

## Chapter 40

Sleep was difficult and Weylin watched the clock with great anticipation. What the hell am I doing here? he asked himself. Is my reputation worth all this? Well, too late to change your mind now, old boy, you're in the thick of it.

At Sascha's suggestion, he had placed a do not disturb sign on his door. Although it had accomplished the desired result, half eaten meals and their dirty dishes were beginning to crowd the small room, creating an undesirable odor from which there was no escape. With little else to do, he paced the room while attempting to heighten his bravado and suppress the building fear. At first, minutes seemed to last forever but as the sky darkened with the setting sun, the zero hour approached with increasing speed. Staring at the bedside clock, he realized that it was eight-thirty and time to get ready. He dressed in the Israeli Defense Force uniform and carefully snapped the munitions bearing belt around his waist. The loose fitting outer clothing easily masked the armament beneath, while giving him the appearance of a fifty pound weight gain. He stood before the bathroom mirror to check his disguise and reminded himself about the ID's,

can't forget them, he told himself.

Momma had provided each team member with reading material consisting of a hard covered leather bound book. She had artfully hidden the documents between the padded leather binding and its cardboard support. The extra material would be virtually invisible to an x-ray security device, she had explained. Retrieving the book, he cut a slit in the leather and removed the documents. He then unbuttoned the outer garment, placed the I.D.F. papers in the uniform shirt pocket, taking care to secure its button, while holding the Palestinian documents out for presentation after crossing the border into Lebanon. He then removed the sealed envelop from beneath his pillow and opened it. Inside, was a single sheet of paper that read: *Take rear staircase to ground floor service entrance. A khaki colored van will be parked with lights off and engine running, enter quickly.* Convinced that he was ready, he placed the loaded Tavor in a provided shopping bag and awaited the departure signal. Minutes later, it came. Three rapid knocks followed by two then three; the predetermined code. Switching off the lights to darken the room, he cautiously opened the door, slipped into the empty corridor and made his way to the ground floor. Quickly surveying the surrounding area through the partially opened exit door, he sprinted the short distance to the van and entered. The entire team, with the exception of Sascha, was seated in the back of the vehicle. He arrived several minutes later carrying what appeared to be a long tube of paper. Sascha, almost unrecognizable with his false long grey beard, turned rearward in the front passenger seat. "There are robes and head scarves in the packages beneath your seats," he instructed. "Take them out now and put them on. They will serve to hide your weapons and reinforce our ruse."

"What are we pretending to be?" Weylin asked.

“I am a cleric,” Sascha grinned, “the rest of you are street vendors returning to Lebanon with a special Israeli travel permit.”

Svetlana sat across from Weylin, dressed in a black robe, head scarf and veil covering the I.D.F. uniform that she wore beneath. “And I am somebody’s wife,” she smirked.

“I thought this was supposed to be a military vehicle?” Weylin remarked, following a cursory inspection of the van’s interior.

“It is,” the driver advised, “they use it to transport food.”

Leaning forward in his seat, Weylin examined the driver’s profile, recognizing him as the man who had filled his suitcase. “Won’t there be some resistance to an Israeli vehicle crossing into Lebanon?” he asked.

“Not when we change the outside markings and license tags,” Sascha said, pointing to the long tube he had carried into the van. “We will stop along the way, install a new logo and presto, we are a bakery truck.”

Forty minutes later, Sascha motioned to a clump of trees off to the left side of the road. Following his direction, the driver caused the van to swerve violently, coming to a stop where it was no longer visible to passersby. The team exited, installed the self adhering logo and license tags and were back on the road in less than ten minutes.

Weylin dozed for what seemed like hours, awaking only to the vehicles slowing pace. Suddenly, Sascha grunted. “There, straight ahead,” he said, “the gate to hell.” Turning in his seat to face the team he added, “We will do the talking, the rest of you keep quiet and pretend you do not understand what is being said.”

“What if they speak Arabic?” a team member asked.

“You will develop a sudden hearing defect.”

From across the aisle, Svetlana smiled reassuringly at Weylin who responded with an exaggerated grin.

“Alright people, this is it,” Sascha warned, as the van crawled to a stop on the Israeli side of the gate.

The driver rolled down the window and presented his folded documents to the approaching sentry. “Open them,” the sentry ordered, in Hebrew, while pointing the muzzle of his automatic rifle at the driver’s head.

