auto rifle with Jet suppressor, Leupold Mark IV 8.5-25x50 ER/T M-1 optical scope with Barrett BORS ballistic computer on QD mounts. But for the coming night, the Leupold was removed and an ATN Otis-17 FLIR sighting system mounted.

To find targets in the dark before using the FLIR sighted Barrett, David had an ATN Fusion thermal monocular. He began to scan the area around him. He spotted some movement in the distance on each side of him, but, as yet, nothing in front of him.

But that didn't last long. He wasn't sure at first, but as he continued to watch the white shape through the monocular he became sure it was a scout, checking things ahead of a Chinese patrol. It wasn't up to him to begin the engagement, but David put down the monocular and settled himself behind the Barrett, eye going to the FLIR scope. In the few seconds it had taken to transition, several more white shapes were now in easy range of the Barrett.

Sighting on the scout, David waited until the Guard unit opened up. The man went to ground, but the heat of his body was easily visible through the grass he was concealing himself in. David squeezed the trigger and the man slumped.

As the sky lit up around him from the weapons of the Guard and the return fire from the Chinese, David took his time and took out any target that looked to be carrying a heavier weapon than the other Chinese. In the span of perhaps eight minutes, David fired fourteen times, sure that each shot had been on target, since the white shapes quit moving completely and began to dim just slightly in the FLIR.

Three more times that night the Chinese attacked and each time were beaten back with David's unknown help. Though the Barrett wasn't entirely silent, the sound was similar to the other rifles being used, and there was no muzzle flash to give away his position.

But the Guard knew something was going on, for, as the sun began to provide enough light to see, a pair of Guards, obviously looking for something, came within David's sight. He was sure they were looking for him. He let out a soft whistle and kept low when the two Guards spun toward him, their M-4s coming around to point at him.

"I'm a friendly civilian," David said in a conversational tone of voice as he stood up, his hands in the air. "Captain White is aware of my presence in the area."

One of the Guards was talking quietly into the boom microphone at the corner of his mouth. He looked over at David a moment later and said, "Lieutenant wants to talk to you."

"I'm coming out, armed," David said, leaving the Barrett where it was, but picking up and slinging an Auto Ordnance .30 M1 Carbine that he kept as short range back up to the Barrett when he was using it.

"I think you'd better let one of us have that," said the female Guard.

David hesitated, but handed it over, carefully. He was in a war zone now, and needed to watch what he did. David emulated the two Guards as they headed back the way they'd come, using every point of cover or concealment available to them. "There's a sniper working from somewhere over there," the female Guard said.

"If he's in range to hit us, he's in range of me. Give me a few minutes and I'll see what I can do."

The two looked at one another and the man began talking again into his microphone. "The LT says give it a shot. But you're coming with us in thirty minutes in any case."

The two joined David in the camouflaged fighting position and took note of the Barrett. "Sheesh!" said the female Guard. "You got a fortune there!"

"Yeah," David said. Taking position behind the rifle, David put the Leupold back on, casing the Otis-17. There was no sound, but David carefully scanned the area forward and to his left, where the female Guard said the sniper had to be.

David stayed calm and carefully examined each possible hiding place that the sniper could be using. It took almost fifteen minutes, but David was squeezing the trigger of the Barrett. "Got him," he said quietly, turning to look at the two Guards. "Let's go talk to your Lieutenant."

"Wow," said the male Guard. "Yeah. Come on. But stay low and move quick. There could be more."

It took them ten minutes to make their way to where the Lieutenant commanding the platoon was set up.

She looked at David, clad in his khakis and wide brimmed hat, for a moment. "Talked to Captain White. Said you had his okay to lend a hand. I'd rather take you under my command than have you out there on your own."

"Not a good idea," David said.

The Lieutenant bristled. "And why not? You obviously have some firepower that will help us, according to two of my people... And what we experienced last night. I want that under my command."

