

I. An Underwater Approach to the White House

An Introduction to Bertie Mac

My name is William Bertram MacFarland. I am a patriot, a soldier, a spy and an assassin. I have served under, and reported directly to, nine Presidents of the United States – from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush. I have participated in some of the most momentous events which have occurred during that period – and due to that participation, in some small ways, may even have had an influence on this nation’s history. Throughout my long career, I have tried to keep a record of the events that I witnessed, lived through, and participated in. Taken together, I believe they provide insights which are available through no other source – and if I die without passing them along, these facts will never come to light.

The Early Days

It was October, 1962 and I was sitting alone in the cavernous Pentagon conference room adjacent to the office of the Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, waiting for Secretary McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of staff to arrive for a critical meeting. They were coming to discuss the latest letter which President Kennedy had received from Chairman Khrushchev concerning the nuclear missiles being installed in Cuba and the naval blockade (“quarantine”) which was being implemented by the United States. I was a lowly Captain in the United States Army but forbidden by the *President* to wear a uniform. On the President’s instructions to his brother “Bobby” (the Attorney General), Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary McNamara, McGeorge Bundy and others, I was to be included in all meetings relating to the “Cuban Missile Crisis.” I was to be introduced simply as Special Assistant to the President and my name was not to be included in the minutes of any meeting. Ever since my meeting with the President in August (along with all the people mentioned above), my entire world had been turned upside down. Whatever career path I had envisioned or hoped for, whatever I had aspired to become and accomplish, whatever I had dreamt of as my private life – had been completely demolished by the reality of my present situation.

I put my head in my hands and thought, “I’m 25 years old for God’s sake! What the hell am I doing here? I am about to participate in a discussion that could ultimately result in a recommendation from the Secretary to the President for a “surgical” air strike on the Cuban missile sites. In a few minutes, when the Joint Chiefs file in,

there will be so many stars in this room that it will look like the Milky Way. I felt as though I was living in some sort of hellish dream from which I couldn't wake up or escape. This was not the first, and probably would not be the last meeting of this group on this subject and although the action recommendations formulated here today might not be totally accepted by the President, they could not help but influence his thinking. And these recommendations, though classified "Top Secret" now, would eventually be declassified and become a part of history. The President could not fail to recognize that in his decision making process.

Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko had already warned in a speech to the United Nations that any attack by the US on Cuba could mean war with the Soviet Union. That war would inevitably mean nuclear confrontation. The decisions made here today in this room would have a material impact on the likelihood of such a war and confrontation.

I began to reflect on the events that had led me here.

CIA Recruitment

Near the end of my junior year at Duke University, I was surprised to get a message from the Dean of Men, Dean Cox, asking me to contact his office and make an appointment. One doesn't often get called into the Dean's office and such a summons usually means some serious bad news. I reflected long and hard on my (many) recent misdeeds and indiscretions but could think of nothing serious enough to warrant a call to the Dean's office. With a good deal of trepidation I called and as soon as I had identified myself to the Dean's secretary she promptly informed me that the Dean would like to see me in his office the following day after my last class. It was with a heavy heart that I showed up for that appointment. I was immediately ushered into the Dean's office where he and another man were chatting as though they were old friends. The Dean greeted me warmly and introduced me to the other person – a Mr. Smith – and then shocked me by announcing that he had another appointment off campus but that we were welcome to use his office for as long as we liked.

Mr. Smith skipped the normal niceties and wasted no time in getting down to business. He informed me that he worked for the CIA and that the CIA was continuously seeking outstanding college students for recruitment. He spoke at length about career opportunities, service to country, opportunities for travel world

wide, etc. He finished by asking me if I would like to have a well paid summer vacation learning more about the Agency. I asked what I would be doing during the summer and if by accepting his offer, I was entering into any long term obligation. He assured me that there was no obligation, that I would be meeting with other officers of the CIA and learning more about the Agency as well as meeting other possible recruits like myself. I would also be put through a series of physical and psychological examinations. I was intrigued - and somewhat flattered - so I accepted the offer, whereupon he got up, shook my hand, told me that I would soon be receiving some forms in the mail to fill out and return, and then walked briskly out of the office.

So began my journey. The summer was (mostly) fun but always interesting. I returned to school in the fall with the assurance of a job offer upon graduation if my thorough background check which was needed for security clearance didn't uncover any problems (it didn't). In addition, I passed my final ROTC¹ exam at Duke and therefore earned the rank of Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserves. After the final academic graduation ceremonies in 1958 I flew to Washington to start my new career. It was unbelievably intense. Because of my examinations and work the previous summer, I was fast tracked to "The Farm" which was then a super secret CIA training camp near Williamsburg, VA.² At the Farm, I underwent four months of paramilitary and tradecraft training. In the spring of 1959, I was sent to basic paratrooper training, then, after a short break, to an advanced school to receive training in high-speed, low altitude jumps, jumps over open water, night jumps, equipment drops, etc. Late that summer after two months of pre-training, I was sent to Ft. Benning, GA for a brutal 60 days of Ranger training. I don't know what the numbers are today but my class suffered a 19% casualty rate. Ranger training was a very different program in those early days. After about two weeks of light duty to recuperate from Ranger training and a further two weeks of vacation time, I was sent to "The Point"³ to get training in what today would be known as "special operations". Among other specialties, I trained in hand to hand combat, knife fighting, small arms training, explosives, evasion techniques, temporary "repair" methods while in enemy territory to limit further damage from incurred knife and gunshot wounds, broken bones, etc. I was both physically and mentally exhausted when I returned to Washington before being sent to the Army Language

¹ Reserve Officer Training Corps

² The location of The Farm (Camp Peary) is now well known as is the fact that it is a CIA training facility. What goes on within The Farm is still super secret.

³ The Point, located on Harvey Point outside Hertford, NC is also now known as being a "special" military training camp but again, what goes on within The Point remains super secret

School at the Presidio of Monterey in California for a 26 week intensive course in Russian language and culture. There, you live in a (simulated) typical Russian small town which is populated in large part by genuine native Russians. You eat, sleep and breathe Russian language and culture. You even wear real Russian clothes made in Russia – right down to your underwear.

Something that no one tells you when you're being recruited is how intensely lonely and isolated you will become. Although there is the usual camaraderie with your fellows during the various training schools, you begin to realize that you will probably never see any of them again and even if you do, you may be forced to deny that you ever met them. You become not only isolated, you are trained to mistrust everyone. Striking up a casual friendship at a party or a bar is an exercise in futility – there can be no meaningful exchange of information about yourself and what you do and where you live, etc. You begin to feel completely shut off from the real world. It was hard to return to the surreal world of the Monterey Language School.