“I do not understand,” the driver replied, in a mixture of English and broken Hebrew.

“English, you speak English?” the sentry exclaimed.

“Yes.”

Straining to look through the windshield, Weylin could see three more sentries positioned in front of the van with weapons pointed directly at them. A light tank, poised to swing its gun turret to either side of the road, moved to block their path. In the distance, to their left and right, were six or more heavy tanks, artillery batteries and many more soldiers. At least we know he doesn’t speak Arabic, he thought.

“Why are you traveling so late?” the sentry demanded.

“We had mechanical problems. We considered staying overnight but there was no place that seemed hospitable.”

“What was the purpose of your visit to Israel?”

“To deliver baked goods to the market for my street vendors to sell.”

“Your documents!” the sentry barked, nodding towards Sascha.

“Please, he doesn’t understand English,” the driver advised.

Then, the driver said something in Arabic and Sascha reached into his robe and produced his documentation.

“He is a cleric?” the sentry sneered.

“Yes, a very important man.”

“OK. Now, please get out and open the rear doors,” he ordered.

Uh oh, Weylin said to himself, here they come.

“Put your heads down,” Sascha whispered, while the sentry walked to the rear of the van.

As the doors opened, a bright light replaced the darkness of the van’s interior. The sentry slowly examined the occupants as he painted each team member’s face with his beam. “Who are these people?” he asked.

“These are my vendors, they are returning home to their families,” the driver said.

“They cannot pass in either direction without a special travel permit!” the angry sentry advised.

“I have them right here,” he replied, while retrieving a stack of official looking credentials from his robe.

The stern faced sentry carefully scrutinized each form with scholarly interest, finally handing them back. “OK,” he barked, “you can pass.”

The driver reentered the van, dropping into his seat with a deep sigh as the sentry waived for the tank to clear the path.

“Get going,” Sascha hissed, “before they change their minds.”

Lebanese security was less troublesome. Following a few traded off-color jokes, they

were allowed to pass beyond the border.

“As soon as the border guards are out of sight,” Sascha said, while turning in his seat to face the team, “we will scuttle the van and go the rest of the way on foot.”

“They will look for us when it becomes known that the van is Israeli military,” a the team complained.

“Not likely,” the driver broke in, “did you not hear the Lebanese guards laughing as we drove off?”

“Yes, we did but what did you tell them?”

“I joked about how stupid the Israeli’s were to not have recognized our phony logo on one of their own vehicles.”

A mile and a half past the border they drove the van into a small bombed out crater, partially obscuring it from the road, and began the journey inland shrouded by darkness. Walking in groups of two and three, keeping their heads bowed, they remained silent, using hand signals to communicate whenever necessary. Twenty minutes into the trek, Sascha motioned to the chocolate eating team member who slowly walked to his side. “We are not far from the first of the three hideouts,” Sascha observed, “you will leave us and reconnoiter.” Removing a small map from his robe, he pointed to the assumed location. “Send three clicks on your headset microphone if they are home. If not, click two, two, two and go on to the next,” he said, pointing to the second location on the map. “One more thing, photograph everyone,” he added, producing a small digital camera.

“What are my orders if I find them?”

“Stay out of sight and wait for us to join you.”

The group wandered in a wide circle in an attempt to remain within striking distance of the three nearby locations. Forty minutes later, Sascha held his right arm high in the air, the group came to a halt and then gradually formed around him. “Three clicks,” he whispered, “bingo on location one. Break into groups of two and converge on map grid one. Once there, wait outside the perimeter for further orders.”

Sascha and the driver were the first to arrive. Crouching behind several mammoth chunks of concrete, less than seventy feet from location number one, Arabic music could be heard emanating softly from the square stone building as the recon handed the camera to Sascha. “Did you photograph all of them?” he asked of the man.

“Yes, that is what took so long.”

Sascha scrolled through the photos and then motioned for the driver to come nearer, “I don’t think I can recognize Mahmud, you have seen him recently ... take a look.”

Upon viewing the last photo, he shook his head. “He is not among them,” he remarked.

“Shit!” Sascha blurted out, “I hadn’t planned on them separating. Do you recognize any of them?”

“A few familiar faces but no names come to mind.”

“Alright, you,” Sascha ordered, pointing to the recon, “go tell the others that we are moving on to map grid number two.”