"Yes, I do. But I'm a civilian. If I get caught, I'll be executed out of hand. If I'm with your unit, you might be too, for having me with you with what I have. It's better all the way around for me to operate alone. Though I would like to coordinate with you."

Lieutenant Patricia Benjamin thought for long time, watching David as he stood silently, watching her. "Okay," she finally said. "But I'm not about to give you one of our radios and let it fall into enemy hands. Do you have a radio of your own of some type?"

David reached behind his back and pulled out the Motorola HT-750 handy-talky. He told the Lieutenant the frequencies he had programmed into the unit. "FM," he said.

The Lieutenant nodded. "My comm guy can figure out something. Okay. You do your thing. But if we call you and need something specific, I expect you to comply. If you can."

"I'll certainly do that. And I will keep you informed of what I'm doing."

"Okay then. My people will take you back to your position. Guess I can tell you we expect a major push at our line within two hours. Probably armor. If you're smart, you'll pack up and leave."

"I think I'll stick around," David said and turned around, replacing the walky-talky in its leather case.

"Take him back," the Lieutenant told the two Guards that had brought him to her. "And let everyone know he's there. Don't want friendly fire taking him out. Dismissed."

"Never thought she'd go for it," the female Guard said. She handed David his M1 Carbine and the three headed back to his fighting position, still being careful. Chances were that the Chinese had more than one sniper.

The two hurried back to their unit after David climbed back down into the fighting position. David took the opportunity to eat and go to the bathroom. He wanted to be ready for the armor attack if it came. He might not be able to do much, but he wouldn't know until the time came. He arranged things so he could make a quick withdrawal, if need be.

David's radio sounded a few minutes later and he talked to the Guard unit's radio person, just checking on the connection. It took only a minute and David had the radio on the ground beside the Barrett.

Stretching out, David allowed himself to doze, knowing he'd hear the attack when it started. And he did. The sound of A-10 Thunderbolts flying by low, at high speed, woke David. A flight of three of the tank killers disappeared from his sight. Soon there were explosions.

But the Chinese had had years to prepare and they had used the time to bring in huge numbers of armored vehicles. The A-10s flew back to their forward base and six Apache helicopters appeared to David's right, each one with sixteen Hellfire missiles mounted.

There were more explosions, and then five of the Apaches returned, going directly over head of David's position. But the effort had not stopped the Chinese. David soon heard the sound of tracked armored vehicles approaching at low speed.

There were three of them, in line abreast, approaching the Guard unit to David's left. Knowing the .50 BMG wouldn't penetrate the armor, David still cranked the Leupold scope up to maximum magnification and began firing at the viewports of the nearest tank.

It slowed to a stop as the other two tanks continued their advance. David didn't have the angle on them and turned the Barrett onto the dismounted infantry advancing behind the tanks. He used up four ten round magazines. They'd finally spotted his position and before they could bring a tank gun to bear or he took a RPG, David quickly left the fighting position, taking everything with him.

He had things loaded on the ROKON trailer before he made a quick call to the Guard unit and told them he was headed for a fallback position. His communication was acknowledged and David took off. He left none too soon. The tank that he'd partially blinded put a round right into the fighting position.

David felt the explosion behind him and winced. But no shrapnel found him and he continued at high speed toward the position he'd scouted out at the same time he had the first position.

As soon as he had the bike and trailer under cover, David went to work with pick and shovel to make a fighting position similar to the first one. This one was actually a better position. He was on the back side of a high knob, with lots of brush around.

The roots made for tough digging, but with the use of a pocket chainsaw David made short work of them. Three hours later, the fighting position done and firing lanes carefully cleared to minimize the chance of them being discovered until it was too late, David downed a canteen of water and ate some jerky and gorp. The sounds of battle were still far away, so David took the time to take a long cat nap. He'd be rested and ready when the time came.

The Guard unit had also withdrawn. Three of them nearly stumbled onto David. He felt bad about scaring them when he whistled to alert them he was directly in front of them. All three had their weapons on him instantly, but held their fire when he called out. "It's me again."

