

The MAG – Prologue

"What's the furnace set on?"

"Why? Are you cold?"

"It feels like it's freezing in here. I'll get a sweater."

"Why don't you just turn up the thermostat?"

"The propane tank is way down, I wish my wages kept up with the prices."

"Are we low?"

"We're down to 100 gallons. The last time I looked the price was around \$3.75. It will cost around \$1,500 to refill the tank. Maybe Matt will give me a little overtime."

"Does the company have enough business for him to do that?"

"It comes and goes, but he got a new order late last week and was complaining about how slow it was filling it. He offered me additional straight time to help him get it out."

"Maybe I shouldn't have spent so much at the grocery."

"Did you get what we agreed on?"

"Sure honey, I shopped from the list."

"What does that bring our supplies up to?"

"Short term supplies are a full six months. Long term supplies are almost eighteen months."

"Good, now all we have to do is replace what we use. I had wanted to get more ammo, but that's going to have to wait. The money I had put up for that will have to go into the propane tank."

"Did you notice the price of bread? The premium brands were \$4.29 a loaf."

"Don't buy it. We have 250 pounds of bread flour and we can get more at Wally World. If the Chinese could find to keep the bread fresh all the way here, I'm sure we'd be eating Chinese bread."

"What do you think about that statement by the Russians?"

"Putin issued a sharp warning to the West on Friday about the consequences of recognizing Kosovo's independence, saying the decision would 'come back to knock them on the head.'"

Earlier in the day, Russia's envoy to NATO warned the alliance against overstepping its mandate in Kosovo and said Moscow might be forced to use 'brute military force' to maintain respect on the world scene. Other Russian officials sought to tone down that view, saying the dispute should be resolved peacefully. The Hizbollah leader says Israel will cease to exist and the Turks have invaded northern Iraq," I recapped. "I thought the cold war was over. Do you have any idea how many countries are making ready for war?"

"I can't keep up with it, they keep adding new players."

"Not counting the Middle East; Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Formosa, Japan, us, and maybe Jose Cuervo down in Argentina. The African continent is at war, just like they've always been."

That conversation happened before Kelly and I sat down for dinner. We had a rule about not talking about negative subjects at dinner so we could avoid indigestion. Let me introduce us: Brady Jacobs and my wife Kelly. I did the Army bit right out of High School and went to the sandbox. Don't know that I ever killed anyone, but we shot at each other more than once. Came home, joined the National Guard and not long after, met Kelly.

Kelly is 5'4", 120#, modest figure with raven hair. I work for Matt assembling orders at his preparedness shop and Kelly works at the Creamery that is famous for their ice cream flavors, around here at least. I'm 5'10", 150# and have sandy colored hair if I ever grew it out. We have been married 2 years and I just turned 25 and her 24.

What else do you need to know? I hate those POS M9s and M16s. I won't say the Springfield Armory makes the best guns, but we have a few, one M1A and two GI M1911s. We have 1,000 rounds of each caliber.

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"Do you still need me to do the extra time, Matt?"

"I sure do, I got swamped with orders, Brady. I need to get these filled and shipped, people are depending on us."

"I figured I might as well go ahead and offer, my propane tank needs filling."

"If Kelly wants to work, I'll pay her the same wage I pay you."

"I'll ask her, hang on..."

"Kelly, Matt offered you work at my wage to get this order out."

"How long will he need me?"

"Hang on..."

"Matt, Kelly wants to know how long you will need her."

"Five hours a night for the next four nights and 10 a day on Saturday and Sunday."

"Ok, hold on."

"Forty hours and Sunday will be your last day."

"Tell Matt ok."

"Matt, she says yes."

"You guys are a life saver."

The following day, I went to work early and told Kelly I'd see her around 4. I was putting the shipping label on a box when Matt came out of his office and said, "Your propane tank is full, you can work it off."

"I don't know how to thank you, Matt. It was down around 100 gallons."

"It wouldn't reflect well on our business if you suddenly ran out of propane. Where has your money been going?"

"Food, we have around a two year supply."

"You young people don't know how to balance things out. For example, I'll bet you still only have 5 20-round magazines for your rifle and the magazines the pistols came with, right?"

I hung my head and said, "Yeah."

"You mentioned 1,000-rounds of ammo in each caliber, buy any more?"

"No."

"Pretty hard when you first start out, isn't it?"

"You have no idea."

"Wrong Brady, been there, done that, got the T-shirt; may even have a couple of bullet scars if I look close."

Usually this was the part where Matt began reliving the Vietnam War. Mostly the battles he'd heard about but hadn't participated in. Born in the early 40s, he'd been too young for the Korean War and his draft number didn't get picked for Vietnam. He volunteered anyway. He didn't like the M16 and refused to give up his M14. Matt was one step down, a designated marksman. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Designated_marksman

If a sniper is defined by 'one shot, one kill', then the DM is defined by 'many shots, more hits'. Today, Matt didn't go into it. Instead, he got a four wheel cart and put 10 cases of Igman 7.62x51mm ammo on it. To that, he added a box holding 50 20-round M14 magazines and 10 M1911 magazines. I finished sealing the next order and he called me over. "Put that on your truck."

"I couldn't."

"Don't you get it? You're the son I never had. One of these days Kelly and you are going to figure out the sex thing and give me grandbabies."

"I don't want to be beholding, Matt."

"Don't worry about it, I have what you owe me as a receivable disguised as an expense. If something were to happen to me, the accountant would just expense it when he closed the books. However, I have one more thing for you, a genuine M14, converted to semi-auto."

"Springfield Armory?"

"Yes, but the one they closed, not the one in Illinois. I changed the stock myself, on Christmas Day, 1969. It got me through Nam."

"How did you get it, they check this stuff?"

"I had two. I dismantled one and sent it home, piece by piece. This is that rifle, be good to it."

We worked hard getting the orders out and by Sunday night the last one was packed and ready for shipment. Matt had credited our account for \$800, just like he said he would. Were it only that simple, 10 cases of ammo at \$450 each added \$4,500, the magazines didn't add anything, they were stamped USGI and probably were a present from Uncle Sugar. The fill up ran \$1,500, just like I said and, we owed Matt \$5,200. He said the rifle was a gift from our Uncle Sam. The government doesn't give you anything for free, if they know about it.

"I have enough orders to keep the two of you in work for six more weeks, working late. In 42 days, you'll own everything you have free and clear. You don't have everything you should have, but one thing at a time. Here you guys take these. I ordered them to check them out, but they sent the wrong color, olive drab instead of black."

"What are they?"

"Tac-Force vests. You're supposed to put magazines in the 4 center pockets and grenades in the 2 end pockets. One, we don't have any grenades; and two, each end pocket will hold 3 magazines. Add a magazine pouch to your stock for the fifteenth magazine and you'll have 300 rounds available. My bad, no charge."

"We'll let you know tomorrow."

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We were so tired when we got home; dinner usually consisted of a TV dinner or something else from the microwave. I knew that once my head hit the pillow, I'd be gone, so we had to discuss the offer over dinner. I started it with...

"I'm bone tired, but when have we had the opportunity to get so far ahead in such a short time?"

"And what do we have to show for it?"

"We don't need any ammo, we have two rifles instead of one, we have extra magazines for all the guns and the house is warm."

"I have the furnace turned down to stretch the propane."

"I forgot that one, another benefit."

"It's sneaky the way Matt did that. He gave us all the stuff up front so we'd feel beholden and have to work off the debt. Ok, I'll work 42 more days, but after that, I want some time off."

"If he decides to do us any more favors, I'll work them off Kelly."

Matt had been a class III dealer at one time as part of his preparedness business. When they passed the FOPA of '86, he became a regular dealer. He carried military style weapons and cowboy guns. And, because we were, in part, a retail gun establishment, we carried at work. He'd talked to the powers to be and Kelly and I applied for and were approved for CCWs. He insisted we load the guns with Gold Dot 230gr and provided the ammo for all of our magazines.

"Kelly will be here at four, but once we work the balance off, she quits."

"I sort of figured she was getting tired. I'll just keep her working on the light orders. I'd like to have a word or three with you Brady."

"Years ago, someone helped me get on my feet after I got back from Nam. That ended up in this preparedness business. There is a fringe crowd out there that believes in preparedness and it's large enough to keep plenty of companies like ours in business. You may have noticed that I offer a little of everything, mostly to meet mail order demand. It's hard to sell guns across the border, although not impossible for some weapons. To make any money at this, you have to stay ahead of the curve and anticipate what's going to be in demand. When I make a mistake, I keep the stuff for my own use and that of my friends."

He paused, and then continued, "Do you know what a MAG is?"

"Mutual Assistance Group?"

"Yes, or Mutual Aid Group. Police, fire and other organizations form them in case they lack the resources to handle large local emergencies. As applied to preparedness, a MAG is generally a group of like minded individuals with a common goal, surviving. We have a secure location where we can go, our bug out place. We've been stocking it for years and in addition to the more conventional things a person might find, we have some very unpleasant surprises for the uninitiated. There's also a buy in to cover anything you're missing."

"If we're not missing anything?"

"Same buy in; the property contains typical recreation camp cabins. Electricity, power, sewer, community washers and dryers. Don't worry about it Brady, your generator alone will eat up your buy in."

"I let know you what Kelly says."

I had all day to think about that and decided with 6 months of extra work, we'd repay the MAG buy in. When Kelly showed up, I explained it and said I'd do the work to have the place. Then, I told Matt.

"Here take these."

"Mossberg's?"

"Standard shotgun of the MAG group, 590A1. There are also a pair of gun sleeves and two cases of Remington 8-pellet, low recoil shell. All at cost."

"What bought up your MAG group?"

"I've been trying for over a year to get you to show the level of interest in survival necessary for me to get you a full endorsement from the other folks. I had a problem and you had a problem and you took me up on my effort to solve your problem."

"The money for the propane?"

"That's part of it Brady, but, it was more than that. I knew you had been concentrating on food to the exception of other things you should have been considering. I've always had more work than you and I can do and have offered you the opportunity more than once to get a step ahead. We've all seen the elephant."

"Everyone?"

"Unless you have seen the elephant, the best you can do is try your best to empathize, try your best to understand what you can, but you can never have that common vocabulary that soldiers who have seen the elephant share. There is a camaraderie that we who have not been there can never share. All we can do is help support the people who are returning. All we can do is let them know we care about them and respect what they have done for us. All we

can do is honor the people who serve and protect all we hold dear."

"How large is your MAG?"

"About a dozen families, it varies. Our spiritual leader is a spry old fart that saw action at the Chosin with Chesty Puller. Got the Purple Heart, won't talk much about it."

"Why?"

"Remember when we were advancing in a different direction? He took a bullet in the southern exposure. Several of us are Nam era vets, got one from Grenada, one from Panama and two from Desert Storm. Only have one Iraqi Freedom and none from Enduring Freedom."

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Matt took the money we repaid him and sat it aside, not saying a word. First we completed the six weeks Kelly had committed to; then, I started working off the buy in. One day, he asked me what I knew about the precious metals market.

"I think the prices are going to take off Brady. This real estate boom has to end and when it does, those sub prime loans they've been making will be worthless. It could collapse the markets. The Fed has its printing presses running 24/7 and I think the dollar will devalue soon."

"I thought it was already devalued, what with gas running almost double and a loaf of bread approaching \$4.50."

"When I made a buy today, gold was around \$950 and silver \$19."

"Maybe I can buy some and pay you back after I work off the MAG buy in."

"Yeah, whatever." Something distracted Matt sending him to the front of the building where the retail business was operated. I saw him pull his 1911 just as he began to go through the door. I pulled mine and worked my way to the door, where I peeked through the window. There were two men holding guns, intent on robbing the place and the only thing standing between them and accomplishing the deed was Matt.

I grabbed the phone next to the door and dialed 9-1-1. When the operator picked up, I reported an armed robbery in progress at Survival Preparedness, a gun dealer. A minute later, it sounded like sirens were coming from every direction. I stayed behind the door, figuring I could do a better job of backing Matt up from behind the door and continued to talk to the operator. It took the Police flooding in to end the Mexican Standoff between the armed robbers and Matt.

There were three of us in the store, Matt, me and Cheryl, Matt's sometimes girlfriend and fulltime counter person. Cheryl didn't handle the guns, hence didn't wear a gun in a holster. Anyway, they divided us up and began to 'take reports'. There were 3 pairs of detectives and each pair wanted a statement. Probably took them back to the office and compared them. Matt just locked the door, we be answering questions for hours.

"Did you call the Police?"

"Yeah, I saw you pull your gun when you went through the door and pulled mine. I peeked through the window, saw the holdup and called the cops. I had your back, but stayed on the phone with the 9-1-1 operator."

"You did good, Brady. Call Kelly. When she shows up, I have something to tell you."

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"I paid for your MAG buy in. I also saved all of the money you repaid me and spent it in that gold and silver purchase I made this morning. I also made other purchases, here, it may not seem like much, but that's \$1,000 in face value of 90% silver coins, or roughly 715 ounces of silver. On top of that, I got you Krugerrands because they have the lowest premium, about 1%."

"Say, this isn't like that Robert Redford movie is it?"

"Which movie?"

"Uh, Indecent Proposal."

"No, I'm not trying to buy my way into Kelly's pants. I told you before that I thought of you as the son I never had. That would make Kelly my daughter-in-law. Get your mind out of the gutter, Brady. Besides, that was an awful movie."

"So, if you bought us into the MAG, when do we get to meet them?"

"In two weeks, roughly, Saturday after next, on site."

"Where is on site?"

"You'll find out Saturday after next."

"Is there a secret handshake?"

"Password."

"Blindfolds?"

"Will they be necessary?"

"I suppose not. I haven't had to qualify with a rifle in a while."

"Brady, are you mistaking our Mutual Aid Group for a Militia Group?"

"Aren't they the same?"

"Not even close. However, one of the qualifications for our group is military experience. You won't find any Airmen in our group."

"What will I find?"

"Army Infantry, Marines and a few Special Forces types."

"Why no Airmen?"

"They don't get Infantry training. We might make an exception if we ever had a Pararescue, Combat Control, Combat Weather or Tactical Air Control Party, who deploy with infantry and special operations units who rescue downed or isolated personnel, call in air strikes and set up landing zones in forward locations. Most of these are enlisted positions."

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The subject of the MAG never came up during the next two weeks. Cheryl started staying late to help out and Matt told me he could sure use Kelly to help get the orders out. When I thought about how much Matt had done for us, I encouraged her to work for the days up to our going to the MAG on site meeting. I don't know what I expected out of that meeting, maybe a bunch of old duffers on their last legs.

In the three years since I went off of active duty, I think I'd gone a little soft. Couldn't pinch an inch, but couldn't run 3 miles anymore. It couldn't have been a worse time for me to realize it either, working 15 hours a day and 10 hours a day on the weekends. I lost much of that fine muscle tone I built up in the Army. It wouldn't be that hard to get it back when we weren't working the extra 5 hour shifts. I could do some calisthenics, jog a while and do a few more calisthenics to cool down. Maybe watch my diet a little until I got myself back in shape.

The night before we were to go, Matt said Cheryl would be joining him. We needed to have go-by (alias) names. It could be anything, like howling mad or face man on the A Team. It should be something simple that everyone could remember. Once we'd been accepted, it was up to us to decide whether to keep the go-by name or reveal our true names. Either way we went, had risks. If we kept the go-by and didn't tell anyone where we lived, they couldn't help us out in an emergency. If someone were arrested and accused of something unmentionable, they couldn't give you up because they didn't know your true names.

Kelly and I discussed it and decided she'd be Navy and I'd be Army, provided the names weren't already taken. We felt sure we'd probably revert to our true names if we became full fledged members of the MAG. We were to bring our rifles, pistols and shotguns. Ammo to be provided by the hosts.

We left around 7 the next morning and drove around 45 miles before pulling into a 'farm' heavily bordered (surrounded) by woods. There was one small, narrow road that entered the

timber, snaked to the left and opened into an 80 acre clearing. I later learned that the farm was 640 acres, a full section, and 560 acres were timber. Half of those 80 acres were taken up by a huge farm pond. There was a garden spot that looked like it could expand several times over. The buildings appeared to be a large old house, a barn, a corn crib, a chicken house, a hog house and maybe a machine shed. Stretching out away from the old house was a string of simple appearing cabins that faced to the west. Every cabin had solar panels on the south facing roof, a stack of firewood and a generator and a tank, either propane or diesel, couldn't really tell.

"I'm Chosin, what's your go-by?"

"Army and my wife is Navy."

"Here's the deal, you'll talk with the men, Navy with the women and later, we'll have a little get together and decide. If we say no, your buy-in will be refunded. If we say yes, you'll be expected to display your marksmanship using the firearms you brought with you. That is not a test. It is intended to give us some idea what we can do to help you improve your skills. Army, come with me. Navy, go with whiter shade of pale (Cheryl waved her hand)."

The MAG – Chapter 1

"Whiter shade of pale?"

"Old song, came out the year I was born, 1967. Sung by a British group Procol Harum. Your husband is in for a big surprise or chuckle when he learns my other half's go-by."

"And, that is?"

"Slave driver."

"Now that fits. How come you two never got married?"

"I guess because I refused to propose and he never got around to asking. Brady doesn't know, but we've lived together for over 10 years."

"Brady said you don't carry a gun in the store."

"Brady is wrong, but if I caught him looking where I carry it, he'd end up blind in one eye. It's in a thigh holster on the inside of my right leg, right above my knee. I'm left handed."

"What do you carry?"

"A Glock 27, .40 caliber, 9 plus 1. You carry a .45, huh? Plus you have that M14. Shoot it yet?"

"Haven't had time. I've shot Brady's M1A and after I spend a few shots getting it sighted in, I don't expect much trouble."

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So far I knew Matt aka slave driver, Chosin aka Chosin, I guess, Kermit the guy with the green shirt, Dak To, Khe Sanh, Ranger, Airborne, Ia Drang, Grenada, Panama, Seal and myself, Army. No doubt the men had matured, perhaps gaining a little weight, but they looked fit. If PT was on the program, I was in trouble. The first part of the conversation was about my time in the Army, the tour in Iraq and any observations I had about the equipment supplied to our military over there.

I told them that the body armor was barely adequate and those M16s, M4s and M9s belonged in a scrap heap. We'd get loaded down with anywhere from 80 to 100 pounds of equipment and be expected to fight an acclimated enemy in 120°-130° heat.

They then turned to my MBR. How long had I had it? Why did it only have iron sights? Did I have enough ammo and magazines? I responded to every question, explaining my choices and our situation. They then turned to Kelly and asked if I taught her to shoot. I said I did and she was as good as I was, possibly better. I added I'd been short on practice time. Finally they turned to the subject of our state of preparedness, I told them about 2 years worth of food, a nearly full armory, a fair ammo supply and no home standby generator.