Monterey is beautiful but I was glad to leave for Washington in the spring of 1961. I had a little more than a month of accrued vacation time, most of which I spent with my family and friends in Baltimore. Sadly, my long awaited vacation wasn't nearly as pleasant and relaxing as I had so anxiously anticipated. Even with my family I could never fully relax and though I explained to my friends that I couldn't talk much about what I was doing "for the Department of Defense" because it was classified, it left me with very little that I could talk about. During my college days, I drank beer and whiskey (and whatever else was available) frequently and sometimes heavily. Now I was very reluctant to have more than a couple of beers and my old buddies invited me less and less frequently to join them at a bar after work to chat up the ladies and consume (sometimes in large quantities) "small liquids to keep the voice clear." The old fun loving, lady chasing, joking, partying Bertie Mac had simply disappeared and my friends weren't very happy about the person who had replaced him. Troublingly, I began to seriously wonder if I were really happy about the changes either. A truly good friend of mine from Duke who was working in Washington – let's call him "John" - became my anchor to reality and patiently listened while I went on and on about my problems, my doubts about whether or not I really belonged in this "business" (and what the hell my options were if I were able to get out of it – once in, it's not so easy to get out), and so on ad infinitum. He never tried to advise me what to do, he simply brought up the various options that he could see to each of the problems I presented and gave a quietly impartial analysis of each. Looking back, I'm appalled to realize that I'm

not even sure I ever asked once about what he was doing, his career and plans for the future, etc. – no, regrettably, it was all about me. Never-the-less, the bottom line was that I decided that it would be illogical to make a final decision based on nothing more than the knowledge and skills I had acquired in some three years of training. I needed to go operational.

Moscow

I spent most of the month of May, 1961 being briefed on what my next duties were to be. Officially, I was going to be attached to the American Embassy in Moscow as a floating, dog's body assistant to any staff officer that needed me and would also be (the Agency having made an agreement with the State Department) the main diplomatic courier. Being a courier is a God-awful job. The maximum authorized weight of the diplomatic pouch was 90 pounds but I swear some of the ones I was given had to weigh close to twice that. Given that I was at the lowest diplomatic rank in the Embassy and in really great shape after all my training, I don't think anyone was terribly worried if the pouch might have been just the tiniest bit overweight. Although you fly first class and the pouch occupies the seat beside you and you handcuff yourself to it during flight, you can never really sleep and never truly relax and when you finally hand the damn thing over to the State Department in the U.S. and are given the mandatory 24 hour minimum time to "relax", State would often immediately give me another pouch to be taken back to the Embassy. In-flight alcohol is strictly prohibited for couriers and couriers were advised to carry whatever in-flight food and drink they thought they might need.

The real reason for my assignment to the Embassy in Moscow was that it would give me a (limited) opportunity to familiarize myself with Moscow, hear and learn the local accents and idioms, read the daily Party approved "news" in *Pravda*, *Isvestia*, *Trud*, etc. in preparation for planned future covert operations. In addition, I was directed to accompany Ambassador Thompson on any trips he took in the Soviet Union outside of Moscow to learn whatever I could. Frankly, aside from the miserable courier trips, I found life at the Embassy fascinating. Though any personal excursions in the City had to be pre-approved, led by a "guide" and monitored by KGB agents (dressed in the most ridiculously inappropriate garb possible in order to be taken for "ordinary citizens" and thus a normal part of the street scene), just having the opportunity to visit such places as Red Square, see the walls of the Kremlin, the fabulous domes of the churches, and above all, the pedestrians and shops (although there weren't very many of the latter) and the cars

and traffic, the noises, the smells, and on and on. It made me feel very alive and very happy and very sure that I had made the right choice for my career and my future life.

The Bay of Pigs fiasco, which originated in the Eisenhower administration, launched in April, 1961 of that year – some three months after Kennedy had become President. It was a major embarrassment not only for the President and the nation but also very much for the CIA, which had planned the operation. President Kennedy was furious and especially critical of our Director, Allen W. Dulles. Although Director Dulles defended himself vigorously and distributed the blame around the Agency as best he could, President Kennedy replaced him with John McCone at the end of September. I had hoped to start covert operations in the fall but McCone was busily replacing the Dulles loyalists (and there were many) with his own picks so any new covert operations pretty much came to a halt. Ambassador Thompson in Moscow was further embarrassed when the one of the Embassy's staff was caught by the KGB in flagrante delicto gathering highly classified Soviet military information and he was promptly hauled off to the KGB's infamous and dreaded Lubyanka prison in spite of his diplomatic immunity.⁴

Lubyanka

It was hard to know just how much truth there was to the myriad of rumors which swirled around Lubyanka because it seemed to be true that no-one taken there ever left alive. Most Soviet officials would not even dare mention its name, far less discuss it. In any case Lubyanka was always my worst nightmare and I vowed to myself that I would never be taken there alive. As it turned out, it was a vow I couldn't keep.

I was still doing routine courier flights but the routine stopped abruptly in mid December 1961 when I arrived at Moscow's Vnukovo airport with the pouch. Normally, with my diplomatic passport, I breezed right through customs so I was more than startled when the customs agent directed me to a seat on the incoming side of the airport and informed me that my papers were not in order. I demanded that the Embassy be called at once and that someone go outside and fetch my driver. I could see that there were several customs and police officers making frantic phone calls – all the while glancing towards me. It was with a huge sense of

⁴ The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations was adopted on April 18, 1961 but did not come into force until April 24, 1964. While it was highly unusual for the developed nations not to honor diplomatic immunity prior to the Convention coming into force, it was far from unheard of.

relief that I saw my driver and a junior Embassy officer walking towards me but that relief turned to total disbelief when the officer, without a word and never meeting my eyes, unlocked me from the pouch, turned on his heel and marched back through Customs closely followed by my driver. I think that's when it hit me that I was being traded for the other staff member. My own government was sacrificing me for another American who they felt to be more valuable. My world was changed forever. I don't frighten easily but I don't mind admitting that I was terrified.

My memory of Lubyanka is pretty much a blur. I remember being roughly handcuffed and shoved into an official car (which had the curtains drawn), between two huge KGB agents. I remember going through the gates to Lubyanka and being driven around to a back garage, hearing the garage doors being closed behind us, and being shoved out of the car onto the concrete garage floor. I remember being dragged to my feet and a giant fist being slammed into the side of my face. I remember waking up in a very cold cell (it was winter and there was no heat of any kind in the cell). The tiny cell had no windows and I found myself strapped to a chair which was bolted to the floor and being slapped and beaten with a police club while questions were continuously screamed at me by a slimy, perverted-looking thin man wearing a Soviet uniform of a type that I had never seen before. He would grab me by the hair and pull my head back, then bend over so that his face was only inches from mine screeching questions at me while his spittle sprayed all over my face.

I had already decided while I was being driven to Lubyanka that total silence would be the best strategy to pursue. I remembered from my tradecraft training in interrogation techniques that if you can get your prisoner to start talking and then immediately reward him by temporarily letting up on the beating, he will tend to talk more and more as the beating resumes and the pain gets worse and will finally break down altogether. I figured that if I remained silent that they would finally get frustrated enough to raise the pain level and physical damage enough to kill me – and I wanted it to happen as soon as possible. I have no idea how long the interrogation continued. Was it days, weeks maybe? – I lost all concept of time. I think it must have been about three or four weeks but I'll never know for sure. I remember waking up one time with a terrible pain in my gut and finding it very difficult and painful to breathe but then I passed out again.