Fortunately, one of the Guards was the woman that had found him the first time.

"Jimmeny, guy! You're going to wind up getting shot by one of us if you aren't careful."

"That's why I whistled," David replied. He stayed within the camouflaged firing position this time.

"Okay. But you be careful where you're shooting. We're going to be forward of your position. If we have to withdraw, we'll be coming right by here. We're checking the path out now."

"Don't worry," David said. "I can tell the difference."

"Yeah. Okay." The three Guards moved on, but were back in a few minutes, having made their quick survey of the terrain. They said nothing to David and he kept silent as well. The sounds of the artillery were getting louder.

David looked up when he heard the sound of an explosion above him. All the aircraft he'd seen so far had been ground attack units. There was now a battle in the skies between air superiority fighter aircraft from both sides.

David was distracted from the aerial battle when a pair of Apache attack helicopters went over low and fast. David had just enough time to make out the fact that each carried only eight Hellfire anti-tank missiles rather than the sixteen they'd carried before. It made David wonder if they were beginning to run short on the high tech munitions.

Shortly afterwards, using the Steiner 15x80 Commander Military C binoculars, David spotted movement in the distance. Quickly getting behind the Barrett, David sighted through the Leupold scope and began to fire.

When the Chinese troops went to ground, David stopped firing, but kept a close watch on the area. He jumped a bit when the Motorola HT-750 broke squelch in his ear. He had on his Peltor Com-Tac II amplified headset with radio interface so the sound was loud. He turned down the volume. "Shooter. Can you lay down harassing fire for a probe team? Same area you put down the others a while ago."

"Will do," David replied softly. "Time?"

"Three minutes at my mark. There was silence for a few seconds and David kept an eye on the Hamilton self-winding watch. The voice said "Mark" and David counted down the three minutes.

Using his best judgment, David began to target likely places of concealment that weren't good enough cover from the .50 BMG round the Barrett fired. He didn't really know if he was making any hits, but the Chinese were not moving around or advancing due to the near silent destruction being showered upon them.

David had to cease his fire when the Guard unit got between him and the Chinese. But he'd done what needed to be done. The Chinese had their heads down and the Guards were able to get close enough to engage with great success.

David could hear the various rifles, machine guns, and grenade launchers of both sides firing. The Chinese grenade launchers were dropping rounds all over the place and David ducked down more than once when one came near.

With the battle going hand to hand, David kept watching through the scope for any opportunity to lend a hand without endangering the Guards. Spotting a Chinese Officer trying to rally his troops, David fired and the man went down. It seemed to break the spirit of the rest of the Chinese and there was wholesale retreat.

David took two more Chinese down before they were out of his sight. More of the Guard moved forward, in pursuit of the fleeing Chinese troops. But David had a bad feeling about the event and quickly switched to the binoculars. He began careful sweeps of the area where the Chinese had been hunkered down and the Guards were now progressing through.

He was too late to stop the well hidden sniper from getting off one shot, which took down a Guard, but David put three rounds into the sniper's nest. There were no more shots from it. David continued to keep watch, until the Guards in pursuit returned to their set defensive line.

David began to relax slightly. He took stock of his position and remaining supplies. He was down to his last two magazines of .50 BMG for the Barrett. After a quick call to the Guard unit to tell them he was withdrawing to resupply and David was back on the ROKON, headed for Andy's place.

He didn't see anyone on the trip. When he got there, the first thing David did was replenish his supplies from the trailer behind the GMC Motorhome. With the ROKON and its trailer parked in the barn with his other rigs, David locked the doors and went to the house.

The power was out, but Andy had a small generator. David fired it up so he could power the water pump. Andy used propane for heat, cooking, and hot water, so David was able to get a hot shower and prepare a hot meal. He was feeling decent again when he turned off the generator and went out to the Sonoma to get on the radio and check in with Carol.