"If you're invited to stay, those piles of building materials at the far end of the row of cabins, are for your new cabin. We usually have a house raising and complete them in a day. You will still have to do any wiring and roll in the R-19 insulation. The cabins are small, but there is a loft where you can put the kids. That farm pond is stocked with small mouth bass, large mouth bass and some big old catfish. Your store of food will be labeled as yours and stored in the machine shed with the other supplies."

He paused, caught his breath, and continued, "We don't have much farm equipment. There is a tractor with a plow, disk, sickle mower, a loader and blade. Most of the work would be done by hand. We have an assortment of chain saws and a hydraulic log splitter. The cabin includes a kitchen wood stove and is your sole source of heat. It has a water tank to heat water for bathing. Any questions so far?"

"I can't think of any."

"Let's go have lunch."

Kelly and I quickly compared notes and she had been asked about cooking, sewing, baking and even our future plans about children.

We ate a quiet lunch and after, Matt said, "Let's take a walk."

"How did I do?"

"You have my vote, but it's up to them now. Let's walk over to your cabin site. That's your cabin. We use pre-cut 2x6 studs, and hammer them together with a nail gun. The foundation is already poured, the sill was bolted in place and then removed for ease of construction. It will

take one day to frame and close it in. We've done every one of the cabins and have it down to an art. You'll have to buy two boxes of Romex, probably 14/3, outlet boxes, switches and duplexes, duplex covers or switch plates. Won't take long to wire and you can put the insulation in at the same time."

"You'll get a galvanized roof covered with solar panels on the south side. You supply the batteries, we supply a 10kw inverter. You'll be able to occupy by next Sunday, assuming you're voted in."

"How many batteries and what size?"

"Most of us use a pair of 12v in series. Every pair you add gives you extra nighttime lighting and avoids running the generator. Those generators are 1,800rpm propane fueled units with a pair of rented 550 gallon tanks. We are totally off grid. No land lines either but we can reach the nearest cell tower."

"No internet?"

"You can hook up with the cell phone, but because of the cost, we recommend you only do it on special occasions."

"If we're here, there probably won't be any internet."

"Yeah, I doubt it myself. Ready to go back and get the good news?"

"Or, the bad news, as the case may be."

When we got back, we reassembled in the big house's dining room.

"Army, Navy, you're invited. Ready to go shoot the guns?"

"Our name is Jacobs, I'm Brady and my wife is Kelly."

Everyone got up and introduced themselves by their true names, but none of them mentioned where they lived. We moved out to a small firing range that had targets at 25 yards, 50 yards and 100 yards. It was explained that the ranges, in the same order, were pistol, shotgun and rifle. We were allowed 3 shots per gun to sight in and we expected to shoot a 5 round string so they could analyze our shooting. Kelly went first and skipped the sighting shots and fired five up tight and personal with the .45. With the shotgun she used the three sighting rounds because she hadn't shot it before. Than she put all of the buckshot pellets in a 5" circle. Finally came the M14 and I swapped guns with her because my M1A was sighted in while I didn't know if the M14 had been.

Now it was my turn. I snapped off 5 measured shots but got a flyer. I turned to the shotgun and used 2 shots to sight it in and put 5 shorts in a 5" circle. Finally I took the M14 I got from Matt and fired one test round. I re-sighted on the same aim point and used the windage and elevation knobs to move the tip of the front sight to where the bullet hit. I fired my second shot

and was just shy of dead center. I tweaked one more time, then fired the five rounds. I managed ~1MOA using surplus ammo.

"Sorry, got a flyer with the pistol. I can repeat the test if you want."

"All right. Use this magazine and give me 5 more."

My group as about the same size as Kelly's and you could cover the holes with a pack of smokes, if you smoked.

"You may have the makings of a Designated Marksman, Brady. You will need a lot of practice."

Despite the question and answer session and the range session, everyone seemed laid back, way laid back. I almost felt like we could have given completely different answers and still been invited. I wasn't even close to how it really was. Matt had talked to the others for nearly a year, just to get them to agree to consider us. He was the group's major supplier and one of the organizers. The only thing they didn't get through Matt were the food supplies and they came directly from one of the other members who supplied survival foods, much like Walton Feed or Bob's Red Mill. We were shown where to go and clean our guns and told to join them when we finished, the beer was cold.

When we finished, we joined them and Kelly took a diet Coke while I went for a glass of beer. Some of these people were grandparents and passing pictures around. The group had a wide range in age, most were older than my late parents and could have come close to being one of my grandparents. The conversation eventually moved into a tease session wondering why we hadn't started a family yet. Kelly put them straight, saying we had wanted to get established and were now close to our goal. She assured them it wouldn't be much longer.

When I was asked if I hunted, I told them I didn't have a .22 rifle or long barreled shotgun. Besides I said, working for a slave driver boss didn't leave me much free time. They shifted to working Matt over the coals because he worked his staff 30 hours a day, 9 days a week. He said he would if he could, business was booming.

"Is it really getting that bad out Matt? The sheeple are starting to buy into getting prepared?"

"I'd say so."

"I'd agree, based on my survival food sales. It's getting tough with the price of food rising as much as it has. Corn around \$6 a bushel and wheat around \$20 means people are going to be starving."

"Is all the wheat that high?"

"Not all of it, it ranges from a little over \$10 a bushel to the \$20 I mentioned."

"It sure wouldn't take much to cause an economic disaster."

"We already have one. The only thing we're lacking is the rioting in the streets."

"Brady, when Kelly and you come up next weekend, bring all of your LTS and keep the STS at home. I'd recommend you move some of your ammo and several changes of clothes, too. Will you be able to get batteries?"

"I don't really know, Chosin."

"They'll have them," Matt replied. "Six pairs to begin with and more later. They'll also have the cabin electrified and insulated before the weekend is over. The following week, we'll come up and install paneling, finish off the inside and add furnishings."

I think that Matt was holding back, he knew or suspected something and was sufficiently fond of Kelly and me to include us in his long term survival plans. The following Monday, Cheryl and he took off and he asked me to watch the front. They were gone maybe an hour and when they got back I thought I saw a wedding ring on Cheryl's hand. I asked.

"We went and saw the judge. Figured we'd better make it legal," he said. Cheryl gave me a wink and got back to work. Cheryl had told Kelly during our on site that she couldn't have kids. Maybe I really was the son Matt never had.

"Congratulations. No more working late for Cheryl, huh?"

"Bull hockey. But, I am considering hiring one more person to work in the store. I'd pay him or her \$10 an hour so I guess I'd have to give you a raise, is \$12 ok?"

"Have anyone in mind?"

"How tied to her job at the Creamery is Kelly?"

"Worked there a couple of years, worked herself up to \$8.50 an hour and their benefits stink."

"Think she might be interested if I gave you two a good benefits package?"

"I sure can ask."

"Call her and ask her to stop by on her way home."

When was the last time someone offered you a 20% pay increase, better benefits and wanted to know if it was ok? I called Kelly and explained that we had so much business Matt wanted to hire her full time at \$10 an hour and he would provide benefits. I also mention the Cheryl and he got married. I didn't mention my raise. The thing about living in small towns is they often have low wages and jobs are hard to come by.

A while back, a lady who worked at the Creamery had found a better job and gave her two week notice. They cut her a check for two weeks and told her not to let the door hit her on the

butt on the way out. Maybe they thought it was better to get deserters out of the store before more people revolted. When Kelly showed up around four, Matt gave her the pitch and she said yes. He asked when she could start and she asked, "Tomorrow?"

I couldn't wait to find out what happened. It turned out that the Company operator listened in on my call to her and passed the information to the boss. Just about quitting time, he brought her check and told her to clean out her locker. Her final check was on the order of \$500 net and she'd cashed it on the way over. She said she'd pay for dinner tonight.

In our town, when you want to eat out, you can go to Delmonico's or Pizza Hut. Delmonico's is an Italian place that serves a little bit of everything, including Chinese. In its glory days, it had been a steakhouse. They still sold steaks and we decided to treat ourselves. We ordered Top Sirloin, baked and salad.

"I have something to tell you."

"What?"

"Matt gave me a pay raise to \$12 an hour."

"Wow, we could end up grossing \$1,100 a week, with overtime."

"Not bad for a small town couple from Nowheresville."

"I watched the store while they got married. He said they saw the judge."

"I worry, you know. What with the state of the economy and all those national headlines making it sound like the world will end any day."

"We've never been better prepared, have we?"

"The thing about it is, let's say some country like Russia or China does make a first strike. We were an hour getting to the MAG site. Would we have that much warning?"

"We might actually have several days warning as tensions build to the breaking point. On the other hand, we could get a call tonight to pack and be ready to leave on short notice."

"Good idea having our LTS stuff there?"

"I have a feeling that the MAG meets often so we'll be able to keep the stuff rotated. I don't know for sure, you understand, but we'll be there three weekends in a row."

When we showed up the next day, salve driver had a used Remington 870 12-gauge with a 26" barrel and a set of RemChokes. The .22 rifle I said I didn't have was there too, a used Marlin model 60.

"The MAG has cases of hunting ammo including an assortment of shot and maybe 25,000

rounds of .22LR. I meant to give you those to yesterday, but got focused on the wedding and totally forgot."

"Thanks, just add them to the list."

"What list? You two are in the clear with me, including the 12 batteries I picked up this morning. You should plan on buying maybe 20 rolls of R-19, and don't forget you need to buy two boxes of 14/3 Romex, outlet boxes, switches and duplexes, duplex covers and switch plates."

"We can really get it up that fast?"

"There will be a full crew and plenty of experience. It will probably be closed in by noon and if you have the materials, finished by nighttime. You noted the galvanized siding, I assume?"

"Yeah, what's that all about?"

"We use the same thing on the sides as we use on the roof. Got a couple of semi-loads cheap, once. Good roof, shiny sides tend to reflect the sun."

"Kind of ugly, though."

"It is that."

Cheryl took Kelly to train on the front room. She told her that when she had to leave, Kelly could cover for her. She noted Kelly's 1911 in the IWB holster and said, "Good for you."

Kelly had told me about Cheryl's gun and there was no way I was going to look up the skirt of a married woman. It provided additional comfort if we got held up again. We'd have 4 guns available instead of 2. The problem with Cheryl's carry position was that she had to bend over a bit to reach the gun.

After work, we stopped at a home improvement store and told them what we needed. The salesman asked if we wanted it now or if we wanted them to assemble the order for us. In the latter case, we could pick it up Thursday night or later. I asked him if they had small hot water heaters and he said they had most sizes, electric, gas and propane.

"What was that about a hot water heater?"

"Kelly, I never heard anyone say one was included. We'll ask Matt tomorrow, but I wanted to do one stop shopping if we could."

"Hot water? We told you that the kitchen stove had a water tank, use it."

"What if we're there during the summer? It would be a shame to heat the cabin up for 3 gallons of hot water."

"It will mean extra plumbing, for the sinks, but if you want a hot water heater, go for it."

"I had a shower in mind."

"We'll run the pipes if you want one. Anything else?"

"No, I'll get a shower cabinet and a small hot water heater."

"Go electric, in an emergency, gas may be at a premium."

We ended up back at the home improvement store after work and added a shower cabinet, fixtures and a Whirlpool 19 Gallon (1,500w/120v) Utility Electric Water Heater.

"Let's go home and count our gold again."

"It's only 5 ounces, that won't take long."

"I know, but I love the feel of those coins."

"If you want to count money, count the bag of silver coins."

"They're all in rolls, that's no fun."

"If you want to do something fun, I'll come up with something."

"I just bet you will."

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"Maybe it's time we started thinking about having a family."

"What brought that up?"

"In two weeks or so, our preparations will basically be complete. We'll continue to add, but since we both have jobs paying better money and benefits, maybe now is as good a time as any."

"Don't spend our raises until we get them in the bank."

"Speaking of which, I wonder what's gotten into Matt lately? First, he supplied the propane, extra ammo, magazines and the M14. Then, came a pair of 590A1s and buckshot. Then, he paid our buy in for the MAG. Let's see, after that, he got our batteries, gave me a raise and hired you. Yesterday, he handed over a Marlin 60 and a Remington 870. I don't get it; I didn't even confront the armed robbers."

"Maybe there's nothing to understand Brady. Looking down the barrels of those guns could

have caused him to stop and think about what was important to him."

"That's another thing, not one word about the attempted robbery at the MAG meeting."

"You're right, that never occurred to me."

"We're not going to solve that mystery tonight, let's get some sleep."

Both of us working in the same store and keeping the same hours cut our expenses by a tank of gas a month, another \$50 raise. We could also carry a lunch and eat together. Kelly was checked out on the front and moved to the back to start packing the small orders. I noticed that Matt's business had picked up and this had been going on for about 3 months. He'd mentioned that at the MAG, but with 3 of us in the back room packing, we could barely keep up. The only reason we were able to was some of the supplies being backordered.

When we went to the home improvement store on Thursday night to pick up our order, I noticed a window air conditioner. I had to ask.

"How large is that unit?"

"Fifteen thousand BTUs."

"One ten or two twenty?"

"One ten and it's energy star compliant."

"How big of an area will it cool?"

"Over 1,000ft²."

"On sale?"

"This week only."

"We'll take it. Add it to the order and we'll settle up."

"After you pay, pull around to the loading dock and we'll load the items for you. Just tell them your name and show them your receipt."

"An air conditioner? What were you thinking of?"

"Being comfortable if it gets hot."

"This is a bug out place, not a vacation home."

"Why can't it be both? That pond is full of fish and I love fishing. From the looks of it, you could

swim in it too. We'll get as much done as we can this weekend and come back next weekend to finish it off. How about we move the spare bed and dresser up there for the bedroom? We could also bring the small kitchen table and eat off the dining room table. Do we have enough utensils and dishes we can equip the cabin?"

"I saved one extra of all the duplicated wedding gifts, they're in the basement. We have a service of 8 in both ironstone and flatware. Kitchen gadgets won't amount to much if we don't have duplicates."

"Then I guess we're down to needing a refrigerator and maybe a freezer, any ideas?"

"Not at the moment, but I'll ask around when we get there Saturday. Let's not get the horse ahead of the cart."

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The next day, Friday, I asked Matt what people did for refrigeration and/or freezers at the MAG site. He replied that most people went with propane powered appliances. They didn't use that much of the generator's supply and getting enough electricity for everything had been a problem. I mentioned the small air condition unit and he asked the voltage and power rating. When I told him, he said that wouldn't be too draining on our system as long as we didn't add a lot of other stuff. I mentioned the electric hot water heater, but said we'd probably only heat water for showers. He suggested getting more batteries and a second inverter when we could.

The following day, we were up early, got around and were ready to leave at 7. I was towing my trailer with a very full load, bulky not heavy. A large portion of our LTS food was in the back of the pickup. We made good time, considering, and when we arrived, the others had the walls framed and laying on the ground ready to be raised.

"We got here just in time, Brady. Once the floor is in, plumbing would be a problem. Show them what you have so they can work around it or make provisions.

"Chosin, I have a shower enclosure for the bathroom, a small hot water heater that can go in the sink cabinet and will need hot water to both sinks and the shower."

"All the comforts of home?" he laughed. "What, no propane appliances?"

"Only found out yesterday, Chosin, give us a chance. Any recommendations about which window the air conditioner should go in?"

The MAG – Chapter 2

"Most that have them put them in the back window where they're in the shade. Almost everyone has added hot water heaters and it's always a problem once the cabin is finished to install the pipes. You're thinking on your feet, that's good. Some have made the mistake of buying 240 volt units, but I assume you got 120?"

"I did, yes. I knew the inverter put out 120 but wasn't sure about 240 so I stayed away from them. Matt staked us with the first 6 pair of batteries; how many more should we have?"

"Most of us have 12 pair, but everyone seems to start with 6 pair. Bring some of your food, did you?"

"Not all of it, the rolls of insulation took a lot of room. So did the shower cabinet, but I packed it full of insulation. I hope I didn't forget to get anything."

"If you did, we probably have what we'll need."

It was something watching the cabin come together. Their practice in assembling the other cabins showed and they had the cold and hot water pipes, the drains and everything in quickly. Next came the floor and after the walls. Three of them were building roof truss structures using a pattern and by the time the walls were up, they had enough trusses for the roof.

Raising the trusses was a little harder because they were heavy and awkward. But, the nail gun sounded more like a machine gun as everything was nailed in place. The galvanized panels went up next, starting with walls and ending with the roof. Inside, one of the fellas had the outlet boxes and two switch boxes installed, the Romex pulled and had been installing the very basic, non-enclosed cabinets for the sinks. Yet another was putting the finishing touches on the plumbing.

The plumbing was basic, kitchen sink, bathroom sink, stool and the shower plus one outside faucet on the back of the cabin. Lunch was called at 12:30 and the cabin was enclosed, with doors and windows installed. Because I'd brought the insulation, they said they do as much of the inside as they could today. They didn't work on Sundays. After lunch, the generator was set, solar panels installed, batteries installed and the insulation installed.

I was unfamiliar with solar installations and one of them showed me the charge controller, inverter and how everything worked together. If you didn't have enough charge in the batteries, the generator kicked in, bypassing the solar with the ATS and powered the home and helped charge the batteries. Two rental tanks would be installed by the propane company during the week that followed and we could plan on finishing off the inside the following weekend.

The cabin was plain but functional. It was also ugly because of the tin siding. The insulation had been installed in the trusses leaving an open area for a loft. The loft ran about half the length of the cabin and had a narrow set of stairs. The freezer, if we got one, could go under the stairs.

The ladies had unloaded our LTS food, labeled it and stored it with the other supplies. Kelly told me that one of the reasons for the labeling was that different people had different ideas about which LTS food they should have. There were the beans and rice crowd, the middle of road crowd and the Mountain House crowd. She said we were right between the beans and rice crowd and the middle of road crowd. Some, who had been at this for a long time, had as many as 250 cans of coffee or roughly a 5 year supply. Others had up to a ton each of beans, rice and wheat. Most of the emphasis was on things you couldn't grow yourself, e.g., the large

stash of coffee.

Kelly had made a list of things we should added to our LTS foods after we had our more pressing needs met, all based on what she'd seen. We'd brought our sleeping bags and an air mattress so we could sleep in our new cabin that night. Most of the crowd planned to stay overnight and go fishing the next day. Matt and Cheryl invited us over for a cold beer after dinner.

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"Birch paneling ok with you?"

"If that's what you plan to get, of course it is."

"It's probably the cheapest and the most common. I know exactly how much it will take and will order it Monday. You'll have to pick it up and haul it here. Came along nice today, despite the extras. Well, beats the hell out of having to install the stuff later. If you want a propane freezer and refrigerator, I may have a contact and can get them for you at cost."

"I think our spending is over for a few weeks until we get caught up."

"Same deal as before except when you repay me, I'll keep the money. I have a family to support now."

"Well, in that case..."

"In that case, I'll make sure they're delivered before next weekend."

"Excuse me for asking, but what's come over you since the attempted robbery?"

"I'll bet you thought it gave me a different outlook on life? It didn't. I was totally impressed with what you did and didn't do. First, you had the presence of mind to call the cops. Secondly, and perhaps more important, you didn't come busting through the door gun blazing. They caught Cheryl flat footed and she couldn't get to her gun. I had mine but it was 2 to 1. Those two fellas were as nervous as I've ever seen anyone and it wouldn't have taken much to have caused them to open up."