I remember that once my cell door opened and that I was dragged out and down the hall. I tried hard with all the very little strength I had left to bite or hit my captors,

and then felt a sharp jab in my arm – and then nothing. The next thing I remember is waking up somewhere on a soft surface and that the air around me was much warmer than the bitter cold of my cell and that astonishingly, the wretched torn and blood and vomit stained rags which my clothes had become seemed to have been replaced with clean clothes that I didn't recognize. I sensed there was someone else in the room with me but when I tried to look around, I felt the old familiar jab again.

Salvation by Generals

The next time I woke up I was in a very large Zil limousine lying on a soft mattress placed at an angle in front of the back seat. The back seat was occupied by two Soviet Generals of high rank and a third person who was apparently a doctor as he had a traditional black medical bag at his feet. All three were staring at me intently as the doctor asked me in Russian to tell him how I was feeling. I felt remarkably clear headed and told him that I felt terrible, my head hurt, my lungs hurt, both arms and legs hurt and something in my gut was hurting me more than anything. He just nodded and told me I was being taken to a place where someone would help me and that for the moment I was “stabilized” but should not try to move around but to lie as still as I possibly could. Then the General sitting closest to me introduced himself as well as the other General and asked me if I thought I could remember their names. I told them that both names were burned indelibly into my brain and if I ever got the opportunity – I would assassinate them both. He smiled and then switched to English and spoke to me quite gently. He said they had been told that I was very intelligent and that their biggest concerns after having me removed from Lubyanka was first – that I would die and second – that I had suffered brain damage. He observed that obviously neither had happened. I was beginning to wish that the first had as I was starting to hurt more and more with every passing breath and beginning to think their second concern might be valid as well as I could make neither head nor tail of this bizarre nightmare. The doctor said, “I know your pain is getting worse but we had to give you something to counteract the sedatives we have been giving you. We will sedate you again after you have heard what the Generals are going to tell you.”

What they told me was this:

“We think that Chairman Khrushchev is getting some extremely bad advice from a very hard-line part of the military leadership and that he has been convinced that your President Kennedy is too young, too inexperienced and too intellectual to

respond harshly to the measures we are about to implement. The Chairman intends to construct launch sites for medium and intermediate range nuclear weapons in Cuba and furnish those launch sites with a large stock of nuclear tipped missiles. Your President must be informed of this immediately. We have absolutely no way of contacting your President directly and would be instantly arrested and very painfully and very slowly put to death if it were discovered that we had tried. In any case, we would have no credibility with your President even if we did succeed in making direct contact with him. We believe that your President has no knowledge whatsoever that your CIA Director Dulles agreed to swap you for your Embassy's Cultural Attaché but we are sure he will know that some major diplomatic outrage has occurred when you show up in your present condition at the American Embassy in Helsinki. The Soviet Union does not trust the United States any more than the United States trusts us. You of course have absolutely no reason to trust either government which makes you curiously useful to both sides. Therefore we are entrusting you to deliver this message, this information, directly to your President and no one else. We will communicate with a trusted junior officer at the Soviet Embassy in Washington. You will know the communication is valid when he mentions our names. Do you remember our names?"

I repeated them. "Good, good," he said. "Now you are far too tired to absorb any more details. You will get them later when you are well. Just remember that our message is to go to the President directly. All further communications must go only through you. Both sides have too many people with their own agendas. We will put you back to sleep now." And they did.

Walter Reed Hospital

I only have strange patches of remembrances between then and the time when I woke up heavily bandaged in a hospital bed surrounded by a number of doctors and nurses, civilian men in coats and ties and an assortment of military officers. I felt horrible and hurt all over but strangely quite a bit better than the last time I remembered being sort of semi-conscious. The military uniforms looked American but I now trusted no one. In Russian, I asked where I was. Someone said, "I think you are asking where you are. You are in the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC."

I think I said, "Bull shit!" before going back to sleep.

My next memory is waking up (maybe in the same bed, I really couldn't tell) with an elderly man in a white lab coat and stethoscope draped around his neck sitting in a chair beside my bed while a middle aged nurse in a ridiculously starched uniform and an even more ridiculous cap on her head fussed around with various bags and bottles that seemed to be attached to me both in places where I would expect them to be attached and others where I certainly wouldn't. As my jaw didn't seem to be working too well, I found that I was having a real problem trying to talk but I tried the best I could to ask the guy in the white coat what the hell was going on and to tell him that I had to see President Kennedy right away.

He said, "Son, I don't know who did all this to you but I can sure as hell tell you that they were not either expecting or even interested in your survival and that their expectations came within a hairsbreadth of being realized. You have had a lot of reconstructive surgery in the last three weeks and we're not close to being finished yet. When we are, you are going to be looking at several months of physical therapy – and you will not find that to be a pleasant experience. However, on orders from the President no less, you have been getting the best treatment from the best physician specialists that Walter Reed has - and at the risk of being immodest, I believe they are some of the best in the world. Having said that, I must say you seem to be in a sort of world class all your own. I'll be damned if I have ever seen anyone who could recover and heal from wounds like you can. It is frankly astonishing – almost freaky. It's clear that before you got into whatever the hell mess you got into, you had to be in magnificent physical condition but even so, I have never seen *anyone* whose wounds heal as quickly as yours do. Were either of your parents like that?" It was hard for me to speak, so I just tried to shrug my shoulders in response. The effort was painful.

As clearly as I could, mumbled out of the side of my mouth, "Have got to speak to President. National security. Urgent." And then, with a feeling of horror, "What date this?" He looked at me closely and said, "It's the beginning of May, 1962." My only thought was, "Oh, my God! Where have I been since December?" I asked, "Mithiles? Mithiles?" He looked at the nurse and said, "He's getting way over agitated. He needs to rest now." The old jab put me out like a light.

Take Me to the President – Now!

The intervals between my periods of consciousness and total darkness were beginning to diminish significantly and although I can't by any means remember exactly, a reasonably good approximation of their diminution (because by now the

first thing I did when I woke up was to ask, “What date this?”) was May 13, then maybe May 19, then perhaps May 23 (but whatever the exact date was, my jaw now worked at the expense of some real pain, my head was reasonably clear, my vocal cords were working pretty well, various body parts seemed to be out of their casts - except my left leg which itched like hell. Bandages and wrappings had by no means completely disappeared (but were significantly diminished) and all things considered, I actually felt fairly good. A different set of observers were peering down at me when I said. “God damn it, are you people all fucking idiots? I’m sincerely grateful for all the work you have done patching me back together but if I can’t get the information that I’ve got to the President, all your work is probably not going to make a damn bit of difference to either you or to me because there is a good chance we are all going to be dead – which death in fact might actually be a blessing because the ones who are left living on both sides are going to die a much more painful death from radiation sickness. I have to talk to the President and I have to talk to him NOW! I don’t have any firm dates for when this nuclear confrontation is going to happen but it will be soon and unless it can be peacefully resolved it will be disastrous for both us and the Soviets. I have a secure way to communicate with high ranking military people in the Soviet Union who are trusted advisors to Chairman Khrushchev. That’s all you need to know. Now take me to the President and take me now! You are literally messing around with a possible nuclear war!”