She was glad to hear from him. She relayed the information that so far the others were all still doing okay, as well. David went to bed in the spare bedroom in Andy's house, the .30 M1 Carbine leaning against the night table.

He slept through the night, undisturbed, and was up early the next morning. He was in the barn, getting ready to head back to the front lines when a military convoy stopped on the road and he saw several Guards heading up the driveway on foot. They were spread out, walking near the edges of the drive, M-4s ready for use.

David showed himself, arms held out from his body to show that he didn't have a gun in them.

"Identity?" Asked the Sergeant in charge of the team.

David, after getting an okay from the Sergeant, reached into one of his shirt pockets and pulled out his driver's license and passport. He handed them over to the Sergeant, who began to speak into the boom microphone of his radio headset.

The Sergeant's eyes cut to David once sharply and he continued to whispered conversation.

"You are highly respected by Lieutenant Benjamin and Captain White. But I suggest you take your toys and go home. Let the pros handle this situation."

"Is that an official order?" David asked quietly.

The Sergeant lips were in a thin line for a moment before he spoke. "I can take the trouble to get the Major out here and he will make it an order. I'd rather you just take off on your own."

His look softened slightly. "I'll let the Captain and Lieutenant know that you were instructed to leave."

"Okay. Thanks. Don't want them becoming dependant on me, anyway," David said. "I'll be out of here in two hours."

The Sergeant nodded and he led his men back to the convoy, which began moving again when they were in their vehicles.

It didn't bother David too much. He'd contributed. And decided he'd probably contribute more. He just wasn't sure how. But he knew the dangers of civilians getting involved in combat operations on their own. He didn't begrudge the military's attitude.

David worked slowly, getting the ROKON and trailer unloaded and back on the trailer, followed by the Sonoma. He backed out of the garage and parked by the house. After locking the house and barn back up, and giving one last long look at the place, David got into the GMC motorhome and headed down the driveway.

He stayed west of San Antonio, picking up 1604 and went around the city, taking 281 to the north. His destination was the Pedernales State Park on the Pedernales River east of Johnson City.

David stopped at every service station on the route and managed to refill all his fuel tanks, though it was five gallons here and ten gallons there. With five dollars a gallon the cheapest price he paid. But David knew it was worth it. He could now get home without additional fuel, if he had to.

He wasn't too surprised to find the park's improved campsite area overwhelmed with refugees. But David was allowed to park, doubled up with another motorhome. The occupants of the other motorhome weren't too happy having another set of vehicles on their site, but the Park Ranger insisted.

David eased the situation by saying he wouldn't be there long, nor would he be disturbing them with loud music or anything else. He even started up the Onan 7kw generator the GMC carried to show them how quiet it was, compared to most. He had super quiet muffler on it and the enclosure was well insulated. With the cool weather, David doubted he'd be using the air conditioners, so probably wouldn't run the generator much, anyway.

Settled in, David quietly made the rounds of the vehicle restricted areas of the park. He was surprised there weren't more people in those areas, especially the primitive camping area that had to be accessed by bicycle or on foot. If it was possible, he would have parked back there, but there was no road access. The GMC Motorhome and trailer would have made it without much problem, but he wasn't going to make waves asking about getting it back there.

Satisfied as to the overall security of the place, David went back to the Motorhome and went inside. He turned on the satellite television and began to search for information on how the

wars were going. There wasn't much information. Many of the stations were still off the air, taken down by Fifth Columnists or by the invading forces in the areas where they'd made headway. It was the same on the standard AM and FM broadcast radio bands.

David turned on the Yaesu VR-5000 shortwave receiver and began to check the Amateur bands. They were silent for the most part. He heard local governments talking to each other, using the Amateur frequencies, since long distance telephone was down due to the loss of several communications satellites. On the way up here, David had noticed that the GPS system had gone down too, some time while he was on the front line. His DVD based mapping system still worked, though. Just without GPS automatic control.