"Anyway, since then, I've been counting my blessings and have quite a few. I suppose the only reason Cheryl and I never got married was I just put it off. I've got a good business and have made and saved a lot of money; in fact, I could retire today and never have to worry about money. As far as the stuff I gave the two of you, you were probably thinking retail value, not my cost. The markup on guns is around 27%. When you take a used gun in trade, you don't allow anywhere near what they're worth. I like you and Kelly, Brady and it's like I said, you're the son I never had. If I retire, I might just sell you the business, if you're interested."

"We might be interested," Kelly announced.

I only caught one fish the next day, a 9 pound catfish. We left between 2 and 3 to get home before dark. Over the course of the next few days, we packed the furniture for the cabin, the remainder of our LTS food, picked up the paneling and located the duplicate items we'd need to stock the cabin. Matt said Cheryl and he could haul the freezer and refrigerator. Even with the bed and dresser, the table and chairs, the cabin would have only the bare essentials. I brought along a portable radio with the NOAA channels to have something to listen to and keep us abreast of the news.

We left on Saturday morning around 6:30 and were at the cabin well ahead of 8. Still there were people there, I assumed they'd come in the previous night. By noon the paneling was installed, the refrigerator and freezer moved in and connected to the propane and they were running. Plus, the furniture was in the cabin and it was ready to occupy. It sure looked bare. I think we needed a sofa, a couple of chairs and maybe end tables to hold the oil lamps. There was even a stack of firewood stacked next to the cabin.

I came to realize that the MAG set things up so they were essentially triple redundant. The water came from a large well and used solar for pumping. There was a large tank holding enough water to provide good pressure to all of the cabins. The septic system, I learned, was about the size a good size motel would use. This setup was well planned and well implemented. The only problem I could see would be getting here if TSHTF unexpectedly. That's when I began to think about what we should have for a BOB. Kelly and I worked on it together and came up with the following:

- 2 50-round boxes .45ACP
- 2 battle packs 7.62x51mm
- 2 25-round boxes of 00 buckshot
- 6 MREs
- Complete change of clothes for both of us
- Gloves
- Large Plastic Bags
- One coil of paracord
- First Aid kit
- Bar of soap
- Wash cloth
- Towel
- Insect repellent
- Sunscreen
- One box of feminine hygiene supplies
- Waterproof matches

Everything fit in a small duffel bag that we kept in the pickup. We talked about finding a used sofa and chairs and taking them up this coming weekend, however, Kelly managed to get them free from Freecycle. Good stuff, too. Not something I'd buy for our house, but for the cabin, it was perfect. End tables were scuffed and I could either refinish them or not.

I hadn't really had a chance to talk with Kelly after she told Matt we might be interested in buying his business. I didn't know if he'd expect us to buy it outright or carry the paper.

Moreover, the way things had been going around the US and the world I had reservations about becoming a small business owner. At least as busy as our mail order business was, I didn't have much time to think about it. If that other MAG member that dealt in LTS foods was as busy as we were, everyone was expecting big trouble soon.

"It's been a good week, what are you guys doing this weekend?"

"Kelly got some free furniture from Freecycle and we were going to take it up to finish off the cabin. There are a few other odds and ends we should move too, so I thought we'd kill two birds with one stone."

"Cheryl and I were thinking about driving up too."

"Anything special?"

"I wanted to talk to the other members and see what they think about what's happening. I don't mind the sales, but they're unusual. I've even been approached by a couple of people about buying gold and silver."

"I didn't know you sold it."

"A little from time to time, it depends on the market. You know buy cheap, sell high. I could sell all I have at the moment, but the taxes on the gain would kill me. Besides, I just have to try and replace it, so I told them to shop from a regular dealer."

"What's the price up to now?"

"Gold is hovering around \$1,000 and silver around \$20. The ratio had slipped up to around 55:1 but silver's closed the gap and it's back to about 50:1. Give or take, that's about the normal ratio in value between the two."

"Keep it the bank?"

"Are you nuts? Economy crashes, banks probably wouldn't even let you into your safe deposit boxes. No, I have it tucked away some where safe. Where did you decided to store yours?"

"We've had it the house, but we thinking about moving it to the cabin."

"If you do, there's a large old fashioned safe up there in the machine shed. Most of the folks store theirs there except for the little they carry in their BOBs."

"How much do they carry in their BOBs?"

"It varies, but no less than a roll each of dimes, quarters and halves. Most carry \$100 cash to in case they need a fill up on the way."

"Do I need to store gas up there?"

"No, there's an underground tank of stabilized gasoline and another of stabilized diesel."

"Should I buy some extra .22 or 12 gauge ammo?"

"We should have plenty, but ammo is like toilet paper, you can never have too much. Saw a program on TV recounting the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. One lady mentioned that since everything they used came in by ship, they had a real shortage of toilet paper and had turned to using newspaper."

"It's going to take us awhile to get up to the level of supplies that some of the others have."

"I know; we were all in the same boat at one time or another. That's one of the reasons behind the MAG. First, there was safety in numbers; second, we could share resources; and third everyone there is proficient with firearms. We didn't have to start from scratch teaching fundamental military tactics."

"Kelly said one or more people had as many as 250 cans of coffee."

"They do and it's all Folgers. Chuck, the guy who sells LTS food, can get it for you at distributor cost. If you want some, let him know this weekend and it will be there the next time we go up."

"Do most of the MAG members buy their supplies from him?"

"Many do. He's lower on most things, but can't complete on a few items and they buy them elsewhere."

"How are Cheryl and you set on food?"

"Had about an eight year supply for one person, but I called Chuck and told him I needed to double up now that I'm married. The basic stuff is cheap and I already had large quantities, but I was short on some things and gave him a list."

"If something happened and the MAG issued a bug out order, what would you do?"

"Load up the guns, ammo and firearms records and go."

"How much did you have to give for those batteries?"

"A lot. They're 12v, 225ah Marine size 8D gel cells. You'd want to add them in pairs and you could figure on about 600 bucks, including cables, per pair."

"So, in round numbers around \$3,600 to go to 12 pairs?"

"That's about what I gave for the first six pairs, so yes. You should have time, after you pay off what you owe me."

The only thing I can think is Matt thought better of that because the next weekend he had 6 more pairs of batteries and the necessary cables. He'd say one thing and a day or two later, contradict himself and go ahead and do it. I took that as a sign that something was worrying him and he felt some sense of urgency. We owed him around 2 grand on the appliances and another \$7,200 on the batteries. Either way, his erratic behavior was disconcerting.

We arrived at the site around 8:30 and Matt took off to talk to Chuck. He told me that if I wanted anything from Chuck, I'd better do it now or forget it. Several more of Chuck's suppliers had begun to backorder, citing shortages.

"What do you think, 100# each of beans and rice?"

"Here, I made a list, check with him and find out how much of it he can fill."

"Chuck, we have a list of what we'd like if we can get it."

"Show me the list."

I handed him the list and he ran his finger down it, pausing occasionally.

"I can get all of it except the paper products and the pads. Try Wally World for those. It will be here next week and it will be COD. It will be in the neighborhood of \$600, cash, gold or silver."

Many of the things on Kelly's list were bulky and inexpensive. Only a few were what I'd call expensive, like the cases of coffee. I'd thought it might run as much as a grand, but that \$600 figure, which excluded toilet paper and Kelly's pads, put us ahead of the curve. We weren't making the \$1,100 a week we first thought we'd be making because weekends were now spent at the MAG site instead of packing orders. This order should bring our LTS foods up to about two years. If there was a rub, it was that our freezer in the cabin was empty.

With two freezers to stock, we could have gone into the poorhouse. The solution was to split the food between the two freezers and keep the stuff we'd use up sooner in our home freezer. In a bug out situation, we'd just have to try and move it to the cabin in ice chests. There wasn't that much to begin with.

For much of Saturday, Matt was in discussions with various members of the MAG. The women had decided on a picnic supper and it was announced that there would be a meeting after. For the picnic, we had southern fried chicken, potato and macaroni salads plus cake for desert. A couple of cases of beer and a case or two of sodas had been iced down, providing everyone the drink of their choice.

"Alright everyone, listen up," Chosin announced. "We have some news and it's not all good. Small food riots broke out in several large cities today. It was partly due to food shortages and probably more linked to food prices. We think this is the tip of the iceberg. Several Governors called out their National Guards to restore order. No one has declared martial law, yet."

"I took orders from several of you today," Chuck picked up. "I have those goods in stock and will fill MAG orders before other orders. It is becoming increasingly difficult to stay in business. There are major shortages and what food is available is costly. That's partly due to reduced availability and partly due to increased transportation costs. If any of you want to change your orders, see me after the meeting. The terms will be the same, cash, gold or silver. The food will be delivered here mid-week. Rather than have my business overrun, I may just shut down and come here for the duration."

What duration?

"One other thing, that some of you apparently didn't know about. We sometimes carry a line of beef products, primarily ground beef in tubes. It's a special purchase and available in 1, 2 and 5 pound tubes. If any of you want to add some to your order, I'll see to it that it's put in your freezers."

"How much is it?" someone asked.

"A buck a pound."

That was one-half or one-third the grocery store price. Kelly and I agreed to order 4 50-pound boxes of the one-pound tubes. That's a lot of ground beef, but it keeps and at a buck a pound... special purchase usually means the factory produces too much and unloads it well below their usual price.

Matt got up next. "You can't believe the volume of business we've had in the past few months. Brady can tell you we had to work 15 hours day and weekends just to get the orders out. During the past week, I've heard from several of my suppliers and they're being forced to backorder for the first time since I've been in business. Not just one, but most of my suppliers. I'm going to shut down too. Cheryl and I will be moving here for a while."

I was dumbfounded. Kelly looked at me and I at her. Now what? We had a mortgage to pay! What little we actually had set back wouldn't last long because it wasn't that much. Those gold and silver coins wouldn't last long. My first thought was to cancel the order with Chuck.

"You look worried."

"Matt that came out of the blue. Forgive me, but we have a mortgage to pay and other expenses."

"The mortgage is no problem. If you're not in your home, the other expenses won't amount to much."

"What do you mean the mortgage is no problem? If we're even a couple of days late, the bank calls."

"You got your mortgage through the bank, but do you know who owns it? Are you sure they didn't sell it off to an investor when the interest rates went up? You had a low interest rate you

know."

"How would you know that? What do you know about our mortgage?"

"I know that your mortgage holder won't be bugging you for payments any time soon."

"Why not?"

"Because, I don't need the money."

"What do you mean you... you bought up our mortgage?"

"Last year. It looked like a good investment and I could earn more on it than most other things. There's one exception to that, I bought gold when the price was \$250 an ounce back in '99. I own a lot of gold, Brady, a lot. Almost all of it purchased for under \$300 an ounce. Cheryl and I have 12 bags of those silver coins, four bags of each denomination."

"I've got to go see Chuck. I placed an order and need to cancel it."

"Why?"

"We'll have to hang on to what little we have."

"Move up here, Brady. I think almost everyone is the MAG is. Go ahead and order that ground beef; that is what Kelly and you were talking about, wasn't it?"

"Do you read minds?"

"No, but I know you, or think I do. You're good at stretching pennies. The beef is good; I bought some the last time he got some. When was the last time you saw extra lean ground beef for a dollar a pound? You might want to ask him about chickens."

Kelly and I went to talk to Chuck together and added the ground beef, a box of chickens and a case of shelf stable hams. I couldn't see how we could get the food we just bought and the food in the freezer at home in the new freezer. It occurred to me that with the 6 extra pairs of batteries, it might not be a problem. Kelly and I worked for a gruff angel. Perhaps a bit intrusive, but always looking out for our best interest.

We returned home Sunday morning only to discover that the food rioting had worsened in the big cities and was spreading to smaller cities. The President had declared a National Emergency and had called out the troops using that new law they passed a while back. We weren't home two hours before Cheryl called. Matt was shutting down the store and needed our help. Their plans were to load the most valuable merchandise then return to the MAG site.

"Help me put all of the firearms back in their boxes and load them on the trailer. I've already loaded all the ammo we had in stock. Kelly, please help Cheryl, she knows what goes and what stays. When we're done, get your freezer, turn off the water and set the furnace at 55°.

Bring extra clothes, too. I've already arranged with the propane company to keep your tank topped off."

There was no blinding light, no blast of wind, no mushroom cloud. There weren't long lines at the hospitals, yet. From all outward appearances, it was just another day. The appearances belied what lay beneath. Even in our community, one could sense unrest. Of the MAG members, the only one who hadn't returned home to get their things was Chosin, he lived in the big old house and the section of land belonged to him. He had a satellite dish and the only TV.

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The John Warner Defense Authorization Act includes language titled "Use of the Armed Forces in major public emergencies". Removing the legalese from the text, and combining multiple sentences, it provides that: The President may employ the armed forces to restore public order in any State of the United States the President determines hinders the execution of laws or deprives people of a right, privilege, immunity, or protection named in the Constitution and secured by law or opposes or obstructs the execution of the laws of the United States or impedes the course of justice under those laws.

When had a President used troops inside the US in the recent past? "On the fourth day, 4,000 soldiers and marines arrived from Fort Ord and Camp Pendleton to suppress the crowds and restore order. Calm began to appear as the Army and Marines arrived with M1 Abrams tanks and Armored Personnel Carriers. With most of the violence under control, 30,000 people attended a peace rally. By the end of the day a sense of normalcy began to return." Oh, you guessed, the Rodney King riots of 1992 when G.H.W. Bush called out the troops under the authority of the Insurrection Act.

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When we arrived back at the MAG late that day, Chuck had everyone's orders. Plus, he brought what he hadn't sold to others to store at the MAG site. The things we ordered from him came to one ounce of gold, the price was up. With both freezers full and food crammed in every nook and cranny, the cabin was pretty full. We had one advantage; we could use the loft to store spares that didn't go into the MAG central repository. God Bless 24 hour stores, we got our paper products and other things on the way out of town.

Things were available for sale at the machine shed. A dozen eggs ran one silver dime, about \$1.50 at the rapidly increasing price of silver. Anyone who had any amount of paper money held onto it for use outside of our site. There was still a need for things from the outside, like propane, but they didn't amount to much.

Someone had plowed the garden spot and it was much larger than before. We were coming on spring and it would soon be planting time. That got me to wondering what plans had been made to preserve the crops. No doubt, they were way ahead me, they had been so far. This whole situation was, well, weird. We were in the middle of an economic meltdown, but that was common knowledge. Despite there being stories in the media about the looming food crisis, I

guess people just didn't believe it. Since rationing had ended after WW II, there had never been scarcities like this before.

The whole idea of the MAG, as I understood it, was for a group of like minded individuals to band together in a time of trouble. In that respect, the situation qualified. However, how was the government going to deal with the situation on the national level? Take food from people who had wisely accumulated it and give it to the people who hadn't? Over my dead body. I had to remind myself, Brady, be careful what you wish for; God has a sense of humor.

The MAG – Chapter 3

Just after lunch, word came that everyone was to assemble in the big house at 8pm for an address by the White House. Kelly and I had everything cleaned up and put away, so we went fishing. Wrong time of day to fish, but it was something to do. It didn't last long, either, we both got cold; wrong time of year, too. We went back home and put on the radio to see if there was any speculation about the address.

Speculation ran rampant. Every network we tuned in had developed a line of thought about that address. All agreed that the President had sent troops into the larger cities to quell the riots. They were less certain what would happen if the rioting expanded to smaller cities. NBC seemed to be suggesting they round up the rioters and put them in camps. Fox picked up on that and was raking NBC over the coals.

CBS wasn't talking so much about the food riots, concentrating instead on the numbers of armed citizens who had the ability to take food from those who had it. More of that Guns of Autumn stuff. They'd been on that tangent since '75, or so I'd been told. Some of their anchors were suggesting that they hoped the address included provisions for getting the guns. I couldn't recall ever hearing such a blatant call for disarming the country. The Supreme Court had begged the question in deciding Heller, once again avoiding determining whether the right was an individual right.

We ate dinner and showed up at the big house early. We were nearly the last ones to arrive, at 6pm. Everyone was gathered in the large living room which held the TV. It was showing the Fox news channel, but muted. Had it not been muted, no one could have heard it anyway; people had broken into small groups and were engaged in conversation. We found the group with Matt and Cheryl and joined them.

"No one can be certain, but I lean towards the White House grabbing resources like they did during WW II and redistributing them to feed the population."

"That might have worked seventy years ago, but our population is different now, people won't stand still for it."

"I don't see how anyone could claim that they didn't see this coming, it was in the news."

"Based on my experience and what Chuck said, some must have."

"Old customers or new?"

"Both."

Kelly and I being the newest members of the MAG and about the youngest, just listened, taking it all in. People weren't arguing, they were considering possibilities. They ranged from the upbeat to the grim. People from the Vietnam era probably had the grimmest views. About 7:45, Chosin got everyone quieted down and we listened to Brit Hume discussing the forthcoming address. He must have seen an advance copy of the speech; he wasn't his usual cheerful self.

"My fellow Americans,

"It pains me greatly to make this address. The situation in our great country leaves me no other choice. We have rioting in our cities, attributed in part to food shortages and in part to food prices. We have other shortages, too, fuel being a major one.

"To eliminate the rioting, I have declared a national emergency and sent military units with orders to shoot to kill, if necessary.

"To alleviate the shortages, I resurrected a standby plan developed by FEMA implementing rationing of scarce resources.

"Your government will assemble the existing supplies and redistribute them. Hoarding will not be permitted. Anyone with more than a one week supply of food, must turn it in at local collection points.

"Anyone with more than 25 gallons of gasoline or diesel fuel must turn it in at the same collection points. Exemptions are made for over the road truckers.

"We hope that these measures are temporary. However, they will remain in place for as long as needed. There is one final measure that I implement reluctantly, the temporary collection of firearms.

"Everyone owning any firearms is required to turn them in to their local law enforcement office. You will be issued a receipt and may claim your firearm after the emergency is declared over.

"I feel certain that every patriotic American will do his or her part to see us through these trying times.

"Thank you and good night."

Chosin used the remote to turn the TV off. You could have heard a pin drop. Everything he'd said was totally opposed to what our group represented. We didn't just have a little extra food; we had lots of extra food. We had large fuel tanks of both diesel fuel and gasoline. Plus, everyone in the MAG owned a minimum of three guns, most more. If I were to hazard a guess, everyone belonged to the NRA or the GOA.

"Well, don't everyone talk at once," Chosin chuckled.

"Bull," came from Matt.

"I'll double that," came from Chuck.

"What do you want to do?" Chosin asked.

"Plan B," Matt replied. "Get out the camouflage netting and hide everything except the pond. That should prevent them from finding us from the air. Close off the lane with the timber like we planned. Isolate this site from everyone."

I raised my hand and asked, "What was Plan A?"

"Plan A is the one option you always have, doing nothing, Brady."