I don’t think they had any doubt about my sincerity but I think – I know – they had considerable doubt about my credibility. Several hours later they woke me from a pleasant nap to inform me with a great sense of their own importance that something like the Deputy Under Assistant to the Undersecretary of State would personally take my message to the President. My response was not printable but very forceful. I made it very clear that I would not convey my message even to the Secretary of State himself – Dean Rusk.

There was consternation all around and I think a growing sense of awareness that I was deadly serious when I said that I would only deliver the message to President Kennedy- and no one else. Never-the-less, several hours later they came back and announced that the President’s (unofficial) Chief of Staff, Kenneth P. “Kenny” O’Donnell,⁵ would be willing to come to the hospital and talk with me.

I couldn’t help it, I really lost it. I tried to get out of bed but found the resulting vertigo overwhelming so I just shouted and cursed at the top of my lungs at

⁵ President Kennedy was one of only two modern presidents who never had an official Chief of Staff – the other being his successor, Lyndon Johnson.

everyone I could see. The result I achieved was not what I wanted but should have expected. Two very large white coated men – hospital orderlies, I think – came running in from the hall and pinned me to the bed and then I felt the old, familiar sharp prick. I don't know how much later it was when I woke up again but the atmosphere had definitely changed. Someone had placed a very large and very beautiful bouquet of flowers by my bed and a young physician told me that “we” were going to practice sitting up after he checked my blood pressure and heart rate. He told me he was going to crank up the top of my bed very slowly and if I felt as though I was going to be sick or pass out, I should just signal him to stop. I still can't believe the dizziness and incredible nausea that built up as I was simply being gently cranked up - continuously, just a tiny bit at a time and very slowly. By the time I had reached perhaps thirty degrees I was sweating and heaving profusely and had already made him stop twice. He told me I had actually made more progress than he expected but I should try to keep my eyes open (they were squeezed tightly shut) and to see if I could relax enough to make the room stop spinning. It was a sickening effort but after what seemed like an eternity I started to feel relatively stable. He then answered the question I was trying to croak out before I got a chance to ask it.

He told me that the human body is a remarkably adaptable mechanism but since I had been in a horizontal position for more than four months, my heart had gotten used to the fact that it could pump a perfectly adequate blood supply to my brain with very little effort. When my head became elevated however, the effort my heart had been expending to get blood to my brain was no longer sufficient and it was the reduced blood supply to my brain that was making me feel dizzy and sick. He told me not to worry, my heart would quickly adapt and that he would have me sitting up straight “in no time”. I didn't comment but just asked where the flowers had come from. He answered, “Those flowers were sent to you with the compliments of the President of The United States who has asked that he be kept informed daily of your progress. He also asked us to inform you that if you wish, he would be quite willing to visit you here in the hospital.”

I asked him several questions. The first was the current date to which he replied May 28, 1962. I then asked him if there had been anything in the news lately about missiles. He gave me a very peculiar look but said that he had neither seen nor heard anything in particular about missiles in the recent past. I asked him if I could please get a newspaper delivered to my room on a daily basis. He laughed and said, “Sir, when we start getting the White House sending one of our patients flowers with the compliments of the President, I imagine you could get just about

anything you ask for but I am absolutely sure we can arrange for a newspaper to be delivered daily.” I thanked him and then asked if someone could ask President Kennedy if he could see me at the White House on June 4. He nodded and said, “It will be asked, sir.” He told me he thought it was time to crank me back down and asked how I was feeling. I replied that the nausea and the dizziness had pretty much gone but I felt like I had just run 10 miles with a 90 pound pack on my back. He smiled and said, “I’ll send the nurse in now. If you need anything, just ask her,” but as he turned to leave, I called out, “Could I also have a clock and a calendar?” “They’ll be there when you wake up,” he said, then turned and left.

The President Requests the Honor of Your Presence

For the past several days, the staff had been gradually opening the venetian blinds in my room so it was no longer in a state of perpetual twilight but this time when I woke up, the blinds were fully open and there was glorious and brilliant sunshine pouring into the room. I blinked, rubbed my eyes, grinned from ear to ear and tried to sit up. I realized immediately that the sitting up part was going to take a lot more work than I thought. While the nurse was checking “our” (why do they do that?) temperature and blood pressure, I glanced around and saw that the size of my bedside table had increased substantially and that it now contained a clock, a desk calendar and a crisply folded newspaper. It also contained a brand new bouquet of flowers. In addition, there was a small envelope bearing the Presidential Seal propped up against the flower vase. The nurse handed it to me silently and turned away as I opened and read it. In beautiful calligraphy it read, “*The President of the United States respectfully requests the honor of your presence at the White house at 10:30 a.m. on Monday, June 4, 1962.*” Underneath was a handwritten message which read, “Hear your recovery is going well. Look forward to seeing you. JFK” The nurse turned back around and said, “OK, let’s get you sitting up enough to take some semi-solid breakfast,” and she started cranking.

The next few days were a misery but strangely exhilarating. The cast came off my left leg and though it was a blessed relief to be able to scratch where it itched, the leg looked deathly white and withered. The two husky physical therapists who had been assigned to me saw my horror stricken gaze and said, “Don’t worry, sir. The color will come back and I guarantee we’ll get you bulked up.” The rest of the bandages came off, the few remaining stitches removed, and daily I got closer and closer to sitting truly upright. By June 1, the two therapists – holding me firmly between them – swung my legs over the side of the bed. Though the experience was

nauseating, it was also revelatory. For the first time since getting off the airplane at Vnukovo, I knew with unquestioned certainty that I was really going to be OK; I was really going to live; I was really going to make it! All of a sudden tears were streaming down my face in torrents and as my body began to shake, the two therapists, without a word, swung my legs back onto the bed, gently lowered my torso onto the pillows, covered me up, then stepped back, snapped to attention, saluted, and said, "Welcome back, sir."

I'll never forget June 4, 1962. I was awakened early by my two therapists who escorted me into the bathroom and effortlessly lowered me first onto the toilet, then into the tub, scrubbed me briskly, lifted me out, dried me off, put me into a hospital gown, sat me back down into my wheelchair, then opened the door to let in a barber and a manicurist. The barber had been shaving me every day for a long time plus clipping my hair from time to time as he deemed necessary. Today he shaved and clipped me meticulously which I didn't mind but I had never had a manicure in my life (this was the first time I had thought about it but I suppose somebody had been clipping my nails during all this time but it was done like any man would clip his nails.) What this lady was doing was a whole different deal.