The shortwave bands, on the other hand, were filled with stations, a few of them actually reporting on the war rather than just speculating. David learned that the Canadians had put up hard resistance at first. But as their supplies of munitions started to become scarce, they pulled back just as David had expected and left any attempts to stop the Russian advance down the east side of the Rockies toward the US to the US.

While the weather was still moderate in the south, winter had come early to the north, and the weather was taking its toll on US aircraft flying from Alaska across the Rockies to attack the Russian convoys of men and materiel. Though the Russians didn't have much in the way of air support, other than ground attack helicopters, they had a plethora of anti-aircraft systems and were not shy about launching swarms of missiles against even lone aircraft.

The big stuff coming from the heart of the US was having mixed luck as well. The conventional aircraft were suffering heavy losses despite constant anti-aircraft countermeasures being deployed.

The Stealth craft were doing much better, but not well enough to stop the slow, steady advance. If something didn't change the Russians would be on US soil within two weeks. The information that one of the shortwave stations was giving was that the US was already running out of high tech munitions. The Naval forces were racing back toward the US but they were still a couple of days before they were close enough to lend a hand on the inland battles.

And they were not coming unimpeded. Already the Chinese had sunk several warships with torpedoes, though the subs had paid a high price for their victories. But every lost US warship reduced the numbers of munitions that would be available for use against the two invaders.

Some things that did surprise David were the reports, from several sources, that the Mexicans were now moving into the southern US, behind some of the Chinese units. The Mexicans were concentrating on southern California and southern Arizona, with some units pushing into the southwest corner of New Mexico as the Chinese continued to move north into the central and eastern part of New Mexico and western Texas.

There were large populations of Hispanics with Mexican ties aiding the Mexican advances and conducting attacks within their local areas. Elements of the large ethnic Chinese population in southern California, based in San Francisco, were doing the same thing. There were

battles all over southern California and Arizona between US private citizens and the Fifth Columnists.

David decided to give it four days. Two to allow the Naval Forces to arrive off the coasts, and two for them to join the fray. Depending on what he found out on the fifth day, he would make the decision to rejoin the defense, head for Montana, or just go home.

Things were looking bad on the second day. The US ground and air forces were nearly out of their high technology weapons and were down to conventional artillery on the ground, and gun against gun dog fights in the air. There simply were no more missiles and wouldn't be for some time.

Operation Blue Dragon - Epilog

Much to his surprise, the Navy, when it arrived off the coasts of Washington, southern California, and Texas did not attack the Chinese, Mexicans, or Russians. Instead, with their threat available, the President announced that the US would retaliate on their home countries with nuclear weapons if the attacks did not cease and the invaders head back to their own countries.

“Why didn’t he use that option at first?” David wondered as he sought other information on the shortwave bands.

According to foreign sources, the President had put the option on the table, but in secret negotiations with all three countries involved. Those news sources said that the apparent bluff had not worked, thus the continuing battle.

It suddenly struck David that the Navy might not join the attacks. At least not in a big way. They had the only hi-tech weapons left, other than nukes, and the military authorities might just be hanging on to them for a just in case need.

David shook his head. If the President was making the announcement in the open, then nukes were probably very close to being used. And David had no doubt that once that flood gate was open, everyone on the planet with a nuke and a grudge would start using them.

With that possibility growing, David decided to go home. It would be much better to be in the shelter at home than looking for one on the road. It took only twenty minutes for David to ready the rig and he was on his way. Most of that time had been spent paying outlandish amounts for a few fuel cans of gasoline. Only when he offered fifty dollars a gallon did anyone take him up on the offers. But he managed to get fifty additional gallons, which topped off the Motorhome and left twenty-five gallons for use on the road.

Though it was approaching darkness, David left the park and headed north on 281. He simply pulled off the road when it became dark enough to need the headlights. Though he had a GoLight Helios forward looking infra-red camera and monitor system, he didn’t want to risk being fired on by nervous Texans that might think he was Chinese or Mexican advance force.