It wasn't as bad as I first thought it would be. The only part of the property that had to be netted over was the part with the buildings. The next day we began that operation, using precut poles and surplus netting. Some of the pieces of netting were huge and able to completely cover things like the barn, machine shed and other buildings. The cabins received a coat of dull paint because of the shiny metal before being covered over. Still, it took two weeks before we were totally done.

The netting had the effect of reducing the amount of power we got from our solar cells. Had we not covered them over, they would have appeared to be a row of shiny plates, a dead giveaway that something was there. When it was done, Matt got me and told me to come with him. He didn't explain.

We ended up at a small, local airport and were soon aboard a Cessna 172 flying toward the area of the site. Matt explained that he wanted to examine the site from the air. We'd make passes from each of the four cardinal directions and possibly diagonals. It would only take one small chink in our armor to give us away, he said.

The pond was clearly visible, but nothing else except for the garden, was. When Matt was satisfied, he asked the pilot to return to the airport. The pilot wanted to know what he had been looking for and Matt told him a likely fishing spot. Maybe the pond/small lake held potential. He wanted to see if he could find a way in, but there didn't appear to be one. The only choice he could see, he told the pilot, was on foot through the woods. The brief flight set Matt back an arm and a leg, aviation fuel was getting expensive, the pilot claimed.

On our way back, Matt radioed ahead and as we moved down the lane, the others set about blocking it with 'dead falls' and brush. When they were done, we gathered and Matt said, "For all intents and purposes, we're invisible. Even knowing where to look, I couldn't see a thing." It felt like, I don't know, the opera ended without the fat lady singing. That couldn't be, because the saying was, 'the opera isn't over until the fat lady sings.' The ending was dependent on the singing, not the other way around. There were no words to describe what I felt at the moment.

Invisible? Maybe and maybe not. What if the government flew over in choppers with heat sensors? Something like FLIR? Would we still be invisible? And if we were what about the livestock that Chosin had? Every critter would give off some kind of heat signature. If there were animals, it would follow that there were probably people. Anyway, the government needed food, so they'd surely come after the animals.

Kelly told me that while I was gone, one of the kids came around saying that the TV was being kept on to monitor the news. I told her that I was surprised the MAG had decided to simply hide out, the problem wouldn't go away and there were others who knew about the MAG site, the people who delivered the fuel, for instance. The MAG members were military and most had seen combat or been in a combat zone, that was one of the qualifiers to be invited to join. Why were they holding back? Kelly and I went to the big house to watch the news. There was a meeting in progress and the TV was turned off.

"Two troops at the road, 24/7, agreed?"

"What are we going to use for comms?"

"Two meter handy talkies, I think. One sniper with a spotter. Figure on medium range weapons, 7.62 NATO."

"Rules of engagement?"

"Do not engage unless you are spotted. If that happens, you are weapons free."

"What if they find the entrance?"

"Call it in, we'll respond in force. Brady, Kelly, you're here, good. I won't have to cover this with you later."

"What about the special weapons?"

"We'll issue them, but sparingly. The simple fact is we don't have all that many and we're lucky to have what we do."

"What special weapons?" I asked.

"M61 fragmentation grenades and M72 LAW rockets. It's what the majority of us are familiar with. The government attempted to use up the M61s and a friend in logistics arranged for us to get a supply so he could replace them with M67s. The M72s are more recent versions, the A7. That's the Navy version of the A6 variant, big boom, low penetration. The 8-pound, 30-inch M72A7 Light Anti-armor Weapon System, based on the M72 66mm shoulder-mounted rocket launcher, adds a better fuze, a releasable strap and an insensitive explosive that makes the warhead less likely to explode when hit by enemy fire.

"M61 work the same as the M67?"

"Yep, if you know how to use either, you're set, safety clip and pin."

"I've never used the LAW."

"Have you seen 'The Enforcer'?"

"Yes."

"Do what the sergeant in the movie did. Relax, Brady, I'll show you."

I wasn't considered a designated marksman, yet. Therefore, my assignment would be as a spotter. Kelly would also be a spotter. While sniper's spotters in the Army and Marines generally carry the M16 or M4, our spotters would be carrying the 7.62 NATO rifles with extra loaded magazines and ammo available at the observation post.

While there was an assortment of 7.62 NATO rifles, the majority were either reworked M14s or M1As. Most families had an assortment of MBRs and ARs, the latter generally AR15s. Had we the money and the choice, I would have like to have some of those new rifles the H&K brought out, the HK 416 and HK 417. The civilian version of the 416 wasn't due out until late 2008 and they hadn't announced a civilian version of the 417. They didn't make their goal of getting the 416 out by the end of 2008.

"You might want to go to the range and practice, Brady. We'd like you to move up to DM as soon as possible. You'll have to qualify out to 600 meters to earn the title. If you had an M-21 like some of the people do, the qualifying range would be 750 meters."

"I don't have a scope."

"You can get everything you need at the store in the machine shed. It's group property and you can turn it in when you're done using it."

"What do you have?"

"Zeiss with built in BDCs, Victory Diavari 6-24x72. The armorer/gunsmith will mount your scope for you. Draw some of the M118LR."

Have you seen a Zeiss Victory Diavari with its 72mm objective lens? I could see why they put them on M-21s. If the minimum setting was 6 power, these were really intended for something like the M82A1 or some of those Accuracy International rifles. They also had built in laser range finding out to 1,000 meters. My only limitation would be how steady I could hold my rifle. My first impression the scope was that it cost as much or more than my rifle. If that was indeed the case, I owed it to myself and the group to earn the DM designation.

The size of the objective lens caused the scope to be mounted higher than I expected. I had to add a strap-on cheek rest to get even close to the proper eye relief. The BDC was set for 100 meters and the armorer/gunsmith had gone over the instructions twice to make sure I knew

how to make the adjustment. At 6 power, the 100 meter target was large, really large.

Perhaps I was being overly cautious with the scope adjustments, it took me five shots to get a zero. The remaining 5 rounds in the magazine etched a $\frac{3}{4}$ " hole in the center of the target. I replaced the target, reloaded the 10 round magazine and moved to 200 meters. There was no wind blowing and after adjusting the BDC to 200 meters, I put 5 shots in about the same sized circle. I shot until my shoulder was beginning to get sore and was concentrating so hard on my task, failed to note I had an observer.

"Just like I thought, you're a natural."

"Oh, you startled me Chosin, I didn't know you were there."

"It would appear that the limit of you and your rifle is around 800 meters. That's enough to qualify you as a DM, I'll tell the others."

"Thanks."

"Don't thank me; I just painted a bullseye on your back. The only body armor we have is the standard police stuff, level IIIA."

"I heard you got the Purple Heart in Korea."

"Lot's of people got the Purple Heart in Korea. I got shot in the butt, but, I'll bet you knew that, right?"

"I heard you were fighting a rear guard action when they evacuated the Chosin Reservoir," I fibbed.

"You did, did you? I've never told a soul how I got that injury, but you've got it right. I was part of a rear guard moving up to our next defensive position when I got shot. They called it advancing in a different direction, but we weren't. We were headed to Hungnam Harbor for evacuation. I got out sooner."

"I wouldn't think that one day on the range would qualify me to be called a DM. If I can repeat my performance tomorrow, maybe then."

"Have it your way, Brady. I won't say anything without your permission."

"I just don't know, Chosin. It's a new scope and I never used a scope before. I want to be sure I can dope the wind and whatever else it takes to earn the DM title."

"You'll do fine boy, practice makes perfect."

"How did you do honey?"

"Better than I thought I would. I really wish now that I had a National Match or Super Match."

"You can't get one, not with the government collecting all of the firearms."

"I know, dammit. They turned out to be right about McCain, didn't they?"

"What, a RINO? And, a liberal? He was the lesser of the two evils. Ron Paul couldn't get elected and there was a lot of concern about Osama Obama. Thank God we didn't end up with the Wicked Witch of the East in the White House."

"As much as I admired John McCain's status as a war hero, he's just another politician. Look what happened to Duke Cunningham. There wasn't any doubt about his guilt, the man just plain got greedy."

That was the end of the political discussion. Any of the candidates in the recent election would have gone after the guns; only McCain needed an excuse. We walked up to the big house to get caught up on the news. I checked the list of names and I was still listed as a spotter.

"I hear you did good on the range today."

"I gave it my best shot," I replied before realizing it was a pun. "No pun intended."

"Think you could do better with a different rifle?"

"I don't know Matt, I've thought about it. No way to get a National Match, Super Match or M21 with the governmental edict."

"All you have to do is ask."

"Yeah right, I tell you I want one of those and poof, you put it in my hands."

"I didn't say that. However, I do have a Super Match that I bought for Cheryl. She doesn't like it and won't use it. I had SA change the barrel from the stainless to the carbon. It's fitted with the same scope you put on your rifle. Plus, I got a wild hair up my butt one day and bought a Raptor 6X (ITT 7001) nightscope."

"They any good?"

"I hope so, considering what it cost. Typical operating range is 1,857 yards in moonlight, 1,232 yards in starlight and 650 yards in cloud cover."

"Why didn't you just buy their day/night scope?"

"I probably should have, but I didn't. I guess that I didn't think of it at the time because I already had the Zeiss."

"Are both zeroed in?"

"To my satisfaction. You'll have to satisfy yourself Brady. You do that and we'll make you a DM and get you a good spotter. The whole idea is not being spotted. You'll only have to shoot if you screw that up."

"I don't like hiding."

"Would you rather go up against men and women in uniform who are just following orders?"

"The whole thing stinks."

"You got that right. It's not a perfect world. It never has been, but lately, it's getting worse. What is the alternative? Give them all of our food, fuel and guns? Only from my cold dead hands."

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We watched the news for a while and both the National Guards under the authority of the Governors and federal active duty and reserve troops under the President's authority were attempting to restore order. Where they brought in armor, they had great success, no one wanted to go up against an Abrams or Bradley. Where they brought in Stryker's or Hummers, people felt the need to test the vehicles. The Stryker's were rated to 14.5mm AP and the M1114s to 7.62mm AP.

Those street gangs in the big cities were well armed. They had both AK47s and M16s. Their favorite handguns seemed to be the 9mm. They could maybe splinter the glass on a Hummer window with the AK, but couldn't punch through. Conversely, the Hummers were equipped with MK19s, M2s or M240s. From what I could see, the soldiers and Marines weren't shooting first, but didn't hesitate if someone shot at them.

I was sure that someone in the MAG probably had a Barrett rifle, but it hadn't come up. I did wonder about the ordinance. If they had grenades and anti-tank rockets, what else did they have? The MAG had been around for several years, I'd been told, and they had said something about surprises. Were they limited to the grenades and LAWs, or did they have more? What kind of dumb luck had led Kelly and me into the situation we now found ourselves? I took a job packing boxes for a preparedness store and it had turned into, what? The wages weren't that high, but the benefits turned out to be tremendous.

Had Matt really put up all of the money he claimed? I thought about that and decided that no one gives away 12 pairs of batteries. His buying the Super Match for Cheryl was a likely story; it wasn't that much different from my rifle, just a better quality. I wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth; I did want the Super Match. BTW, I found a website on the internet that had both the Tac-Force vest and the Raptor night vision scope.

<http://www.savvysurvivor.com/http://www.savvysurvivor.com/raptorscopes.htm>

I found that he was right about returning the scopes to zero when you swapped them out (a comment on the website). Anything over 500 meters and you generally lost your zero. My solution was to permanently mount the Zeiss on the Super Match and the Raptor on my rifle.

Depending on when my turn as a DM came, I carried one or the other. If the tour overlapped from daylight to darkness, I carried both. It was roughly the same as carrying a BAR, weight wise.

The first time troops came down our road wasn't on my shift. Reportedly, they stopped at the driveway crossing the ditch and moved a way down the narrow road, stopping when they discovered the road was blocked by deadfalls. Had they gone further, they'd have come up against the netting stretched across the road making the woods seem to go on. The MAGs precautions had a downside in that we were trapped unless we cleared the road.

"Get that Raptor sighted in?"

"It won't maintain zero if I switch it out, so I put it on my rifle and left the Zeiss on your rifle. The max range of the night scope is well within the range of my rifle."

"You heard that we had visitors?"

"Yeah. I also heard that they didn't come far down the road."

"They didn't and Chuck was the DM so they just sat tight until the military left. That's what I was telling you earlier about avoiding being observed. If they don't see you, you don't have to fight them."

"What about those people who know about this location?"

"Like who?"

"The fuel delivery companies. They know where we are."

"That's why they're members of the MAG. It's a closed system Brady, no one outside the MAG knows about the place except the county tax assessor. The taxes are paid by mail from an out-of-state address, something Chosin set up."

"What is his name?"

"Who?"

"Chosin."

"Fred. I never got his last name and he never offered. What difference does it make?"

"None, I was curious was all. Do you think the military will be back?"

"Eventually, yes. They'll want to know what's at the end of the road."

"Anytime soon?"

"I shouldn't think so; they have more on their plate than a blocked road in the woods out in the middle of nowhere."

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The government clamped a news blackout on the media. It was a difficult task to accomplish, but they issued orders to arrest any reporters found in the riot zones. Reporter's claims to their 1st Amendment freedoms fell on deaf ears. This conflict had no embedded journalists. Gerald wouldn't be drawing any more maps in the sand. In previous conflicts with journalists embedded, the military frequently spent time just protecting the journalists and they couldn't spare the time.

People who had food lost it to FEMA goons who were going door to door looking. Firearms were seized and the people arrested. If they resisted, more often than not, they were shot. They had made it to our town and had broken into Matt's preparedness business. There were no guns or ammo to seize, but they took the MREs he left behind. They had also broken into Chuck's warehouse and came away empty handed.

"Now that pisses me off."

"Did you expect otherwise?"

"I hoped. They didn't get much, but that's not the point. There's nothing in the John Warner deal that allows FEMA to act that way."

The MAG – Chapter 4

"When do you expect the Army or Air Force to fly over the site using FLIR to look for people and/or animals?"

"I don't, they have no reason to do so. All of the livestock is under cover and while those nets won't hide heat signatures, they can't spare the manpower to search every square inch of the US of A. Chosin didn't pick this location because of its remote location, he inherited the property. That it is a very remote location was only a side benefit at first. Now, it's essential. If a family or two were out here on their own, trying to make it in an unimproved area, they be up to their butts in alligators. They'd be living off the country and that's hard in the best of times."

I supposed they were right. When I'd thought of bugging out, it was always taking what we could carry and heading somewhere like a national park or forest. That would probably be the same idea that many others had and we'd just be moving from one trouble spot to another. The MAG site was a totally different idea. The cabins were probably on some satellite photo somewhere, if anyone cared enough to look. Then again, the uniform cabin sizes could easily be mistaken for storage buildings, but the farm itself was readily identifiable.

That narrow road was narrow for a reason; the overlap of the trees completely hid the road from the air. One would assume that there had to be a road through the strip of timber to reach

the farm buildings, but it could only be found from the ground. The buildings were painted to look dilapidated and wouldn't draw a second look. All the livestock feed was purchased and hauled in by MAG members although in a pinch, we could grow a few crops. Only those shiny roofs were a dead giveaway.

"So, tell me, you said we had a few surprises if we were attacked. Tell me it's not limited to those LAW rockets and hand grenades."

"Fine, it's not limited to the LAWs rockets or hand grenades."

"What do we have?"

"Nothing you're not already familiar with."

"That's not an answer. If you don't want to tell me, fine, just say so."

"A lot of it is old stuff, circa WW II. We have M1919A4s converted to 7.62 by the Navy, Mk 21 Mod 0. We also have something heavier for when TSHTF, the big brother of the 1919."

"The Ma Deuce?"

"It's properly called the Browning Machine Gun, Cal. .50, M2, HB, Flexible. Yes, the old reliable Ma Deuce. We have 4 of them and 8 of the light machine guns. They were legal, we bought them a few years back and they were on the National Firearms Registry. Of course, that was a few years back in a different state," Matt chuckled.

Counting the teenagers, we numbered about 40. There were 14 men, 13 women (wives), and about a dozen or so teens. Platoons consist of two or more squads, sections, or crews. In Armor, a Platoon consists of four tank crews; in Infantry, a platoon consists of three rifle squads and a weapons squad or section. Lieutenants lead most platoons, and the second-in-command is generally a Sergeant First Class. We had two rifle squads and two weapons squads. We didn't have any officers or sergeants, but most of the people had been NCOs at one time.

"I don't relish the opportunity of using them. Odds are we'd end up using them against our own people, not some foreign invader."

"What if McCain calls in UN troops?"

"That's different. I might be able to use them then."

"Does anyone here have a Barrett rifle?"

"Why?"

"I'm just curious. We seem to have everything else."

"As a matter of fact, we have three. Chosin has one, Chuck has one and I have one."

"The M82?"

"Yes, of course. And, before you ask, we have the proper ammo."

"Raufoss?"

"We have some of that, some of the Barrett loaded by IMI and some of the M1022 the Army developed to match the ballistics of the Raufoss. We don't shoot them a lot, the ammo is too expensive. All three rifles have the Leopold scopes with the BORS and either the Leupold Mark IV 6.5-20x50mm LR/T M1 or the Leupold Mark IV 8.5-25x50mm ER/T M1. The ER has the greatest range, around 2,000 meters. I suppose you want one of those, too?"

"No, I was just curious. It didn't make much sense for us to have surprises without that including some Barrett's."

"I gone about as far as I care to, equipping you and Kelly. Never say never, because something will change. If that happens, you would be my logical choice for my Barrett."

"Which model is it, Army or Marine Corps?"

"M82A1M, the Marines Corps version. There isn't that much difference, a couple of options. I got one of those AWC TurboDyne suppressors. Chuck got the Ops, Inc. 3rd model and Chosin a Reflex BT8. We haven't had any trouble with the rifles using the suppressors."

"Recoil bad?"

"You know you're shooting it but the suppressor makes more of a difference than that Barrett muzzle break. It won't punish you either way, but you need hearing protection without the suppressor. Now, is there anything else you're curious about?"

"How am I supposed to know things without asking?"

"You're not. No one objects to you asking if the question is relevant to our situation. Do you recall I said we were invisible?"

"Yep. We're not, Matt, not if they use FLIR."

"You're right, but they'd have to have a reason to look here. It's around 20 miles to the nearest community and that's a small town. The county seat is further, but not really that much larger."

Trouble came, from an unexpected source; hungry people who had hunted the area and knew about the open 80 acres behind the timber next to the road. They pulled into the drive big as you please and parked. They exited the vehicle, took out hunting rifles and loaded them.

Meanwhile, the two meter radio was humming.

"This is Mike at the OP. I have a pickup with three men."

"Chosin replied, "Old Dodge pickup?"

"Affirmative."

"Two old guys and one younger?"

"Affirmative."

"Those guys are ignorant; they can't seem to read the No Hunting and No Trespassing signs. Everyone with their radio on move to the OP, I think it's time to put a stop to this."