“I was afraid this might happen,” Sascha lamented, as he and the driver moved a safe distance away from location number one. “This time, my friend, it will fall upon you to make the identification.”

“I agreed to look at pictures,” the driver complained, as they walked side by side in the

darkness, “nothing more. What you ask may cost me my life.”

“I am sorry, my friend, but this is a nasty business and you have been well paid.”

The driver, after uttering several Arabic curse words under his breath, stopped in his tracks. “Alright,” he said, with little conviction, “I will do what you ask.”

Weylin and Svetlana slowly caught up with the pair while the remainder of the team, in groups of two, kept a safe distance from behind. Quickening their pace, they pulled alongside Sascha. “What happened?” Svetlana asked.

“Mahmud’s playmates were within but he was not.”

Just then, blinding headlights were seen coming from a turn in the road ahead. “Down, everybody,” Sascha urgently whispered into his headset microphone.

The headlights continued to shine in their direction and were joined several moments later by another pair. “What do you think,” Svetlana asked, “did they make us?”

“Quiet, I am trying to listen. I must get closer,” Sascha said.

“Wait, look over there,” she whispered, pointing to their left.

“What is it?”

“A soft light coming from that two story house. Could that be grid position two?”

Crouching on the dirt and pebble covered ground, he removed a red pencil beam flashlight from within his robe and examined the map. “Yes, I think you are correct. It is closer than we had calculated. Those trucks may be his.”

Replacing the flashlight, he rose slightly to move closer to the vehicles, when Svetlana caught his sleeve and tugged. “Be careful,” she warned.

Ten minutes later, he returned, panting from his sprint. “They are his sentries,” he



reported, “but they are not expecting us.”

“How do you know?” Weylin asked, while moving about, trying to find a comfortable place among the rubble.

“Their weapons lean against the trucks while they talk about food and women. They are not expecting trouble.” Turning to the driver, Sascha pointed towards the building. “It is time,” he said, “go with God but come back with good news.”

As Weylin watched the diminutive figure disappear towards map grid two at an agonizingly slow pace, he contemplated the danger they now faced. If Mahmud’s at home, he thought to himself, getting to him won’t be easy; not with two truckloads of armed terrorists separating us.

Sascha, interrupting the silence by motioning for them to move to his side, gestured toward the building. “Look closely at that structure and tell me what you see.”

Simultaneously, Weylin and Svetlana donned their night vision goggles. “Two stories,” she whispered, “no balconies, only one door visible and low light coming from one front window and one on the left side, first floor.”

“Good girl,” Sascha replied, “my eyes are not what they used to be.”

The group of three returned to silence, broken four minutes later by the driver’s excited return. “I have seen him. He is on the first floor, towards the front of the building, eating.”

“How many are with him?” Sascha demanded.

“I counted five but I heard music and laughter coming from above.”

“A hornet’s nest,” Sascha said beneath his breath. “We will need a diversion to draw away those sentries.”

“We are too few,” Svetlana observed.

“No,” Sascha disagreed, brusquely. “Remember Chechnya, we were four against their thirty. Think, we have tactical superiority--use your imagination.”

“I will bait the trucks with grenades and get them to follow me down the road,” she said.

“No, I need you here,” Sascha replied, emphatically, while pointing to the driver, “you will go.”

“Me? You will not be satisfied until I am killed, will you?” the driver grumbled. “But it seems I have no way out, so, give me the grenades.”

Svetlana handed him three grenades; one stun and two fragmentation. “Bait them with this one,” she advised, pointing to the stun grenade that would explode with a paralyzing concussive force while emitting a blindingly bright light. “Use the others to kill, but wait for my signal before you begin.”

The driver crawled into the darkness heading for a position fifty yards away from the trucks and building. When he was no longer visible, Sascha signaled the team to come closer. In the darkness, the team’s presence was heralded only by the sound of breathing. Huddling around their leader, they listened as Sascha presented his plan of attack. “Those trucks,” he said, pointing towards the road, “will be diverted away from our target. The instant they begin to move, so do we. I want two men on each side of the building, we,” pointing to Weylin, “will take the front entrance. Svetlana, as always, will scale the building to the roof before we enter.”

“How will we remove the hostages?” a team member asked.

“There will be no hostages,” Sascha growled, “understand? Shoot anything that moves.”

The team shook their heads in accord. “OK, now take off your robes, it is time for us to

become Israelis.”