But he was up before dawn the next morning and on the road as soon as it was light. As on the trip down, he stopped at every service station that looked like it was open. There weren’t as many open now as before, and the price had jumped appreciably. He didn’t pay fifty a gallon again, but he was paying twenty whenever he could find any. He kept the Motorhome topped off, and filled one can at each stop until everything was completely full again.

Every night he listened to the shortwave radio in the Motorhome. It seemed that Europe was getting ready for war, too. Not so much an invasion, since Russia was the only real threat there, but for a nuclear attack if the US went nuclear and Russia and China responded in kind. The European leaders and many of the citizens had no doubts that Russia would hit Europe with nukes on general principles so they wouldn’t be a threat in the post nuclear world.

It wasn't the US that launched first. The US wasn't the target, either. Pakistan, at odds with India for years, retaliated to an Indian incursion across the border with a nuclear tipped missile. India retaliated in kind, and a short nuclear war between the two took both out of the nuclear club and into the Post Apocalyptic Word.

David was on the home stretch when the rest of the world finally reacted to the news. There were cries for peace in the world from just about everyone. But Iran, having developed their nukes and seeing that the EU and the US were not involving themselves in the Pakistan/India clash, launched their dozen nuclear tipped missiles into Israel as their troops headed for the Iraq border and their foreign agents took down the Saudi Arabian ruling family. Iran was planning on creating a new Persian Empire while the rest of the world was otherwise occupied.

North Korea leadership had similar thoughts. Since the US had not reacted to the war between Pakistan and India, and it seemed wasn't going to involve itself in the Persian war with Israel, North Korea hit South Korea with their small arsenal of nuclear weapons and troops poured across the border, headed for Seoul. China made no move to rein them in. In fact, China was supplying support to the operation.

China, apparently fearful of a nuclear attack from the US, that would leave them vulnerable to attacks by their ancient enemy, Japan, launched a series of nuclear missiles from submarines out in the Pacific.

Japan's super secret nuclear weapon program had produced enough warheads to respond in kind against China.

It continued to escalate. Chavez had been true to his word and created a small nuclear arsenal of his own. With only Brazil a real threat to them in South America Chavez launched on Brazil's major industrial cities, as well as a few population centers.

But Chavez had greatly miscalculated. Though they had not talked it up the way Venezuela had, Brazil had been working on their own secret nuclear program since well before Chavez started. Brazil retaliated, sealing the fate of Chavez and any hope of Venezuela becoming the declared leader of South America.

David kept expecting to see missile tracks overhead, or the flash of a sky burst HEMP device, as he neared his home. But nothing happened. The rest of the world was at war, using nuclear weapons, and the US still had not responded to any of them.

The day David got home, what US based news he could get announced that China had offered to stop the invasion, if the US would surrender Texas and Oklahoma west of I-35, all of New Mexico and Arizona, the southern section of Nevada south of an east-west line through Tonopah and California south of an east-west line ten miles south of the southernmost point of Lake Tahoe.

Russia made a coordinated offer, agreeing to stop the invasion if the US surrendered the entire state of Alaska to them.

The leadership of the US was given a week to comply, while the invasion forces held the ground they'd taken.

David, with millions of other Americans, waited tensely for the US to reply, expecting the total refusal of the terms of surrender. They got something they didn't expect. On the morning of the sixth day, with no public announcement, the President unlocked the nuclear arsenal and the US launched a massive first strike on China, Russia, and the southern two-thirds of Mexico.

But the US Congress did not limit the attack to just the invading countries. The infant New Persian Empire was targeted, too, and eliminated as a force in the Middle East.

As the nuclear warheads began to detonate around the world, all US radio communications systems still operating were given the word to announce to the population of the United State that they should take shelter in any and every possible place that was suitable.

David sighed sadly and headed for his shelter. A new world was coming. A Post Apocalyptic World.

End *****

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