I'd heard the story. Three men from the small town around 20 miles away usually came here during deer hunting season. They'd park by the road, move into the timber and take a deer. Just one, mind you, a single shot wouldn't disclose their location. They might wait a day or two and come back. It was always one shot and they never parked in the same place twice. Chosin had never been able to catch them red handed. This time was different, he wasn't alone and the OP was manned. I had just come off shift and still had my web gear on so I joined the people moving to the OP. Near as I could tell, they were carrying Winchester or Remington bolt action rifles.

"Hold it right there, you're trespassing."

"Who is going to stop us?" one of the older men asked.

"We will," Matt said as several of us stepped from behind cover holding an assortment of military style weapons.

"Our families have to eat."

"So do ours."

"You can't spare one deer?"

"You didn't ask. I've put up with you guys hunting my land for years," Chosin replied, "And haven't stopped you. Things are different now, what with the government having its head stuck up its behind. I see you still have rifles, you didn't turn them in?"

"We don't have any local law enforcement to turn them in to."

"What about the county sheriff?"

"He can take it from my cold dead hands," the other older man replied.

"Good answer. What's the deal with your town?"

"FEMA came through and grabbed most of the food. Some of us had some cached. The thing we ran short on was meat."

"For all the years you sneaked on this land and hunted, you had to know there was a farm, right?"

"We did."

"Did you ever think to just come to the house and ask?"

"We talked it over and decided you knew who it was that was poaching and would just tell us to go to hell."

"At the moment, I am so inclined. Give me one reason why I shouldn't."

"We have families to feed."

"Don't we all."

"You have a large herd of deer."

"Around sixty-some last count."

"Well, I'm not going to beg."

"Nobody asked you to beg, just to ask. What part of please don't you understand?"

"That's begging."

"That's common courtesy."

The other older man, the first one who spoke, said, "I'll say please. Is there anything you can do to help us out?"

"Tell me what you need and for how many people."

"Altogether, there are nine of us. My wife and myself, Joe's wife and him, my son Casey, his wife and three grand children."

"So, what do you need? Beef, pork, chicken or fish?"

"Yes. Any of the above would be greatly appreciated."

"Chuck, this is Chosin. I need enough meat for nine people for three months. Make it frozen

and an assortment."

"Roger."

"Ok fellas, unload the rifles and put them back in their cases. You heard what we're going to give you gratis. Next time you need something, parked right where you did today and get out of the pickup, unarmed. Someone will be along directly to talk to you."

"Just like that?"

"Just like that, with a condition. You are never to tell anyone about this farm. Outside of our group, you are the only people who know about it. If anyone comes looking, we'll blame you and that will end the handouts. It could end more than that, if you get my meaning."

"You mean you'd try and kill us?"

"There won't be any trying, at all," Matt replied. "Didn't your mama ever teach you to not look a gift horse in the mouth? We value our privacy and will have it. Period."

Whether they took that to mean we wouldn't try to kill them was one way to interpret what Matt had said. I knew him well enough to know what he really meant; they end up dead and wouldn't see it coming. At this point in time fully half of the population on the farm, or MAG site if you prefer, was a DM. We had the ability to reach out and touch someone from a very long range. Try hell, we'd just do it, should it become necessary.

There was a long flat stretch of road that went well past either edge of the farm and someone would have park a long way off not to be noticed by the OP. The spotter had a 60 power spotting scope that would allow him or her to see well past the edge of the property.

Chuck showed up with the meat and help carrying it. It had to be quite a bit, it took six of them to carry it. The men looked at the packages and if their jaws would have reached to the ground, they'd have all had bruised chins. 'My cold dead hands' stammered out, "Thank you."

"You're welcome. Remember the condition."

"We know nothing," one of the older men said trying his best to imitate Sergeant Schultz. They got in their pickup and left, grinning.

"If that's the worst we have to deal with, we may be ok."

"I wouldn't be counting my chickens, just yet," Chosin responded. "Those were the good guys."

"You expected them to show up?"

"Sooner or later, assuming that FEMA didn't put them in a camp. I didn't mind them taking the deer, just them hunting without asking. Caught a glimpse of them a couple of times, so I pretty much knew what they looked like. They served a purpose keeping the deer herd thinned a

little."

"If they're the good guys, who are the bad guys?"

"Remember John McCain's speech the night he cinched the nomination by taking Texas?"

"Vaguely, why."

"He's been in office for less than a year and has already started by acting like a King. I watched Fox News that night and Britt Hume said something about him becoming King. I don't remember exactly what he said, but McCain has grabbed all the power he can muster. If it works out, no one will give it much thought; if it doesn't, there's going to be hell to pay."

"We're not talking about trying to overthrow the government, are we? I didn't join the MAG for that kind of fight."

"Everyone here is a Patriot, sworn to protect and defend the Constitution. Once you make the oath, it's forever. You may finish your term of service, but that oath stays with you. Or, were you different, you took it back when you got out?"

"I did not!"

"Neither did any of the rest of us. Our obligation is to the Constitution, not John McCain or any other politician. Not being active duty military means he is not our Commander in Chief, the principles laid out in the Constitution are. They leave us alone and we'll leave them alone. We may help a few neighbors, but that's it."

As far as neighbors went, the nearest were those three guys and their families, with one exception. The land surrounding the farm was a state conservation area. Generally, depending on the state, these areas are closed to hunting and don't have many improvements. More or less an unimproved park you can visit for hiking, camping and bird watching. Chosin said the state had tried to buy the property, but he wouldn't sell. They weren't initially willing to use Eminent Domain to claim the property. In response to Kelo, the state changed the law and they lost their last best chance to grab the property.

"There's meeting in the big house at 4," Kelly said. "They want everyone there."

"What's it about?"

"No one said. It was Chosin himself who made the rounds."

"If Chosin made the announcement, it must be something big."

"That's what I thought, too."

"We'd better go now, it's 3:45."

As usual, we were nearly the last ones there. The TV was turned off, so it wasn't another Presidential announcement. Chosin waited for the last family to show up, then began immediately. Kelly had left bread in the oven.

"As some of you know, we have amateur radio that we constantly monitor. You just can't trust the mainstream media. You've all heard McCain's address and as far as the government goes, it seems to be implementing exactly what he said they'd do." Chosin paused, and then continued. "The story we're getting on amateur radio backs that up, but there's more. McCain has ordered the continuity of government plan implemented. The latest version was implemented by Bush. We have the directive, although we don't have details."

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National Security and Homeland Security Presidential Directive

NATIONAL SECURITY PRESIDENTIAL DIRECTIVE/NSPD 51

HOMELAND SECURITY PRESIDENTIAL DIRECTIVE/HSPD-20

Subject: National Continuity Policy

Purpose

(1) This directive establishes a comprehensive national policy on the continuity of Federal Government structures and operations and a single National Continuity Coordinator responsible for coordinating the development and implementation of Federal continuity policies. This policy establishes "National Essential Functions," prescribes continuity requirements for all executive departments and agencies, and provides guidance for State, local, territorial, and tribal governments, and private sector organizations in order to ensure a comprehensive and integrated national continuity program that will enhance the credibility of our national security posture and enable a more rapid and effective response to and recovery from a national emergency.

Definitions

(2) In this directive:

(a) "Category" refers to the categories of executive departments and agencies listed in Annex A to this directive;

(b) "Catastrophic Emergency" means any incident, regardless of location, that results in extraordinary levels of mass casualties, damage, or disruption severely affecting the U.S. population, infrastructure, environment, economy, or government functions;

(c) "Continuity of Government," or "COG," means a coordinated effort within the Federal Government's executive branch to ensure that National Essential Functions continue to be performed during a Catastrophic Emergency;

(d) "Continuity of Operations," or "COOP," means an effort within individual executive departments and agencies to ensure that Primary Mission-Essential Functions continue to be performed during a wide range of emergencies, including localized acts of nature, accidents, and technological or attack-related emergencies;

(e) "Enduring Constitutional Government," or "ECG," means a cooperative effort among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the Federal Government, coordinated by the President, as a matter of comity with respect to the legislative and judicial branches and with proper respect for the constitutional separation of powers among the branches, to preserve the constitutional framework under which the Nation is governed and the capability of all three branches of government to execute constitutional responsibilities and provide for orderly succession, appropriate transition of leadership, and interoperability and support of the National Essential Functions during a catastrophic emergency;

(f) "Executive Departments and Agencies" means the executive departments enumerated in 5 U.S.C. 101, independent establishments as defined by 5 U.S.C. 104(1), Government corporations as defined by 5 U.S.C. 103(1), and the United States Postal Service;

(g) "Government Functions" means the collective functions of the heads of executive departments and agencies as defined by statute, regulation, presidential direction, or other legal authority, and the functions of the legislative and judicial branches;

(h) "National Essential Functions," or "NEFs," means that subset of Government Functions that are necessary to lead and sustain the Nation during a catastrophic emergency and that, therefore, must be supported through COOP and COG capabilities; and

(i) "Primary Mission Essential Functions," or "PMEFs," means those Government Functions that must be performed in order to support or implement the performance of NEFs before, during, and in the aftermath of an emergency.

Policy

(3) It is the policy of the United States to maintain a comprehensive and effective continuity capability composed of Continuity of Operations and Continuity of Government programs in order to ensure the preservation of our form of government under the Constitution and the continuing performance of National Essential Functions under all conditions.

Implementation Actions

(4) Continuity requirements shall be incorporated into daily operations of all executive departments and agencies. As a result of the asymmetric threat environment, adequate warning of potential emergencies that could pose a significant risk to the homeland might not be available, and therefore all continuity planning shall be based on the assumption that no such warning will be received. Emphasis will be placed upon geographic dispersion of leadership, staff, and infrastructure in order to increase survivability and maintain uninterrupted Government Functions. Risk management principles shall be applied to ensure that

appropriate operational readiness decisions are based on the probability of an attack or other incident and its consequences.

(5) The following NEFs are the foundation for all continuity programs and capabilities and represent the overarching responsibilities of the Federal Government to lead and sustain the Nation during a crisis, and therefore sustaining the following NEFs shall be the primary focus of the Federal Government leadership during and in the aftermath of an emergency that adversely affects the performance of Government Functions:

(a) Ensuring the continued functioning of our form of government under the Constitution, including the functioning of the three separate branches of government;

(b) Providing leadership visible to the Nation and the world and maintaining the trust and confidence of the American people;

(c) Defending the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and preventing or interdicting attacks against the United States or its people, property, or interests;

(d) Maintaining and fostering effective relationships with foreign nations;

(e) Protecting against threats to the homeland and bringing to justice perpetrators of crimes or attacks against the United States or its people, property, or interests;

(f) Providing rapid and effective response to and recovery from the domestic consequences of an attack or other incident;

(g) Protecting and stabilizing the Nation's economy and ensuring public confidence in its financial systems; and

(h) Providing for critical Federal Government services that address the national health, safety, and welfare needs of the United States.

(6) The President shall lead the activities of the Federal Government for ensuring constitutional government. In order to advise and assist the President in that function, the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism (APHS/CT) is hereby designated as the National Continuity Coordinator. The National Continuity Coordinator, in coordination with the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (APNSA), without exercising directive authority, shall coordinate the development and implementation of continuity policy for executive departments and agencies. The Continuity Policy Coordination Committee (CPCC), chaired by a Senior Director from the Homeland Security Council staff, designated by the National Continuity Coordinator, shall be the main day-to-day forum for such policy coordination.

(7) For continuity purposes, each executive department and agency is assigned to a category in accordance with the nature and characteristics of its national security roles and responsibilities in support of the Federal Government's ability to sustain the NEFs. The

Secretary of Homeland Security shall serve as the President's lead agent for coordinating overall continuity operations and activities of executive departments and agencies, and in such role shall perform the responsibilities set forth for the Secretary in sections 10 and 16 of this directive.

(8) The National Continuity Coordinator, in consultation with the heads of appropriate executive departments and agencies, will lead the development of a National Continuity Implementation Plan (Plan), which shall include prioritized goals and objectives, a concept of operations, performance metrics by which to measure continuity readiness, procedures for continuity and incident management activities, and clear direction to executive department and agency continuity coordinators, as well as guidance to promote interoperability of Federal Government continuity programs and procedures with State, local, territorial, and tribal governments, and private sector owners and operators of critical infrastructure, as appropriate. The Plan shall be submitted to the President for approval not later than 90 days after the date of this directive.

(9) Recognizing that each branch of the Federal Government is responsible for its own continuity programs, an official designated by the Chief of Staff to the President shall ensure that the executive branch's COOP and COG policies in support of ECG efforts are appropriately coordinated with those of the legislative and judicial branches in order to ensure interoperability and allocate national assets efficiently to maintain a functioning Federal Government.

(10) Federal Government COOP, COG, and ECG plans and operations shall be appropriately integrated with the emergency plans and capabilities of State, local, territorial, and tribal governments, and private sector owners and operators of critical infrastructure, as appropriate, in order to promote interoperability and to prevent redundancies and conflicting lines of authority. The Secretary of Homeland Security shall coordinate the integration of Federal continuity plans and operations with State, local, territorial, and tribal governments, and private sector owners and operators of critical infrastructure, as appropriate, in order to provide for the delivery of essential services during an emergency.

(11) Continuity requirements for the Executive Office of the President (EOP) and executive departments and agencies shall include the following:

(a) The continuation of the performance of PMEFs during any emergency must be for a period up to 30 days or until normal operations can be resumed, and the capability to be fully operational at alternate sites as soon as possible after the occurrence of an emergency, but not later than 12 hours after COOP activation;

(b) Succession orders and pre-planned devolution of authorities that ensure the emergency delegation of authority must be planned and documented in advance in accordance with applicable law;

(c) Vital resources, facilities, and records must be safeguarded, and official access to them must be provided;

(d) Provision must be made for the acquisition of the resources necessary for continuity operations on an emergency basis;

(e) Provision must be made for the availability and redundancy of critical communications capabilities at alternate sites in order to support connectivity between

and among key government leadership, internal elements, other executive departments and agencies, critical partners, and the public;

(f) Provision must be made for reconstitution capabilities that allow for recovery from a catastrophic emergency and resumption of normal operations; and

(g) Provision must be made for the identification, training, and preparedness of personnel capable of relocating to alternate facilities to support the continuation of the performance of PMEFS.

(12) In order to provide a coordinated response to escalating threat levels or actual emergencies, the Continuity of Government Readiness Conditions (COGCON) system establishes executive branch continuity program readiness levels, focusing on possible threats to the National Capital Region. The President will determine and issue the COGCON Level. Executive departments and agencies shall comply with the requirements and assigned responsibilities under the COGCON program. During COOP activation, executive departments and agencies shall report their readiness status to the Secretary of Homeland Security or the Secretary's designee.

(13) The Director of the Office of Management and Budget shall:

(a) Conduct an annual assessment of executive department and agency continuity funding requests and performance data that are submitted by executive departments and agencies as part of the annual budget request process, in order to monitor progress in the implementation of the Plan and the execution of continuity budgets;

(b) In coordination with the National Continuity Coordinator, issue annual continuity planning guidance for the development of continuity budget requests; and

(c) Ensure that heads of executive departments and agencies prioritize budget resources for continuity capabilities, consistent with this directive.

(14) The Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy shall:

(a) Define and issue minimum requirements for continuity communications for executive departments and agencies, in consultation with the APHS/CT, the APNSA, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, and the Chief of Staff to the President;

(b) Establish requirements for, and monitor the development, implementation, and maintenance of, a comprehensive communications architecture to integrate continuity

components, in consultation with the APHS/CT, the APNSA, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, and the Chief of Staff to the President; and

(c) Review quarterly and annual assessments of continuity communications capabilities, as prepared pursuant to section 16(d) of this directive or otherwise, and report the results and recommended remedial actions to the National Continuity Coordinator.

(15) An official designated by the Chief of Staff to the President shall:

(a) Advise the President, the Chief of Staff to the President, the APHS/CT, and the APNSA on COGCON operational execution options; and

(b) Consult with the Secretary of Homeland Security in order to ensure synchronization and integration of continuity activities among the four categories of executive departments and agencies.

(16) The Secretary of Homeland Security shall:

(a) Coordinate the implementation, execution, and assessment of continuity operations and activities;

(b) Develop and promulgate Federal Continuity Directives in order to establish continuity planning requirements for executive departments and agencies;

(c) Conduct biennial assessments of individual department and agency continuity capabilities as prescribed by the Plan and report the results to the President through the APHS/CT;

(d) Conduct quarterly and annual assessments of continuity communications capabilities in consultation with an official designated by the Chief of Staff to the President;

(e) Develop, lead, and conduct a Federal continuity training and exercise program, which shall be incorporated into the National Exercise Program developed pursuant to Homeland Security Presidential Directive-8 of December 17, 2003 ("National Preparedness"), in consultation with an official designated by the Chief of Staff to the President;

(f) Develop and promulgate continuity planning guidance to State, local, territorial, and tribal governments, and private sector critical infrastructure owners and operators;

(g) Make available continuity planning and exercise funding, in the form of grants as provided by law, to State, local, territorial, and tribal governments, and private sector critical infrastructure owners and operators; and

(h) As Executive Agent of the National Communications System, develop, implement, and maintain a comprehensive continuity communications architecture.

(17) The Director of National Intelligence, in coordination with the Attorney General and the Secretary of Homeland Security, shall produce a biennial assessment of the foreign and

domestic threats to the Nation's continuity of government.

(18) The Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of Homeland Security, shall provide secure, integrated, Continuity of Government communications to the President, the Vice President, and, at a minimum, Category I executive departments and agencies.

(19) Heads of executive departments and agencies shall execute their respective department or agency COOP plans in response to a localized emergency and shall:

(a) Appoint a senior accountable official, at the Assistant Secretary level, as the Continuity Coordinator for the department or agency;

(b) Identify and submit to the National Continuity Coordinator the list of PMEFs for the department or agency and develop continuity plans in support of the NEFs and the continuation of essential functions under all conditions;

(c) Plan, program, and budget for continuity capabilities consistent with this directive;

(d) Plan, conduct, and support annual tests and training, in consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security, in order to evaluate program readiness and ensure adequacy and viability of continuity plans and communications systems; and

(e) Support other continuity requirements, as assigned by category, in accordance with the nature and characteristics of its national security roles and responsibilities

General Provisions

(20) This directive shall be implemented in a manner that is consistent with, and facilitates effective implementation of, provisions of the Constitution concerning succession to the Presidency or the exercise of its powers, and the Presidential Succession Act of 1947 (3 U.S.C. 19), with consultation of the Vice President and, as appropriate, others involved. Heads of executive departments and agencies shall ensure that appropriate support is available to the Vice President and others involved as necessary to be prepared at all times to implement those provisions.