Breakfast, bathroom again, brushing of teeth (which I could actually do pretty well by myself by now) and then it was wardrobe time. For the first time in some six months I was actually getting to wear some underwear. Brand new boxer shorts, brand new cotton tee shirt (hurt right much to get that one on), and then came the pajamas. They were beautiful and clearly custom made for me. They were the same deep blue as the Army's dress blue uniform and someone had stitched thin gold piping around the bottoms of the sleeves and the legs. I was speechless; I'd never seen anything like it before in my life. The *piece de la resistance* though was the bathrobe. It was the same deep blue, but double breasted with a hand embroidered Army seal stitched onto the left breast pocket. Spit shined leather slippers completed the picture. What had started out as kind of fun and kind of funny now was getting to be a bit embarrassing. I was beginning to feel like a mannequin in a show-room window. I started voicing my concerns rather vigorously when the door to my room was jerked open and a two-star general strode in and said in a steely voice clearly used to authority and command, "Lieutenant, you will be quiet and you will listen to me closely – is that clearly understood?" I shut up immediately and did my best to salute (it was still hard to get my right elbow up to shoulder level) and said, "Yes sir! Excuse me, sir!" He said, "I'm not quite sure what all the fuss is about you and frankly, I don't want to know. What I do know is that you are starting to act like a spoiled brat and I will not tolerate

that. Within approximately one hour you will have the honor of meeting face to face with the Commander in Chief of this nation's armed forces. I don't care what your politics may be or even if you have any but damn it Lieutenant, you are an officer of the United States Army and you will both show him the deep respect that is owed to him as Commander in Chief and conduct yourself in a way the Department of the Army would find meritorious of its approval. Do you *understand*?" After my quick response of, "Yes, Sir!" he growled with a sort of quiet menace, "For your sake, I sincerely hope so." and spun on his heel and left.

I was stunned and mortified. I had indeed been acting like a spoiled child and had let the constant attention and deference convince me that I somehow deserved it. I looked around the room filled with more than a half dozen people who had constantly helped me, comforted me, nursed and nurtured me and catered to my every whim. There was dead silence in the room as I looked each of them in the eye and said, "Absolutely everything the General said is dead on and I have no words to tell you how deeply ashamed I am. All of you have consistently been by my side, helped me with all your skills and knowledge and I think – with all your hearts. You have saved my life, reintroduced me to the land of the living and over and over demonstrated your kindness and compassion in numberless ways. You have never complained, you have never given me the countless reprimands I have so often and so richly deserved. And what have I given you in return?" I just shook my head and said, "Oh, God. Is there any way I can make it up to you all? Is there anything I can do to demonstrate how sincerely sorry I am for my unforgivably despicable behavior? Please, please! Don't just stare at me and say nothing! Somebody, for God's sake, say something!"

Nobody moved. Nobody said anything. I think my anguish must have been palpable because Sarah, my day nurse, walked over and gently kissed me on the cheek. She straightened up and said, "Yes, you have indeed been a bit of a pain at times Lt. MacFarland – particularly lately – but I think all of us have been deeply moved and even inspired by the literally unconscious courage and the will to live you have repeatedly demonstrated while our best staff physicians were trying to repair or at least mitigate the unbelievable damage that had been inflicted on you. We have all been truly amazed at the extent of your recovery and how much will power you must have had to summon not to give up. So we all cut you some slack. But now, sir, those days are officially over."

My God! I'm in the Oval Office

Surely so much tension was never so gracefully broken and even I couldn't help laughing (and trying not to make even more of a complete fool of myself by crying at the same time) as everyone in the room crowded around, patting me on the shoulders, the arms and once, to the horror of my barber who rushed over to repair the "damage", on the head, muttering things like, "You're a good guy Lieutenant," and "We're not PO'd, Lieutenant" and "It's OK, – you've been through one hell of a tough time", etc. At some point during all this, someone arrived at the door saying, "Your car is here, Lieutenant. Would you please accompany me downstairs?" and to the cries of, "Good luck, good luck!" my wheelchair was zipped down the hall, into the waiting elevator, and through the front doors of the hospital to a waiting limousine emblazoned with the Presidential seal. I was then respectfully but firmly belted into my wheelchair by two Marines who then lifted the wheelchair (and me) into the back of the limo. The rear seat had been removed and replaced by a small platform bolted to the floor which had special straps and locks to secure my chair's wheels. The driver asked if I was comfortable and on hearing my assent, the car began to gently glide down the drive.

It was an amazing and eye opening journey. Presidential limos do not encounter any traffic; do not take any notice of stoplights; but simply glide on to their destination oblivious of the world around them. The gates at the White House swung open with such perfect timing that our slow but steady progression up the drive to what I now know to be the entrance to the West Wing of the White House was not delayed by an instant. As the limo gently stopped under the portico, the back doors were immediately opened, my chair unlatched (although I remained belted to the damn thing), and gently wheeled through the entrance to a foyer where finally I got unbelted. We then moved forward into a very attractive lobby then left into a rather long corridor at the end of which was yet another corridor where we turned right and followed it as it angled further right. We stopped midway down this angled corridor while the Marine who had been leading us knocked softly on a door to my left. It was opened by an enormous black man wearing formal attire (it was the first time I had ever seen a coat with tails) complete with a high wing collar, white gloves, etc. He came out and said to the Marines, "Thank you gentlemen. I'll take charge of the Lieutenant from here." While the Marines marched side by side back the way we had come, I was gently wheeled through the open door where I gasped in astonishment. "My God," I thought, "I'm in the Oval Office!" And moving towards me was President Kennedy.

I struggled to salute as I said, “Mr. President. I’m deeply honored to meet you, sir.” He smiled at me and said to the big man behind my chair, “Thanks, John. I’ll take it from here.” As John was leaving, the President said, “Lieutenant, there’s no need to salute inside the White House, but I thank you for your effort, especially as it seems you’re still having some mobility problems in that right shoulder. I’m told however that after a few months of physical therapy, you are expected to recover fully. Now let’s move you over here beside this couch. I’m anxious to hear what you have to tell me, and I want these gentlemen to hear you as well” as he motioned towards a small group of three men who had been conversing with each other in low voices but who now started to move towards us. He said, “I expect you recognize Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara but you may not recognize my national security advisor, McGeorge Bundy.” As he turned to them, he said, “Given the state of the Lieutenant’s right shoulder, I think we’d all better skip the formality of shaking hands. Now let’s sit down and listen to what the Lieutenant has to tell us. Go ahead, son. We’re all ears.”