(21) This directive:

(a) Shall be implemented consistent with applicable law and the authorities of agencies, or heads of agencies, vested by law, and subject to the availability of appropriations;

(b) Shall not be construed to impair or otherwise affect (i) the functions of the Director of the Office of Management and Budget relating to budget, administrative, and legislative proposals, or (ii) the authority of the Secretary of Defense over the Department of Defense, including the chain of command for military forces from the President, to the Secretary of Defense, to the commander of military forces, or military command and control procedures; and

(c) Is not intended to, and does not, create any rights or benefits, substantive or procedural,

enforceable at law or in equity by a party against the United States, its agencies, instrumentalities, or entities, its officers, employees, or agents, or any other person.

(22) Revocation. Presidential Decision Directive 67 of October 21, 1998 ("Enduring Constitutional Government and Continuity of Government Operations"), including all Annexes thereto, is hereby revoked.

(23) Annex A and the classified Continuity Annexes, attached hereto, are hereby incorporated into and made a part of this directive.

(24) Security. This directive and the information contained herein shall be protected from unauthorized disclosure, provided that, except for Annex A, the Annexes attached to this directive are classified and shall be accorded appropriate handling, consistent with applicable Executive Orders.

/s/ GEORGE W. BUSH

The MAG – Chapter 5

"I thought they only implemented that when they expect an attack against the country," I said.

"That's right, Brady, it goes back to 1947, but the big change came under Reagan with another under Clinton and then the last one by Bush. The entire idea is to keep the country running in case of an attack."

I looked around the room and saw that some of the fellas were smirking, while others looked as alarmed as I was. The older men were smirking; it was the younger ones, closer to my age that looked concerned. I was already out on the limb; I decided to pursue my questions.

"So, if they implemented the COG plan, they're expecting an attack?"

"It would appear that they either expect an attack from within or from without, yes."

"Nuclear war?"

"That's one possibility. Another is another terrorist attack. With all the confusion around the country, the timing would be perfect. Finally, we have to consider they have reason to believe there could be a rebellion. It could be anything that affects the continuity of government."

"There have to be a lot of angry people, especially considering his order to turn in the guns."

"Would you hide your guns or use them to start a rebellion?"

"Well, I'd probably hide them."

"I think a majority of Americans would do that, rather than starting a rebellion. Let's set that option aside for the moment. Of the other two alternatives, which would you think more likely

Brady?"

"A terrorist attack, probably."

"Anyone disagree with Brady? We've been expecting a second attack since 9/11."

"We've heard stories for years how al Qaeda may have smuggled in nukes," Matt said, "I suppose they may have succeeded."

"Or, the government has reason to believe they have and are now prepared to use them."

There seemed to be a consensus that the country was facing a terrorist attack.

Just because a majority of us thought there could be a terrorist attack, didn't mean there would be one. A couple of the Vietnam era vets opined that there could be several attacks. They were referring to the Tet Offensive that ran from 30Jan68 until the 23Sep68.

The first thing that came to mind when discussing terrorist attacks was 9/11, but do we consider it as one attack with several targets or several attacks? All the ragheads came from the same group. They divided into 4 groups and hijacked 4 aircraft, sending 2 into the WTC, a 3rd into the Pentagon and the 4th into the ground in Pennsylvania. It appeared to be one plane per building, so it was open to interpretation. Much of the PAW literature seemed to suggest several attacks at various locations around the country using nuclear weapons.

I doubted that bin Laden had enough money to buy that many nukes. However, that didn't preclude them using the poor man's nuclear bombs, a chemical, biological or radiological attack. In order of magnitude, biological is probably at the top of the heap followed by chemical and then the dirty bomb. No doubt they had every law enforcement officer in the country looking for the terrorists. Kinda cut down on their grabbing the food and weapons, but that was a good thing. At the moment, it was all speculation.

So far, the MAG's assessments had been right on. We all bugged out before the Presidential announcement. We'd done our best to make the MAG site unobservable. Was it skill or just luck that put us out of harms way before TSHTF? The country was clearly in trouble and I wondered if McCain's actions made the situation better or worse. The MAG seemed disinclined to take any action.

The Smith Act, relating to sedition, was still on the books, but based on Supreme Court reversals in 1957, probably was unconstitutional. The older Insurrection Act, dating from 1807, was still on the books. It was limited by Posse Comitatus but that limitation was changed by the John Warner Act and the following year by H110-4986 (see Title XVIII). The problem with all those laws was that most of us didn't know about them unless some MSM reporter took exception to a provision and made a stink. (Tell me I'm wrong on that, I'd love to debate it with you.)

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"So, what can we do about a terrorist attack?"

"Nothing. We can't go out armed looking for terrorists or the government is sure to arrest us and take our weapons. We can only hope that if there is a genuine threat, the government stops it before it happens."

"So, we sit and wait?"

"Sounds like what we did when we were in the Army, doesn't it? There is nothing we can do until something happens. Try and relax, we should know soon based on what the amateur radio network said."

The meeting broke up and Kelly and I went home. She had bread in the oven and said it had been done before we left for the meeting. One of the advantages of baking bread in a wood stove was that, with practice, you could learn how much fire to build so the bread baked, then cooled off as the oven cooled off. It really smelled good, so she got it out of the oven and cut off a hunk for each of us.

"I'm going to go nuts sitting here waiting for something to happen."

"You want some jelly for your bread?"

"Don't change the subject."

"At the moment, there is nothing we can do. In the first place, we don't have enough information so we don't know what caused McCain to trigger the COG plan. If we knew that, we'd have to know where it was going to happen. Then, there's the issue of when it's supposed to happen. Could we get there in time to make a difference or not? If you can answer all those questions, dear, I'll get my rifle and go with you."

"Blackberry?"

There's something about a slice of fresh warm bread that melts the butter and soaks up the jelly. It's one of the ultimate comfort foods. Kelly was right so I enjoyed the bread and tried not to think about it. That's easier said than done. I opened a file on my laptop and sat down to read. I had a copy of Halffast's 'Light's Out', an online novel about survival after an EMP-burst disables most technology. At some 600 plus pages, I found myself engrossed to the point where I sat up most of two nights and the day in between reading continuously.

They didn't have just one disaster, they had several. It started when some billionaire raghead sent off some nukes above the US. The VP ended up in charge and he couldn't handle it. Then someone set off more nukes, this time above Europe, etc. Meanwhile the lead character in the story keeps getting thrust into leadership positions that he doesn't want and becomes somewhat of a folk hero. There is the old wives tale that says bad things happen in threes.

I was beginning to believe that, first we had an economic meltdown, followed by a food shortage that led to rioting in the streets and President McCain using his authority to use

regular military troops to restore order. Finally this thing with the COG implementation, it had to mean something unless it was just a bunch of conspiracy theorists talking on the amateur bands. Chosin and a majority seemed to think it meant a terrorist attack. It could also mean there was evidence someone planning WW III or a rebellion against the government because McCain went after the guns when the rioting broke out.

I only had a 5 year membership in the NRA because a Life membership had become so expensive. So, I agree that he was in violation of the 2nd Amendment, but Chosin was right, I'd hide my guns before I turned them in or had them seized. The ATF might have the 4473s on some of my guns but not on all of them. That wouldn't do them much good because we weren't at home; we were now living at the MAG site. If the ATF showed up here, we'd be in trouble for more than a few rifles and handguns; we had machine guns, grenades and rockets.

Reading 'Light's Out' allowed me to get my mind off Chosin neatly maneuvering me into selecting a terrorist attack as the most likely action; I didn't really care to be manipulated. Kelly sidestepped the issue with a loaf of hot fresh bread and then I got to reading. Now I was beginning to wonder if maybe they weren't right. WW III was unlikely because we could totally wipe out Russia and China and they had to know that. Our 14 SSBNs scared the crap out of them because those weren't warheads they could target and there were about 2,688 warheads on the boomers.

We had never really reduced our compliment of 5,000 or so nukes, either. Maybe some were deemed unreliable, but I'd be willing to bet they'd still go boom. The government also made conflicting statements about the number of warheads on our MM III missiles, sometimes saying they'd been de-mirv'd and other times claiming the opposite. The only people who knew for sure weren't talking. That last thing we wanted was a GTW, you could figure on the world loosing anywhere from one-third to one-half of its population should that occur. It was much easier for the Russians or Chinese to provide a few nukes to someone like bin Laden and let his people do their dirty work.

The thing that got to me the most was just sitting here waiting for something to happen and the uncertainty of what it might be. Kelly and I were relatively new to this, having only begun to prepare after I went to work for Matt. We'd been diligently accumulating STS and LTS foods and a few weapons. Then Matt comes along, kind of like Bombs Away LeMay and we wind up not only very well prepared but the newest members of a Mutual Aid Group, with a buy in that approached 6 months of my earnings.

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"Where have you been Brady, I haven't seen much of you."

"I got overwhelmed by all of this and took time out to read a survivalist story."

"Which one?"

"Light's Out."

"David Crawford's story? That was a good one. So were Battle of Jakes and Pax Americana."

"It took me about 24 hours to read it, it's some story."

"Still having misgivings about that COG announcement we picked up on the amateur bands?"

"I don't see how a few ham operators could know something like that."

"They all have regular jobs, radio is just a hobby. Some of them no doubt work for the government. You be amazed by some the emails I've gotten over the years, many of them 'eyes only'. Most from groups I belong to, information networks as it were. It doesn't take a whiz kid to figure out some of the things they pass around, although sometimes they only have limited information. I have one friend who has sent me around 3,000 emails with alarming information and most of it proves to be right on. You'd be surprised about the stuff the government does behind our backs."

"This thing McCain did sure wasn't secret."

"No, it wasn't. I suppose he thinks he is doing the best he can for the country, but I can assure you much of it is unconstitutional. He's violated the 2nd and the 4th Amendments for sure. The gun grab and the food and fuel grabs are violations one and sometimes both of those Amendments."

"So, I guess we just sit and wait."

"Right, but would you rather do it here or back in the city? Look Brady, it's not a question of if, just when and what. That applies equally to every disaster scenario you can dream up from weather events to geological events to widespread illness and even terrorist attacks. We got started on this before Y2K and when that didn't turn out to be a problem, we just continued to build on the MAG because if it's not one thing it's another."

"How long could we hold out if something happened?"

"Years. We store things like wheat, corn, beans, rice and a few other things for the common good of the MAG members. We have a small common arsenal of inexpensive weapons and ammo that we can use to help out a few outsiders too. We have 4 or 5 cases of SKS rifles and thousands of rounds of ammo for them on strippers."

"What about those 3 hunters?"

"We can help for quite some time as long as they don't go blabbing where they got the food. Chosin said that if they had the price of a buy in, we should consider taking them in."

"Do we have materials for 3 more cabins?"

"We have most of it and what we don't have, we can get from or more of the MAG members. I cleared out because of the guns and Chuck cleared out because of the food. Through one

member we can keep ourselves provided with propane for several years. Another member supplies all of our solar panels and related equipment. Those batteries I bought you came from yet another member. It goes on and on, everybody has something to supply."

The MAG – Chapter 6

"Kelly and I don't."

"You do, you just don't realize it. You provide the young blood we need to keep to outfit going."

"What do you really think is going to happen?"

"Brady, I have no more information than you have. One of the three things you mentioned, probably, but as to which one? Without more information, it's anyone's guess. Is that why you read Crawford's story? It has its twists and turns, about like our present situation."

"No, Matt, I read it to get my mind off the present situation."

"Did it work?"

"Only while I was reading."

"While we're on the subject of EMP, be sure to keep a radio in a metal cabinet. I have to run. Check the meeting room in the big house from time to time, they'll have the latest information."

'Yeah, right' I thought, 'they're just guessing.'

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Sometime early the next morning, it felt like we had a brief earthquake. I was guessing, of course, but the ground shook. Kelly and I went to the big house to see if anyone else felt it. The place was packed and the half dozen different conversations that were going on competed with each other to create a terrible din. I looked for Matt and Cheryl, but didn't see them. Kelly and I joined the group Chuck was in.

"...but does anyone know where for sure?"

"We've heard several reports including New York, Washington, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle. We don't think that many devices went off and some of that is speculation."

"We just got here," I said, "What's going on?"

"Hi Brady, Kelly. Those nuclear weapons the terrorists hadn't snuck into the country were set off this morning. We're not sure exactly where; however, them having seven bombs seems unlikely."

"Where are Matt and Cheryl?"

"Cheryl is with Matt who is meeting with Chosin. They'll have an announcement in a few minutes. I've already met with Chosin and he sent me out here to try to keep a lid on. For the moment, I'm just letting everyone get it out of their system."

About five minutes later, Chosin, Matt and Cheryl came downstairs and Chosin and Matt took seats at the 'directors table' where Chuck joined them.

"Would everyone please quiet down and take a seat? We have some information you'll all want to know."

It took 3 or 4 minutes for the conversations to end and people to find seats.

"We can now confirm that terrorists have set off nuclear weapons in six cities and released chemical weapons in two more. We have no reports of radiological bombs at this time. To the extent that they may have used biological weapons won't be known for some time. The cities hit were New York, Washington, Atlanta, Houston, Chicago and Los Angeles. Chemical weapons were used in San Francisco and Denver. We're not sure which agent they used, but we believe it's a nerve gas, possibly GB (sarin) or VX. We are safe in this location and should receive no fallout. However, in light of this development, we believe we have even more to fear from our government as they try to deal with is mess."

Matt picked up the conversation at this point. "We have no immediate needs that we cannot meet. We will be bringing in propane tankers later today to insure a steady supply of fuel. We will also be bringing in two diesel tankers and one gasoline tanker. Between the stores on hand and our livestock, we should be good on food for several years. I hope you all like beans and rice, they're our backup. We're going to use our remaining materials to build three more cabins and invite those three hunters to join us to preclude them revealing our location."

Chuck picked up there. "I have several sources available from whom I can get all of the basic grains we may need including wheat, corn, rice, barley and so forth. Over the next few days, I'll try to arrange shipments of each. We have a long term contract for hay for the livestock with us providing the fuel and the grower selling us hay at a discounted price. His farm isn't that far from here and he and his family have a place to stay in Chosin's house."

"Ok, that's what we have for now. Questions? No? Good. Matt and Chuck will be getting with each family and explaining what we need you to do for the immediate future."

"See Brady, you were wrong. It wasn't an earthquake on the New Madrid Fault."

"You're right Kelly, but I almost rather it would have been. Earthquakes don't produce fallout and at least people are able to get into the areas and deal with the dead and injured."

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"The packages have been delivered?"

"Yes. We used their UPS and labeled them as medical supplies."

"Good. Post the message on the internet and back that up with telephone calls."

"How long will it take?"

"The virus doesn't produce symptoms for 3-5 days, depending the victim's immune system. They are contagious after one day allowing them to spread the virus. The mortality rate is 50 percent with treatment, and close to 90 percent without."

"Allah Akbar."

"Allah Akbar."

Anything worth doing is worth doing right. This group of terrorists had used everything except dirty bombs. The nukes would force the US military to move to the nuked cities to try and perform rescue operations, body clean up and eventually city clean up. The VX nerve gas had the consistency of oil and was very persistent. It was also about ten times more deadly than sarin. Their third weapon was an engineered virus that was deadly. Perhaps as bad as Ebola, or close. Possibly a derivative, who knew?

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Before the day was over, we had two 9,000 gallon propane tankers, two 16,000 gallon diesel tankers and one 16,000 gallon gasoline tanker. Chuck had arranged for and picked up several truckloads of bagged grain; so much that a tent had to be set up to hold it. Matt took off for much of the day and came back with a pickup and trailer loaded with ammo. He had some of every caliber that anyone at the site might need.

Kelly and I were sent to man the OP using a four on, four off shift arrangement. Cheryl and some of the others were busy organizing and inventorying what the other brought in. Today, I had Matt's Barrett along with one of the M1As. I'd gotten some range time right before going to the OP, so I at least knew how to operate the rifle and verified the sighting. Heavy sucker; between it, the ammo, my M1A and those magazines, I felt like I was loaded down for a training exercise in boot camp.

The following day, Chosin, Matt and Chuck went to look up the hunters and hopefully make them an offer they couldn't refuse. They weren't gone all that long and apparently the men agreed; we started on the three cabins right after lunch. Extra supplies had been brought in to provide them all the comforts, including showers, water heaters and air conditioners. They were to move enough of their furniture to furnish the cabins. Not counting our hay farmer, by the end of the week, we numbered 15 families. The hay farmer, the one exception, delivered all the baled hay he had on stock and said he'd have one more cutting in a few weeks. Meanwhile, his livestock was moved to the site and he and his family moved in with Chosin.

Early the following week, his grain stores were moved and added to the silos increasing our

supply of animal feed. With business attended to, the narrow road was once more blocked and the cammo netting re-hung. The guard shifts were changed to 4 on and 20 off. Kelly and I remained paired.

With the passage of time, the cell communications became less reliable. Some thought it might be atmospheric and others unreliable power. Many websites were already down because of the nukes, either directly or indirectly because a switching network was down. After a couple of weeks, the internet shut down completely. The silence from the 'White House', our executive branch, was deafening. Surely, someone could have come on the EAS and given us some information.

As it turned out, we weren't as clever as we thought. It may have been too many large trucks going down graveled roads and not returning. Whatever it was we began to pick up more traffic on the road. As a result, the Directors, Chosin, Matt and Chuck announced that we were expanding from one OP to three. You may recall my describing the state conservation area. I related that it could be used for camping. Some people had apparently bugged out and come to the area. They'd play hell making a go of it in the woods. However, Chosin's deer herd wasn't fenced in and if they were lucky they'd be able to get meat.

The OPs would be added to the corners of the property next to the road and each would have a DM/sniper and an observer. Since there were three Barrett's each of the DMs had to learn to shoot one and tote the 7.62 and the 50BMG. Like I said, it wasn't a task for the faint of heart. The corner OPs were nearly ½ mile from the living area through heavy woods a good 30-40 minute hike.

The other thing the Directors had done was to implement a patrol. The circumference of the section was about 4 miles and a patrol could cover it in less than 2 hours. With that in mind, they had two patrols, a second that started an hour after the first. Because of that, anyone who camped in the conservation area would be detected if they crossed onto the property.

Finally, it came...

"My fellow Americans,

"It is indeed a sad day for our nation. Six cities have been bombed, New York, Washington, Atlanta, Houston, Chicago and Los Angeles. In addition, two cities have been attacked using nerve gas, San Francisco and Denver. Your government is working hard to determine who is behind this and reprisals will be made.

"All Naval and Air Force assets have either left port or are on standby to lift off when the need arises. The United Nations has offered assistance and we are considering it, although we may not need it. Speaker of the House Pelosi has urged to administration to accept the assistance and we will give her request the attention it deserves.

"The attacks have further disrupted the country and at this time, military forces will be used for rescue and clean up. The National Guard will have to stand in their stead to restore order in

cities still experiencing unrest.

"In view of the attacks, all persons who turned in firearms will be allowed to reclaim them by presenting a photo ID and their receipt. In view of the present situation, we may need to reform the militia to lend aid to the National Guard units. At the present, I am calling on all Governors with state defense forces to use them in aid of their National Guard units.

"This office will make another broadcast at the same time tomorrow. At that time, we will have more information regarding the militia. In view of the ongoing food shortages, we ask that all Americans pull together to aid each other in opposition to a common enemy.