I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, opened them, faced them all, and addressed the President. “Sir,” I said, “I must tell you that my very clear and very explicit instructions were to deliver this message to you personally and to you alone. There is obviously nothing whatever to prevent you from then sharing it with whomever you please, but please sir, these men saved my life and I don’t think there is any question but what they gravely imperiled their own lives in doing so. I feel honor bound to respect their instructions and although you can clearly order me to disregard them – I beg you not to do so.” No one said a word, and I just wanted to curl up and die and vanish off the face of the earth when the President said, “Gentlemen, with what this young man has been through, I think it would be an unforgivable abuse of power for me to order him to violate the trust which was placed in him to carry out his instructions – and I’m not going to do that. If you want to stretch out, I don’t think there’s anybody in the Cabinet Room or if you prefer something smaller, you’re welcome to use my study.” As they arose he said, “Actually gentlemen, if you would, wait just a moment please while I check on something,” and he walked over to his desk, picked up the phone, punched a button and said, “Evelyn, (Evelyn Lincoln, the President’s personal secretary) what have I got scheduled for lunch?” After a few moments he said, “I’m glad I’ve got an excuse to get out of that one. Call him and tell him that we’ll have to reschedule and get the dining room next to my study set up for two people – one of them in a wheel chair.” He then turned to the other three people in the room and said, “I apologize for taking up so much of your time this morning and I know you are all terribly

busy so let me not detain you any longer. I'll contact you after the Lieutenant and I have finished our discussions."

Back Channel Inception

He sat back down and said, "Now that we have a little time together, why don't you take me back to the very beginning of this story and tell me what happened."

"Do you mean starting with my detention at the airport in Moscow?"

"That's it – start there"

He looked grim as I began to recount the entire story but said nothing until I came to the end and then just looked down and said, "I see. I see." After a long pause he said, "So you're telling me that your own government betrayed you and was willing to throw you on the trash heap, sacrifice your life, for some functionary that they thought more highly of, who had more experience, knew more secrets, and almost certainly had friends in the Agency and/or State at fairly high levels?" I answered, "I don't know so, sir but that's certainly the way it seemed to me." He shook his head sadly and said, "I know for a fact that we have some clandestine Soviet personnel which are being detained here in the U.S., any of which the Soviets would be happy to trade for one of ours. But it seems that the Agency made the decision that they would rather keep the Soviets and "only" have to sacrifice you instead. Someone from our side must have been able to make a pretty convincing case that you had far more valuable information than our ex-cultural attaché – who incidentally came to no harm whatever while in prison but was simply kept *incommunicado* while these negotiations must have been going on. Also, in case you are wondering, I had absolutely no idea that any of this was happening. The first I ever heard of you was when State passed along an urgent message from our Embassy in Stockholm confirming that you were in critical condition, had been delivered by two very high ranking Soviet officers to our Embassy in Helsinki and that you kept muttering that you had an urgent message which had to be delivered to me personally. That was a strange enough set of circumstances to convince me we should do everything we could to get you back here as soon as possible.

I understand that one of your majors in your distinguished undergraduate career at Duke was in nuclear physics, and that you had a particular interest in particle physics and quantum mechanics – whatever that is – and you were allowed – as an undergraduate, no less – to attend a lecture series given by Niels Bohr. It probably wasn't very hard to make the case to the Soviets for the swap." He sighed and

added, “Incidentally, I’m sorry to tell you, but I understand that Dr. Bohr is quite ill.”⁶

He asked me if I knew what had happened to me after my “abduction” from Lubyanka to which I replied that the sole clear memory I had was my conversation with the two generals and everything else was pretty much a blur.

He said, “Well let me tell you what little I know. Although a good deal of it is speculation from our Embassies in Helsinki and Stockholm – as well as from other resources which I’m not supposed to talk about – it seems you were taken to a safe house in Moscow where you were cleaned up as much as possible and examined by a physician who proclaimed that you could never make a journey back to the U.S. alive and that indeed in his opinion he would be astonished if you could make it through the next twenty four hours. None-the-less, I expect your “abductors” felt they didn’t have anything to lose by trying and flew you out of Moscow on a military plane to the airport just outside of Leningrad.⁷ As Finland is a neutral country, the generals could not fly you directly to Helsinki in a military airplane so they did the next best thing and transferred you to a smaller military aircraft which flew you to an airstrip just a few miles away from the Finnish border. Given that no one in the Soviet Union who is not a very, very high ranking official rates a Zil⁸ and as these generals had passports proving them to be members of that exclusive group, they would have been waved through the Finnish border immediately and without question. You arrived at our Embassy in Helsinki in critical condition and it’s a good thing your “abductors” had a high enough rank to take not only you but also the papers and passport you were carrying at the time of your arrest - because you were totally unrecognizable. Our physician at the Finnish Embassy said you were bleeding internally and that unless you could be gotten onto an operating table within hours, there was no way you could survive. Your arrival caused a flurry of diplomatic signals flying back and forth between our Embassies in Helsinki and Stockholm and in a frenzy, the only US airplane we had in Helsinki was converted as best they could to carry a stretcher - and off you went for the short hop to Stockholm. Our Embassy in Stockholm certainly didn’t have the medical facilities necessary to take care of you and since you were apparently bearing a message of national security importance for me personally (the few times you regained enough consciousness to speak, that’s all you would say) we hesitated to try to get you fixed

⁶ Niels Bohr, who won the Nobel prize in 1922 for his work on the structure of the atom, died in November, 1962. He was also known as the “father” of quantum mechanics.

⁷ Leningrad resumed its former name of Saint Petersburg in 1991.

⁸ Zil Limousines were hand-crafted and were restricted to only the very highest ranking Soviet officials.

up in a Swedish hospital for fear that you might reveal something which could be harmful to our security interests. The dilemma was that you needed help, you needed it fast, and you needed that help to be provided in some place which was both very secure and very physically stable. An airplane was out of the question because not only did you need a complete operating room, it needed to be rock solid stable and no airplane can provide that.⁹ The only other alternative was a large naval surface vessel which, though they are mighty, can't guarantee total stability in stormy seas. We didn't have any land based resources which had the medical facilities you required or the ability to conceal your presence for the months of reconstructive surgery and rehabilitation you were going to need. You, and this nation, were extremely fortunate that there was a naval asset which could offer everything that was so necessary and which happened to be cruising (illegally, I'm afraid) quite close to Stockholm. At my direction, it was ordered to change course and take you aboard."

My eyes opened wide as I asked, "Sir, are you telling me I was brought home on a nuclear submarine?" He chuckled and said, "No, I am not telling you that for a number of reasons which you don't need to know about, but of course I can't stop you from drawing your own conclusions – and that's all I'm going to say about that. Now, talk to me about exactly what these two generals told you – what did you say their names were again?"

I said, "Mr. President, I haven't told you their names for several reasons. First of all, I'm sure the names they gave me are not their real names – that wouldn't have been very smart and even in my condition, I could tell these people were extremely intelligent. The second is that those two names constitute the code words that will prove their authenticity when and if they try to contact me. However, as I told you sir, apparently Chairman Khrushchev has already decided he will build missile launch sites in Cuba capable of launching nuclear tipped MRBM's and IRBM's¹⁰ and if he hasn't already done so, will shortly be shipping significant quantities of these missiles to Cuba. Forgive me for saying this sir; I am only repeating what they told me, but apparently the Chairman thinks you are too young, too immature and too intellectual to effectively oppose him. If these events come to pass, and the generals certainly had no doubt in their own minds that they would, I believe it would be of great use to be able to communicate directly with these very highly placed advisors to the Chairman."