"Thank you and good afternoon."

"Off hand I say that eliminates the possibility of a rebellion. People can get their guns back."

"Do you really believe anyone was dumb enough to turn them in, to begin with?"

"No, I suppose not."

"We need a militia."

"We already have one, the Tennessee State Guard. We can join up or form our own."

"If we join up, we'll have to go where they send us. If we form our own, we can stay here and protect this place."

"Is that legal?"

"Sure it is. Title 10, Subtitle A, Chapter 13,

§ 311. Militia: composition and classes

(a) The militia of the United States consists of all able-bodied males at least 17 years of age and, except as provided in section 313 of title 32, under 45 years of age who are, or who have made a declaration of intention to become, citizens of the United States and of female citizens of the United States who are members of the National Guard.

(b) The classes of the militia are:

(1) The organized militia, which consists of the National Guard and the Naval Militia; and
(2) The unorganized militia, which consists of the members of the militia who are not members of the National Guard or the Naval Militia."

"Is that current law?"

"Sure is. Any discussion or do you want to vote on it?"

"I make a motion we form our own militia."

"I'll second that."

"All in favor?" Chuck asked.

"Aye."

"Opposed?"

"The ayes have it and it's unanimous. Chosin, want to lay it out?"

"We'll form our own militia for the protection of the MAG site. I am in overall charge. We'll establish two light Platoons, one under Matt and one under Chuck, each consisting of between 15 and 20 members. Each Platoon will have 3 M1919A4s and one M2HB plus the infantry unit will include the 2 DMs plus their observers and the remaining members as infantry. DMs will use 7.62 and infantry has their choice of 7.62 or 5.56. We have mil spec lowers for the AR15s if anyone wants theirs converted to either full auto or 3 round burst. We also have a limited supply of M203s. The 40mm HEDP grenades are the German-made DM12 cartridges."

"Matt, any chance I could get an AR-15 from you for Kelly?"

"Sure, semi-auto, 3 round burst or full auto?"

"Full auto. You don't need it often, but when you do, there's no good substitute. Do you want the M14 back?"

"Let her keep it in case she changes her mind. Does she know anything about the grenade launcher?"

"No."

"We'll give it to someone who has experience. We only have a few training rounds and not that many of the German DM12s."

"How did you get those?"

"The Corps wanted a replacement for the M433 over safety issues, they're spin armed. They bought some to test and a few came up missing in shipment. Strange how that happens, must have fallen off the truck while they were being transported. They were missing a pallet load of 28 boxes, with 12 to the box."

"Right, a whole pallet fell off the truck."

"Maybe it got set down in the wrong place when they unloaded the truck, but they were short one pallet."

"Wouldn't the driver be in trouble?"

"Sealed load. Either it didn't get loaded at the pickup point or got misplaced at the deliver point. Enough said?"

"Maybe they'll put us all in the same cell block."

"No matter how hard they try, do you have any idea how much stuff the military misplaces in one year?"

"I thought it was all computer controlled now."

"It is, that's the beauty of it. The forms are all computer generated and do you know anyone who doesn't have a computer?"

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It took a couple more weeks for the two light Platoons to get set up and organized. It was strictly Co-ed and included husband and wife teams for the most part. We spent most of the time working on unit tactics when we weren't on guard duty, eating or sleeping. As we got to know each other better we began to develop some unit cohesiveness. It was easier for the husband wife teams, but everyone caught on. We had enough handy talkies to give each pair a radio with the ear bud/microphone boom.

The M1919A4s had a 2 person crew and the Ma Deuce a 3 person crew. Each DM unit was a 2 person crew giving us 8 or 9 infantry, about 2 squads. Because some people were required to man the CP, juggling the schedule became a major concern especially since it was time to plant the garden. Our hay farmer and his family took over that chore for us and he only went to his farm about once a week to check on the hay riding a Honda motorcycle. The people we moved from town helped with the CP and tending the livestock. None of these people had any military experience although they evidenced a willingness to learn.

The downside to that was they were set in their ways and learning discipline wouldn't come naturally like it did for most of us who entered the military at younger ages. They didn't need to be taught shooting skills, they already had those. Nonetheless, Chosin carefully trained them how he wanted the CP to operate.

Word came that there would be another Presidential address at 9 Eastern, 8 Central so as many as could crowded in the meeting room to catch the address.

"My fellow Americans,

"The Centers for Disease Control have announced the appearance of a new, deadly virus. They have been unable to isolate the outbreak to a single point. In fact, they have identified over 20 locations with similar outbreaks of the same, as yet

unidentified, virus. So far they have experienced limited success treating the illness with anti-viral medications. They estimate a 50% plus mortality rate with treatment and nearly a 90% mortality rate if treatment isn't initiated rapidly. A doctor will make a presentation when I'm finished explaining the symptoms.

"At the moment, the only effective means of preventing the transmission of the disease seems to be isolation. Therefore, we are pulling our troops from rescue and cleanup operations for the moment and recommend everyone remain in their homes. I've spoken with all of the Governors and they are prepared to provide food as needed. An 800 number for each state has been established and will be announced after this broadcast.

"Travel will be limited to within 25 miles of your home without prior approval.

"Never before in the history of this country have so many disastrous events occurred at within such a narrow range of time. We continue to try to identify those responsible and bring them to justice.

"Thank you and good night."

They then cut to a doctor from the CDC who laid out the symptoms. They were roughly a combination of the common cold and influenza with symptoms not presenting until the fourth day. Everyone who caught it was a walking time bomb because they were contagious after the first full day. The disease then moved to the lungs causing them to fill and you drowned in your own fluids, not unlike some forms of pneumonia. Well, that was nothing like Ebola, a hemorrhagic virus.

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"Do we have enough gas masks, Matt?"

"There are nearly 50 of the MSA CBRN Millennium Gas Masks and extra CBRN filters. They have voice amplifiers, outerserts, a few sets of spectacle frames and carrying cases. Plus we have a limited supply of small and medium but most of them are the adult size. We have around 200 of the Mark I kits."

"What don't we have?"

"An Abrams tank, a Bradley IFV, artillery, aircraft, Hummers and a LAV-25. Want me to go on?"

"I'm sorry I asked."

"Compare what we do have with what your average Mutant Zombie Biker (MZB) will have. We're way ahead of the curve. Can you see a MZB toting an M82 on a

Harley?"

"Maybe in the Pelican case, but otherwise no. I can see the logical of having a weapons squad as part of each Platoon, but are we going to try and lug those through the woods?"

"No, you'll only have the machine guns when you're here at the housing area. The machine guns would slow you down and you'll be going out as a rifle Platoon. We only have 3 families who weren't part of the MAG and if they don't have military rifles, we'll issue them some of those SKSs I mentioned."

The Mark I kit was used if you were exposed to nerve gas. It contained two auto injectors, atropine sulfate and pralidoxime chloride. Typically, US service members are issued three Mark I Kits when operating in circumstances where chemical weapons are considered a potential hazard. Along with the three kits are issued one CANA (Convulsive Antidote, Nerve Agent) for simultaneous use. CANA is the drug diazepam or Valium, an anticonvulsant.

The gas masks Matt listed were the latest models approved by the government for all circumstances. The real problem with a gas mask was the fact that the filters have short lives, depending on which chemicals are in the environment. As a biological filter, they were rated N100. Both MSA and 3M had a CBRN rated gas mask, but the rating only applied if you were using the correct filter element. With all of the equipment and supplies the MAG had, I was beginning to wonder how they did it with only a \$10,000 buy in. Maybe, I thought, it was because the MAG members themselves were the suppliers and could provide everything at cost.

I guess bad things did happen in threes or fours or maybe fives. When Cheryl called to say Matt was closing the store and moving to the MAG, I thought he might have been doing it on an impulse. Now, I didn't think so, especially since Chuck had been there when we got back with all of the available food from his warehouse. Plus the other MAG members were there or arrived shortly after we did. They'd never told me the secret password, I wondered if some otherwise innocuous phrase or word told them to circle the wagons.

Then, I remember what he'd said, "I'm going to shut down too. Cheryl and I will be moving here for a while." Maybe I'd better clean the wax out of my ears. If Chosin lived here and Matt and Chuck, the two other 'Directors' were moving, it was definitely time to circle the wagons. Password, my aching butt. They were secretive about the MAG but it wasn't some secret society.

"Want to go to the range and practice?"

"Did you get me the AR?"

"Yes and it has an A3 lower, full auto. I told Matt you wouldn't need a M203. Most times semi-auto will be fine. If we get outnumbered and it looks like we might get overrun, switch to full-auto then spray and pray. I got enough magazines that so you can carry double the normal load out of seven. You'll have twelve in pouches and one in the rifle stock magazine pouch. If you keep that for a quick backup and use another as your first mag, you'll have a total of 14."

"Can I carry that much?"

"You'd be carrying a lot more if you were doing the Crucible, the Corps final exam. You'd have the standard ammo loadout but would be carrying a pack that weighted 40% of your body weight. No sweat, babe, I have faith in you."

I'd said earlier that I was a little out of shape. The long walks through the woods had been working on my legs and I had the muscle tone back in them. I worked out some with some of the fellas with the weights and had most of my upper body strength back. Only time would tell how I'd done on building my endurance. ATM, I was pretty sure I wouldn't have been able to complete the Crucible. Unlike the Corps, the Army trained soldiers, the Corps trained Warriors. The Navy could be dated to October 13, 1775 while the Corps could be dated November 10, 1775, and the Army to June 14, 1775, before we were a country.

Kelly, by contrast, was in excellent condition. I truly don't know how she did it, maybe it was lugging baskets of dirty clothes to wash, hauling food back to the cabin and all those chores the stay at home partner usually does. She'd built some of her muscle tone working at the Creamery; one would have thought it would have been more automated. When we were working at Matt's she could handle any size package, the same as Matt or I could. Plus when she became my Observer, she was walking everywhere I did and carrying the M14 and ammo.

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We were not on patrol this week and had the duty of manning the three OPs. It wasn't our shift when the radio call came in. The OPs had been renumbered 1-2-3 going from left of center to center to right of center, facing outward.

"OP One, I have traffic."

"Roger, disposition?"

"Moving slow, they seem to be looking for something."

"OP Two, I have them, they're slowing down."

"Roger. All stations, Alert. First Platoon move up to back up the OPs. Include the

Weapons Squad."

"OP Two, they stopped at the driveway."

"Status?"

"Seem to be some MZBs, definitely not military or FEMA. They're armed."

"Hold your fire, the First Platoon is moving up to cover your back. If you're spotted, you're weapons free."

The reply came as two clicks on the radio, apparently the MZBs were getting too close for them to talk. Kelly and I had been assigned to OP Two for normal observation duties and we carefully moved up to join the two people currently in the OP. Meanwhile, the Weapons Squad had spread out and had the four machineguns ready to lend fire support.

The MAG – Chapter 7

We could see what they had been talking about. Six pickups, with 5-6 men per vehicle. Mostly armed with AKs or SKSs. Generally undisciplined, if I were a judge. I took Kelly's AR and moved it to full-auto, returning it to her. I slipped the Zeiss scope off the Super Match; it was too much scope for the situation. Just then, one of the MZBs spotted the OP and let loose a burst from his AK. I returned fire, punching a hole center mass and he folded up like a book.

A firefight broke out, the likes of which I hadn't seen since Boot Camp when we were using blanks. The MZBs tried to move to cover but the machine guns were working overtime, mowing them down. Most of their fire was directed at our OP and we hunkered down lest we get shot. That was the reason we had an infantry squad and a weapons squad, to provide us covering fire and suppressing fire. We were outnumbered 2 to 1 in the beginning, but a minute later the odds were even and a minute after that we outnumbered them 2 to 1.

There was an explosion as one of them tossed a grenade that fell short of its intended target. He received a 40mm grenade in response and it was on target. They tried to fall back to their pickups so they could get the hell out of Dodge which only left them more exposed. Within 5 minutes of it starting, it was over. We had not only the defender's advantage, but military training at one time in our past. Well, most of us anyway. There was a call, "No Quarter," but I wasn't going to shot a wounded man.

Apparently, that was the difference between those who hadn't seen combat and those who had. They had no such compulsions and there ended up being only one survivor on the other side, an unwounded man who had been carrying an AK. His

hands were duct taped behind his back and he was loaded in one of the pickups. The road was cleared and those six pickups moved to the buildings area. I hadn't gotten a close up look at the man I shot, but I did when we were loading bodies. I emptied the contents of my stomach in about 10 seconds. I'd seen combat but never anyone I knew I'd killed.

After the bodies were loaded, the deadfalls moved, the trucks moved and the deadfalls replaced, we shoveled dirt over the blood stains to restore the scene to what it looked like before the shootout. I put the Zeiss scope back on my rifle and Kelly and I walked back to the buildings. She had gone through 3 magazines to my few shots. Remind me not to piss her off. I knew that all of my shots had hit someone, but some of those people I'd hit had been hit by others firing at the same time I did. Conversely, Kelly had been on full-auto and spraying and praying. She was uncertain whether or not she'd hit anyone.

The backs of the pickups were filled with an assortment of loot. There was liquor, food, jewelry, firearms, ammo, camping equipment and about anything one could imagine. Their weapons had been collected and moved to the warehouse where they could be examined and possibly repaired. The Nam era vets were in charge of questioning the sole prisoner. I don't know what they did, maybe waterboarding, but in short order; they had all the information he had. Then, he was shot and his body added to the pile.

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"There's a meeting at the big house to discuss the attack."

"Ok Kelly, let's go."

"First of all, let me tell you who these people were. They were inmates of a county jail who managed to break out. They took over a couple of gun dealers and armed themselves, adding the AKs and SKSs. The M16s they had came from the Deputies in charge of the jail. They then started moving cross country, looting and staying one step ahead of the military and law enforcement. They had an assortment of pistols and revolvers, some from those very same Deputies."

"They looted, raped and pillaged a wide swath until they got here. When they saw the entrance road, they decided to follow it and see where it went. They didn't know we were here. That's why they weren't ready for us. One of their number spotted OP Two and opened fire and I believe you know the rest. We don't know who to return the loot to, so we'll add it to our stores. The weapons will be examined, repaired if possible, and issued to anyone who wants the full-auto option. Most of the vehicles have half a tank of fuel or less. No decision has been reached on their disposition."

"We'll bury the bodies in a deep common grave in the garden where, in time, they can provide fertilizer. You did good, people. Those of you who lacked combat experience got a taste of it today. It is not a pleasant experience, but a very necessary one. That's all I have at the moment."

There was no debriefing about the attack. Matt had been there and observed, best he could, what had happened. For the uninitiated, the common response would have probably been, "It happened so fast." The combat vets would probably reply, "Veni, Vidi, Vici." Julius Caesar's response to the Senate telling them same stuff, different day, ergo, I came, I saw, I conquered. Do you know Brutus's reply to Caesar when Caesar asked "Et Tu, Bruti?", "Yeah, Caesar, I had a burger and fries."

Kelly and I returned home and cleaned our guns, then reloaded the magazines, just in case. She warmed up some leftovers for supper and we listened to the radio for a while trying to get a feel of what was going on in our country. The bottom line was, it wasn't good. Some of the cities where there had been rioting had been nuked, experienced nerve gas attacks or had outbreaks of that new virus. Other cities weren't doing much better because of food shortages, gang violence and in some cases FEMA's heavy handed tactics.

"Ready for bed?"

"It has been a long day."

"I'm going to shower first, but I'll save you some hot water."

I hadn't even seen her turn on the hot water heater. Evening showers usually only meant one thing and we'd leave the hot water heater on after we showered. It meant she'd have on some flimsy nightie that left little to the imagination. We didn't have duty until noon the following day, we could sleep in. It got my mind off the events of the day.

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I was carrying the Super Match with the Zeiss scope because our shift was from noon until 4pm in OP Three. Matt commented before we left that they could probably salvage most of the rifles, around 30, give or take. They had found more grenades when they'd gone through the MZBs stuff, M67s, some tear gas and some flash-bangs. There had also been an M-24 SWS in .300 Winchester magnum.

Police Departments and Sheriffs Department don't use M67 grenades that I know of. That meant that the guys had probably hit an ammo resupply point for the National Guard. If that was the case, why were most of their weapons AKs and

SKSs? I saw some M16s, but why didn't they take more? I knew that had I gone to a National Guard resupply location, I'd have taken a whole lot more than they apparently did.

Kelly had decided to carry her A3 full time and had moved from the 1911 to a POS M9. She'd have twice as many shots, but she'd probably need twice as many shots. In a way, her having the A3 was a comfort because she could lay down a whole lot of suppressing fire while I selected my targets. Assuming, of course, that we had to shoot. We checked in regularly on the hour and half past and 8 radio calls later, our relief showed up. We hadn't seen anything and told the couple to watch their six before departing for our cabin.

Matt was waiting when we showed up. One of the weapons they had recovered had been a genuine A3 build by FN for Colt. It was complete with the now standard M68 (CompM4) Aimpoint Sight System. He said the weapon was in excellent condition and the Aimpoint sight was already adjusted. He suggested that Kelly take it to the range soon and confirm the sighting. All she had to do was put the dot on the target and pull the trigger. Matt said he had the 3X magnifier that worked with the sight, but Kelly declined. First, she said, she wanted to get accustomed to the red dot.

When she went to the range, I went along because I had removed and replaced the Zeiss sight. I wanted to confirm my zero. Not only was my zero right on, but I was shooting 1MOA at 1,000 meters. Kelly readily adapted to the red dot but still didn't want the magnifier. When we finished and got up to go back to the cabin, Chosin was standing there, arms crossed.

"You are going to be one of our designated snipers Brady."

"I'm not that good."

"The hell you say. I want you to come get the M24 SWS and give it a try. It's supposed to have an effective range with the day scope of 800 meters. I think the .300 Winchester should be effective out to 1,000 meters. I want you to find out."

"I'll try, but no promises."

"I looked it up in one of my books. It said the .300 Winchester magnum is a cartridge for large game hunting and long range shooting. It sees use in long range bench rest competition and has been adopted by Law Enforcement Marksmen and by some branches of the US military for use by their snipers. Maximum effective range is generally accepted to be 1210 yards (1097 m) with ammunition incorporating low drag projectiles. Sub 1 minute-of-angle accuracy out to 1000 yards (914 m) is not unusual in precision built rifles firing match grade ammunition. Velocity with a 180 grain projectile at max powder charge and 24"

barrel is 2975 ft/s \pm 25 ft/s (907m/s \pm 7.6m/s). Recoil from the .300 Winchester magnum is strong, much more than the .30-06 Springfield. Remington has made low-recoil rounds called "Managed-Recoil" available, that kick less and provide performance similar to the .300 Savage."

"I'll try."

"Do you have a shooting jacket?"

"No."

"I give you one when you get the rifle that should help absorb some of the recoil."