⁹ That is still the case to this day.

¹⁰ Medium Range and Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles.

The President looked at me with bemused astonishment and said, “Wait, wait, wait just a moment. Are you seriously proposing that you personally serve as the communication intermediary between our two governments if this missile thing actually comes to pass?” I said, “Mr. President, I am certainly not by any means proposing that I be the sole communication intermediary between our two countries. Obviously our government and theirs have very well developed regular channels of communication but at times, sir, it seems to me that these very official and formal channels of communication can become onerously slow so if one has the possibility of sort of going through the back door rather than the front, formal door; that might be of real value.” I reflected a moment and continued, “‘Back door’ sounds sort of sneaky somehow, maybe a better term for an informal means of communication might be something like ‘back channel.’”¹¹ He looked at me and said, “Well this conversation is certainly not going anywhere close to the direction I thought it would take. So tell me, son, why not let our experts from Defense and State carry on these ‘back channel’ conversations? I know you’re very bright but these folks have a whole lot more expertise, experience, and knowledge of the Soviets than you do.” I responded, “Unquestionably, sir. The problem is that the generals won’t talk to them – they will only talk to me.”

He scratched his head and said, “Well, Lieutenant, let’s say for the moment that’s true – but are you telling me that the simple fact that you know both of their “names” – and I agree with you completely – those names are surely not their real names – is going to be enough for them to feel certain that they are communicating with you?”

“No sir,” I answered, “I’m sure not. But whatever drug they gave me to bring me out of my unconsciousness also sort of induced a somewhat surreal clarity of mind which burned into my memory not only every detail of that five or ten minute conversation, but also every detail of the passenger compartment of the Zil that I could see. Because the curtains were drawn, there were lights on. I can tell you how many and where they were located. I can tell you who had what service insignias on their uniforms, what the doctor looked like and what he was wearing, what material the back seat was covered with and what color it was, who wore glasses, everyone’s hair color, who had mustaches and/or beards, who was wearing shoes or boots and what color they were, and countless other details which no one in the world except me could possibly know. I can certainly prove my credentials – and I can make them prove theirs as well.”

¹¹ Although most scholarly etymological reference works place the origin of the term “back channel” somewhere around 1975 or even as late as 1984, I believe that the term originated in this conversation in June, 1962.

He shook his head again, sighed, and said, “Well, damn son, you’ve definitely convinced me on the identity verification question and certainly, if any of this missile stuff ever comes about – and unfortunately I think you are starting to convince me that it really might – it *would* be very helpful to have a straight pipeline, or ‘back channel’ as you call it – directly into the Chairman’s inner circle. I can’t see anything illegal or unconstitutional about having such a line of communication but you have to know that State and Defense and probably a lot of my own senior staff - along with the Vice President¹² - are all going to go absolutely ballistic if I support this.” He looked up sharply and with a wry grin added, “No pun intended.”

Lunch with the President

The President stood up and said, “OK. Let’s go and have a bite to eat. I know you have to be exhausted and you should get back to Walter Reed and I’ve got to get back to work, too – and I have to think a lot about what you’ve told me before I make any decision on how to proceed. Now it looks like I have wheelchair duty, so let’s move on.” As he got up, he asked me to wait a second and went over to his phone again, punched another button and said, “Is Mrs. Kennedy upstairs?” A pause. Then, “Good. Ask her if she can come down to the little dining room for just one minute – promise – no longer than two – to meet a new friend of mine. So she isn’t shocked or anything, tell her that he’s in a wheelchair for the moment but should be out of it soon. OK, thanks.” He pushed me through a small door that I hadn’t noticed and into a narrow corridor and said, “That’s my study on the left and my lavatory on the right and right in front of us is my dining room.”

I don’t remember what we had to eat. What I remember – and treasure most – was the graceful, easy, casual and relaxed atmosphere that the President projected. I found it impossible not to be drawn to him but although I believed that he was totally truthful when he said he had no prior knowledge either of me or what had happened to me until he had received the urgent dispatch from the Swedish Embassy, I was still extremely traumatized by the fact that my own government had been the major player in my arrest and subsequent torture. I also had a hard time believing it could have been CIA Director Dulles acting alone, but then all three major suspects - Dulles, Rusk and McNamara - reported directly to the

¹² Vice President Johnson, when he finally found out about it, thought it was a great idea. I suspect it reminded him of many of the “round about” methods that he had used so successfully to cajole recalcitrant members of the Senate to come around to his point of view and support legislation which he wanted to see passed.

President. I was lulled by the President's charm and easy familiarity but realized with a sense of real surprise that I simply wasn't prepared to unconditionally accept everything he said. It wasn't that I didn't believe him, I just found myself unable to convince myself that I unconditionally did. While I was struggling mightily with that shocking realization, there was a soft tap on the door behind me and Mrs. Kennedy let herself in and after gently patting me on the shoulder, she sat down on a magically provided tableside chair between the President and me and politely declined the immediate offers of food and drink.

Mrs. Kennedy was far more beautiful in person than depicted in her newspaper photographs. She warmly addressed me as though she had known me from childhood and said that she had been horrified to hear that despite my diplomatic immunity I had been arrested but even more horrified to hear that after my arrest I had been brutally interrogated and beaten – but surely I have misunderstood that (the last in a softly rising tone of voice indicating it was a question). I said, "I'm sorry to tell you that your information is quite correct Ma'am, and I certainly wish it weren't." She turned to the President and said, "Jack, that's just outrageous! Isn't there something we can do about it and isn't there something we can try to do to make it up to . . .," at this point she turned to me and said, "I was quickly briefed on my way down here and I understand your friends call you Bertie. May I call you Bertie?" to which I replied, "of course ma'am" whereupon she turned back to the President and completed her question, "Bertie?" As the President replied, "Well, we will certainly do everything we can," I became aware that she was looking at me intently as the President spoke and though I'll never know (maybe it was the fabled "woman's intuition," who knows?) I swear I think she realized I didn't completely trust him. In any case, she abruptly pushed her chair back, stood up, and said to me, "Bertie, I do hope you'll forgive me but I have a terribly busy schedule today and I have to get back to work. Please accept my thanks for all that you have done for our country and my sincerest hope for your complete and total – she looked flustered and asked the President, "Jack. What's the word in English for 'rétablissement'?" Before he could answer, I said, "Merci, Madam. Je comprends très bien." She glanced at me curiously, then smiled and left the room.

The President also regarded me rather curiously but always the perfect host, he asked, "Bertie – I think we're all going to call you Bertie from now on – would you like anything else? Some coffee? Some tea? Maybe a liqueur?" I responded, "My sincerest thanks, Mr. President but I am more – actually *much* more - than full and frankly sir, I am totally exhausted." He seemed both genuinely concerned and a little abashed and said, "I really am sorry, Bertie. We need to get you back right

away. I sincerely apologize. I should have realized that this was way, way too much for your first trip out of the hospital. I'll get them to call me and give me an update as soon as you're back. Oh yes, just one more thing Bertie. You have now been promoted by Presidential decree to Captain in the regular, not the reserve, Army of the United States. I'll get the proclamation over to you tomorrow. And I want you to meet Bobby – you'll like him (I very much didn't – at first, but all that's for later). Now let's get you back."

Rétablissement

I somehow managed to keep the food down until I was taken out of the car at Walter Reed but then vomited spectacularly. Not only was my stomach just now slowly getting used to solid food, the solid food that it was getting used to was not even in the same universe as what I had eaten at the White House. When the heaves finally stopped, someone wheeled my sweat drenched body up to my room, undressed me and sponged me off, then closed the blinds - and that's the last I remember until rather late the next morning.

There were no fresh flowers – which I took as a somewhat ominous omen – but there was a large manila envelope bearing the Presidential seal propped up on the bedside table which the ever-present Sarah handed to me with a cheery, "Good morning, sir!" as she discretely turned away. With something of a sense of foreboding, I opened the envelope and pulled out a letter-sized proclamation – again bearing the Presidential seal – informing me that Lieutenant William Bertram MacFarland was hereby promoted to the rank of Captain in the Regular Army of the United States of America – and the proclamation bore the personal signature of the President. Also in the envelope were two sets of Captain's bars - I later found out they were made of sterling silver – and a handwritten note from the President which said: "Bertie, it was good meeting you yesterday and you have assuredly given us all a lot to think about. If events transpire as you predict, I will certainly be back in touch and in the meantime, best wishes from Mrs. Kennedy and me for a prompt and full 'rétablissement.' JFK" I laughed and said to Sarah as she turned around, "Sarah, will you come over here and give me another peck on the cheek? I've got something to show you." After bestowing the requested peck she straightened up, wagged her finger at me and said, "Listen here young man, don't you try to get fresh with me. I am very happily married and besides that, I'm old enough to be your mother." I pursed my lips in a grimace and said, "Darn! Too late again! Please tell your husband that I said he is a very fortunate man that and I'm extremely jealous."

Then I said, “Sarah, love of my life, look at this and tell me what you think,” and I pulled out the proclamation and the Captain’s bars. She read it, shook her head and said, “Well first of all Captain, congratulations on your promotion. But you know sir, there is just way too much going on here for me to understand – and believe me – I *definitely* am not only *not* asking to understand – I truly would run out of the room if you tried to enlighten me. In my twenty some years of nursing – most of it here at Walter Reed – I have never had or even *heard* of a patient remotely like you. I’m not just talking about your recovery, even though it really is miraculous. But there are far too many other things that I really can’t understand. For example, do you know we had to use your graduation photo as a guide in reconstructing your face? Do you know that there is an armed guard outside your door 24 hours a day? Do you know that we are not supposed to even mention your name to our friends and coworkers? It is rare for even a three or four star general to receive a telephone call or a personal note from the President but here you go tooting off in a Presidential limo for a face to face meeting with the President and apparently had lunch alone with him in his personal dining room. The only reason we know that is because you got so violently sick when you arrived here yesterday afternoon that we had to call the White House to find out what you had eaten. The Secret Service people kept asking if we were sure you had eaten at the White House at all and after we said that we didn’t know for sure but the driver of the Presidential limo that took you to the White House and brought you back here would certainly know because you are in a wheel chair and can’t walk. The fact that you had arrived by Presidential limo definitely got their attention and the next thing we knew we had both the President’s personal physician and a terrified head chef on the phone who was plaintively telling us that no one had mentioned anything at all to him about you needing a special diet, etc., etc. Anyway, we found out what you ate and that you dined alone with the President. The food was just way too rich for you but we certainly didn’t have to worry about your having eaten anything poisonous. Now you get a promotion by Presidential decree? Heaven only knows what is going on but I’m very happy that Heaven has to deal with it and not me. Now let’s get you up and get you some breakfast and get to work.”

The next ten weeks were at least as hard as – and sometimes more painful than – than Ranger training. I was awakened promptly at 6:00 each morning, moved into my wheelchair and thence to the bathroom where I was placed on the toilet. Upon hearing the toilet flushed (initially I couldn’t reach far enough behind me to flush it myself and just had to yell, “Ready!”) I was put back on the chair, wheeled over to the sink to brush my teeth, then had my face and hands sponged down, wheeled out

for a shave, ate breakfast and was allowed 15 minutes with *The Washington Post*. Then the really tough part started. At first it was all done in the chair. I would raise my arms in the air as far as I could whereupon a therapist on each side of me would take my wrist in one hand and put his other one on my shoulder and start stretching the arm further. During very long periods of bed rest, muscles start to atrophy somewhat and become stiff. The tendons that anchor the muscles to the bones begin to lose their elasticity due to the lack of motion. Stretching them back out again is astonishingly painful. I am fortunate to have a very high pain threshold but this was excruciating. Since I wouldn't yell, they just watched to see how profusely I was sweating and when I was drenched to their satisfaction, they would gently lower my arms to my lap, say, "Good job, sir," and leave. I would be given about 45 minutes before the second torture team came in and started doing the same things with my legs. Then I would have to do neck exercises, hand and wrist and finger exercises, ankle and foot and toe exercises – none of them for very long but *all* of them very painful. By the end of the day, I was totally trashed. The pain was absolutely exquisite. I had muscles screaming that I didn't even know I had.

At the beginning, this sadistic ritual was repeated once every three days. As I got a little stronger and things hurt a little less, my reward was just a turning of the screws. I'll never forget the first day that I was lifted out of the chair and asked to try to walk a little bit. I was wedged in between two very husky therapists and although my legs and everything else had become a little stronger and considerably more flexible, the first time I had to try to support some of my weight with my legs, I nearly passed out. The concept of sympathy was totally unknown to my tormentors however. When they thought that the probability that I was *really* going to pass out was pretty high, they just sat me down and said something like, "Good job, sir. You probably need to take a break for just a short while." God knows they didn't lie about their "whiles" being short.

Gradually however, I was daily feeling reasonably better and stronger and more mobile. I started doing leg lifts in my bed, getting up by myself and inching along the wall to the bathroom (inevitably to the strenuous accompaniment of Sarah's wonderful imitation of a scandalized mother hen) and although it would certainly be an overstatement to say that I was actually starting to look forward to the now daily exercise regime, it at least was starting to become less of a daymare. By mid-August, my trainers (who now had graduated from their previous role as torturers to their somewhat less evil role as tormentors) were starting to relinquish their demonstrations of how to do sit-ups and push-ups because they were having

difficulty keeping up with mine. I was feeling pretty good – after a very long absence, I was back – fitter than ever and tougher than nails. I wanted desperately to get totally involved in some interesting project where hopefully I could make a real contribution

As the saying goes, be careful what you wish for. I had absolutely no idea of what was about to occur.