They had changed out the scope on the rifle and it now sported a Zeiss, something they seemed to have in quantity. It was the same Victory Diavari 6-24x72 scope with a different BDC. I tried on the jacket and it fit well enough so Kelly got a spotting scope and she and I headed for the range. I started at 100 yards and marked the BDC wheel as I advanced the range with Kelly noting my settings in a notebook. Damn, that rifle kicked, but because of the shooting jacket, it wasn't all that much worse than my 7.62 and about the same as the Barrett.

"What do you think?"

"You can shoot it well enough, Brady, but do you want to? You shot just as far with the Super Match and 175 grain Black Hills match ammo. It didn't require a shooting jacket either. Plus, you have 20 rounds instead of 5."

"Towards the end, I was afraid I was going to start flinching. I think I'll tell him thanks, but no thanks."

"Chosin, it's sighted in out to 1,000 meters. I marked the BDC and Kelly has the settings in her notebook. I think I'll have to pass on the rifle, I took too much of a beating. I was shooting equally well with the Super Match using 175 grain Black Hills match. I think I will stick with that, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind, but are you sure?"

"Yes, I am."

"Ok, we'll find someone else to use it, maybe someone who doesn't already have a Super Match. Regardless, we talked it over and you are now one of our designated snipers regardless of which rifle you use."

"How does that differ from a DM?"

"It means that Kelly and you are free to operate on your own if we have the need, rather than as part of a squad."

"In other words, not much."

"That's right; you'll be a DM team unless we need a sniper team."

Matt came over later with Cheryl and we all sat down for coffee.

"You asked Chosin a question and he didn't really give you a good answer, Brady. Let me see if I can explain. Our snipers will have access to the M82s for really long range sniping. They can use whatever shoots effectively at 1,000 meters for shorter range assignments. Our problem at the moment is we have 4 1,000-meter weapons and only 3 2,000-meter weapons. Plus, there are several good marksmen, but they're just not as good as our snipers."

"You remember, don't you, that one of the underlying theories behind the AK was that most riflemen didn't shoot more than 300 meters. During WW II, the Germans developed the assault rifle concept, based upon research that showed that most firefights happen at close range, within 300 meters. Our former Marines are at least twice that good if they've kept in practice. The Army pukes maybe 300 meters, the standard qualification. You seem to be the exception, Brady, but then you had a M1A rather than an AR-15."

"How do you rate my guns?"

"You should have bought the Taurus PT1911, same money, much better pistol with all those built in extras. Your loaded standard is a treasure by any measure. It shoots almost as well as the Super Match and it only cost half as much. You have to know I like the 590A1 because I gave them to you."

"There's nothing wrong with our SA .45s."

"No, there's not. However, the Taurus is simply a better gun."

"When the hurricane going to blow in?"

"What do you mean?"

"We've had an economic meltdown, terrorists attacked us, we have some kind of bug out there killing people and we were attacked by MZBs. If I understand how the rule of threes works, that's four so we have five more to go."

"Did you consider that the nukes, nerve gas and illness were all part of a coordinated terrorist attack? If they were, we're sitting on three, not four. The

only weapon the terrorists didn't use was radiological weapons. Those gas masks are rated CBRN – Chemical – Biological – Radiological – Nuclear."

"That brings up another question."

"Ok, ask."

"The buy in was ten grand, right?"

"Yes, so?"

"There is no way that covered the expense the group went to for us. How much does one of those Zeiss scopes cost? How much is a gas mask? How did you manage to buy us \$1,000 face of silver and that many one ounce gold coins, when we'd hadn't paid that much back?"

"Oops."

"Don't say oops, didn't you see that movie?"

"Yes I saw it. Well, I guess you figured out that the buy in wasn't exactly ten grand, huh?"

"What was it really?"

"Twenty-five. But that covers everything you needed and didn't have, including but not limited to, the Super Match. I spent what you paid back on silver, but added to it and got you the 5 gold coins while I was at it. I have no family and neither does Cheryl. We're too old to have kids, if we could. Our wills are made out and Kelly and you get it all."

"I'm in no hurry for that to happen."

"We aren't either, but there it is. When Chosin, Chuck and I started the MAG, Chosin put up his property to use and Chuck and I each put in fifty grand. That was dear money when we did it, but I had a good year and so did Chuck. We bought in volume and got the lowest prices we could. Many times when I'd order for the store, I'd order a like amount and have it delivered to the MAG. Chuck did the same thing. Chosin was a friend of Chuck's older brother, that how they knew each other. I knew Chuck from Nam."

"Anyway, Chuck's brother said we were totally crazy and wouldn't participate in the MAG. Didn't matter, he had a stroke and died and wouldn't have been around. We hooked up with some other Nam vets who had done well and persuaded them to join the MAG at the then current \$10,000 buy in. Over time the value of the

dollar fell and the buy in increased to maintain parity. In case you're wondering, the sale price on those Zeiss scopes is around \$3,700. We didn't pay that much, we got them wholesale by buying two dozen."

"That's ninety grand."

"More like seventy-five grand, but they weren't cheap. None of the really good stuff is ever cheap, you should know that. That doesn't mean that the most expensive is the best, either. We had plans on getting more of the M82A1s, but those plans fell through."

"Why, run out of money?"

"Not at all, we have the money for up to three more with the BORS systems and the Leopold scopes. We couldn't get Ronnie Barrett to sell them directly to us."

"Why not, you have a federal firearms license?"

"He has a distributor network. It's not that far to Murfreesboro, maybe I should get my FFL and drive up there."

"If you do, I'd go and ride shotgun."

"Are you sure you want to risk that, it's more than 25 miles."

"I'll go. If nothing else, I owe it to myself. Besides, I've always wanted to see those racks of \$8,000 rifles."

"I wonder if he'll take cash. We collected enough from those guys that attacked us to pay for three. Just in case, I'll take 36 ounces of gold."

"When do you want to go?"

"First thing tomorrow? We can bring Cheryl and Kelly along for backup. They may have to bat their baby blues to get him to turn loose of the rifles."

And, wiggle their butts. The XM109 was based on the M107, just used a 25mm round. It was never adopted because the recoil was excessive. I had no idea how many they built for evaluation. Barrett made a soft mount for the M107 that allowed it to be used in a pintle mount. The description specifically said it was intended to absorb recoil...

We left at sunup. By the time Barrett would have opened for business, we were sitting out front, waiting. Around 9am, one person showed up and to tell you the truth, he looked familiar but I couldn't place the face. Matt had a grin on his face

and gleam in his eye. We exited the vehicle and went to the door. It was locked and Matt pounded until he got a response. The guy who had come in came to the door and said, "We're closed." Matt held up his FFL and a wad of cash. That was enough to get the door unlocked.

"I'm sorry but we're closed. We only sell through a distributor network."

"Mr. Barrett, I want 3 M82A1Ms with the BORS system and the Leopold Mark IV 8.5-25x50mm ER/T M1. I have my FFL with me and will pay cash."

"Gee, I don't know."

"If you have one of those XM109 Payload rifles that we could fit with a soft mount and the BORS system, we'd be interested in one of those too."

"What would you do for ammo?"

"I assumed you would have some to test the rifle."

"We do, but it's mostly those blue nosed test rounds."

"I saw that on TV. I assumed you had some of the cartridges they developed for the OCSW, XM307."

"Do you have any idea how much that ammo costs?"

"Around \$25 a round."

"Not quite, but close. Come in and we'll talk."

He let us in and locked the door behind us. He led us to the assembly floor you see on the Military Channel or the History Channel. There were enough guns to take your breath away.

"Let me see your FFL."

Matt handed the original over.

"You're not class 3?"

"Not any more, it got to be too much of a hassle."

"You want hassles, get a manufacturing license. Alright, everything seems to be in order. I'll sell you 3 of the M82A1Ms with the BORS and Leopold scopes. I'll give you a deal; shall we say \$10,000 each?"

"That's MSRP!"

"True. It's also take it or leave it. I'll throw in the nylon strap set and a case of ammo with each rifle."

"Eighty rounds? Make that 400 rounds and you have a deal."

"You need extra magazines?"

"If you'll sell them to me wholesale."

"I'll do that. Let me fire up the copier and get a copy of your FFL. That rack over there has the rifles with the BORS and Leopold scopes – pick out three."

The beauty of the BORS was that it had a built in drop compensator for 100 different rounds and came with a CD containing more that you copied to your computer and downloaded to the BORS. Matt gave about half the retail price for the magazines and made sure he had 10 for each rifle. Barrett threw in 3 more strap sets for the 3 rifles the MAG already had. I spotted suppressors mounted on two rifles and asked about them.

"Experimental," I was told. "We can only sell those to class 3 dealers."

I picked up three of the cans and stuck them in a bag. I asked, "Ops, Inc.?" and Matt nodded. Barrett got the cases, the ammo and the strap sets and put everything on a cart. We loaded the stuff into the truck and took off. On the way back, Matt said I should take one of the new rifles and sight it in. It was mine to keep. I should get with our gunsmith and make sure the suppressor was properly installed. From now on, all of the .50 caliber rifles would only be fired if they sported a silencer. We didn't want to attract attention, he explained.

We arrived back just before lunch and after we had a bite to eat, I checked with the gunsmith and then Kelly and I headed to the range. I programmed in the Barrett 661 grain cartridges and used them for my initial sighting in. The rifle was right on. Next, I switched to the M1022 and, dialed in the BORS and had the same results. Finally, I loaded one magazine of the Raufoss and checked various ranges. I was doing fairly well out to around 1,500 meters, just under a mile. I had a little trouble doping the wind. We returned to the cabin and cleaned the rifle.

The MAG – Chapter 8

We now had 3 M1As, my loaded standard, the Super Match and Kelly's M14 conversion. We had one M16A3 with the M68 sight. We had 3 pistols, 2 SA .45s and one Beretta 92FS. We had 3 shotguns, 2 Mossberg 590A1s and a Remington

870 for hunting. Plus with had one Marlin .22 rifle. And, sitting in its Pelican case was a Barrett M82A1M, all fancy like. It was almost better than sex. Almost.

We spent more time preparing and training than fighting. That's the way it's supposed to work, if you do it right. You practice with your weapons until you can put a round right where you want it, with any weapon you have. You practice exercises so if something happens, you react rather than stand around trying to figure out what to do next. Again, the difference between Soldiers and Warriors. Then, when you don't have anything else to do, you spend time getting your body ready. Physical Training, running, things that build upper body strength. You're not trying to become the next Arnold, but you don't want to get shot because you got winded. And, it's all easier said than done.

We watched as the country folded up and feared that McCain would actually call in the UN. He finally announced that he wouldn't do that, opting instead to recall all of our troops from Iraq (130,000), Afghanistan (20,000) and Korea (29,000). I assumed he wouldn't stop there and would actually recall every Soldier, Sailor, Marine or Airman we had deployed anywhere outside the US another 15,000 or so. We had enough Iraqis trained to hold their own and had done almost the same in Afghanistan. Our role in Korea was primarily a support role and the North was disarmed, finally, so that shouldn't be a problem.

Kelly and I actually had a day off and were sitting around the cabin listening to the radio when we got another alert. The patrol that circumnavigated the site had run into a group camped behind the farm in the park. It must have been a large group because Chosin clearly said everyone, except the front observers. I selected the Super Match and Kelly her A3. We quickly assembled and drove to the nearest entrance point to the timber that would get us to where the patrol was located.

I heard someone say, "More than 50." I assumed that referred to the size of the group we were going to face. Our odds weren't that bad, we had around 30 people counting the patrol. The patrol that was an hour behind the first patrol was moving at breakneck speed to catch up to the first patrol. Maintaining noise discipline really slowed us down and it took over 30 minutes to reach the site. By then, the second patrol had caught up and was in position, increasing our number. Chuck moved up to be with his patrol and get the low down on the campers.

There was the usual initial standoff following by getting acquainted followed by an order to stand down. These people were residents from the county seat and they seemed to be well supplied. They had food, water, camping equipment and a freshly killed deer was hanging from a tree. We learned that they used bows to hunt lest they give away their location. They were relatively well armed, ARs, hunting rifles, a few foreign military rifles like FAL and H&K.

Matt joined Chuck and they began to negotiate in earnest. As long s they were

sleeping in tents, didn't they want to do it where they could have a few creature comforts? Maybe fresh running water, a little electricity and a place to store frozen meat? The group leader was resistant at first. The longer Chuck and Matt spent laying out the benefits, the more people in the group urged him to change his mind. Finally, with some assurances, he acquiesced. That's when we finally moved up and they saw the size of force we had assembled. We spent the next two hours helping them to take down tents and move things to the pickups so we could move them back to the cabin area.

Chosin had someone take about 2 dozen chickens out of the freezer and someone else start on potato salad and macaroni salad. Another person made Jello salads. The large grills were set up in preparation for a picnic supper. Short on picnic tables, we brought the folding tables out of the warehouse and set them up. I didn't know about those, everyone around here tended to be closed mouthed.

Meanwhile the remainder of us helped them set the tents back up and showed them the communal bathrooms in the warehouse. Everyone seemed anxious to get a shower and change into clean clothes. They took note of the washers, dryers and clothes lines and would probably spend the next couple of days getting caught up on laundry. Chosin had someone dig out the liquor we recovered from the MZBs and we actually had a cocktail hour while the chicken was cooking.

Chosin took the group leader aside with Matt and Chuck and they had a major discussion. It was evident to even the most casual observer that the discussion was going well, there were smiles all around. We were pretty full up, every cabin had occupants and Chosin plus the hay farmer and his family were living in the big house. I hadn't seen any more building materials and assumed we didn't have the capacity to build more cabins.

Kelly and I met so many new people we couldn't keep the names straight. In terms of skills and professions, we really added to the group. There was a physician, an ER nurse, a dentist, and more than a dozen craft trades not previously represented in the MAG. There were two women, friends, who worked together in a bakery, baking bread, cakes and making pastries. Oh, there was also a lawyer, the group leader. Fortunately, there were no media people.

Kelly and I had observation duty the next day and while we were gone, Chosin, Chuck and Matt got together with the group of newcomers and made certain they were properly armed and had ample supplies of ammunition. The road was cleared and a semi tractor with a box trailer pulled out about halfway through our shift, destination unknown.

We finished our shift before the semi returned and we just sitting around drinking a cold beer when the truck pulled in. We walked down to look and the trailer was full of lumber. Hundreds if not thousands of board feet of framing lumber, nails,

screws, insulation and so forth. The trailer was pulled down past the newest cabin, parked and unloaded. Then, they took off for a second load. Meanwhile, Seal came out of the warehouse with a forklift load of that damned tin siding. How much of that stuff did they have? He dropped it and went back for a second load, a lot, I guess.

Our propane man left in his pickup with someone riding shotgun and returned later with a semi load of 550-gallon tanks. They were unloaded and they returned to get his pickup. Not long after, the semi with the box trailer returned with more lumber, wood burning stoves, hot water heaters, air conditioners, plumbing fixtures, piping and everything they would need to build several cabins. I was wondering if it was loot, but apparently not, I saw Matt hand a stack of receipts to Chosin.

Chosin got together with that lawyer and the lawyer looked at the papers and nodded his head. I didn't see any money change hands so I had no idea what the lawyer was nodding about. First thing the following morning, they began to erect cabins, two at a time. There was a lot of help and the two cabins were finished, outside anyway, by evening. I noticed they worked after supper and apparently completed the cabins. Two tanks had been set by each one, plumbed and filled. A 12kw residential standby generator was also placed by each and hooked up. I didn't see any refrigerators, freezers or furniture though.

At the crack of dawn the following day, while Kelly and I were at OP One, the box trailer pulled out again. Refrigerators? It was followed by a pickup carrying about 8 people. Again, they didn't return until we were off shift and trying to get a little shuteye. It was well after lunch when we got up and the next two cabins were closed in and people working on the insides. The first and second new cabins were now occupied and they not only had furniture, but everything kitchen wise. There was a new refrigerator and freezer sitting in front of the two cabins getting the finishing touches along with stacks of furniture.

"They didn't waste any time moving them in, did they?"

"How many new cabins do you think they're going to build?"

"Off the top of my head? One for each family."

"That's what I thought, but how many families?"

"I didn't get a good count at the picnic, but I'd guess at least a dozen. If you figure the average family at 3.13 and there were over fifty people... wait, make that sixteen."

"Where did you get 3.13?"

"2004 census estimate, table number 53."

"Have it on your computer?"

"Yeah."

"Why?"

"Damned if I know, it was interesting at the time, I guess."

We watched for a week as they built 2 cabins a day. They built 14 cabins not 16, so I guess the average family size was larger than average. The last cabin built, not the first, was occupied by the lawyer. He seemed to be leading from the front and I saw him on the range practicing with an HK 91. He was alone, but there was a single woman about his age who moved in with him. None of our business, considering the relationship that Matt and Cheryl had for 10 years before getting married.

The new people had been in the park for over 2 weeks before our patrol noticed them. That translated into none of them being sick with this new bug going around. I was frankly concerned when they went out with the trucks to get building supplies and propane tanks and later to refill the propane tanker. While there had been no indication on the radio or TV that the bug was in the area, one couldn't be too careful. I later learned that they used N100 disposable masks and exam gloves.

Once the cabins were finished, the activities slowed considerably. People not on patrol or manning the OPs were training the new residents. This was more of an average group than we were, not everyone had military service in their backgrounds. Some weren't in the greatest physical condition, either. They weren't 18 year old recruits at Parris Island or Camp Pendleton. They literally had to work their butts off, and some of those beer guts, too. Some of those guys almost sweat blood before they got into condition, and we actually took it easy on them.

The thing about being a trainer as opposed to a trainee is that you have set the standard. Ever seen a DI who couldn't outperform his troops? In order to train them continuously, we had had to take a turn and I found a few muscles I hadn't been acquainted with for some time. Only when they were nearly some semblance of physical fitness did we turn to teaching them to shoot. Unlike the lawyer, Mel, who could shoot really well, most of the women hadn't shot guns much and many of the men had more bad habits than good.

It's sometimes harder to un-teach bad habits than it is to teach good habits. The women who never used a gun before were the easiest to train. Next came guys

like Mel who just needed a little polishing. Finally came the guys who we had to un-teach and re-teach. We spent a lot of time on breathing and balancing a penny on the barrel. We spent more time getting them over flinching.

After Chosin, Matt and Chuck took back their M82s, they issued the new ones to the three of us who had trained to use theirs. While my M82 belonged to me, the other two belonged to the MAG because they were mostly paid for out of MAG funds. Yes, the money from the MZBs became MAG money. In a way, Chosin, Chuck and Matt were the MAG, they'd started it. They'd also poured tons of lost profits and costs into it to get it set up.

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"My fellow Americans,

"After grounding all air traffic and placing numerous cities in quarantine, we believe we have the biological weapon contained. The CDC has determined that this is an engineered virus. However, at this time there is neither treatment nor any vaccine that can prevent it or reduce its effects. We have returned most of our troops to our shores and the rest are in transit. These troops will be assigned to rescue operations in the bombed cities.

"Yesterday, several trains were bombed in the London Underground. Unlike the July 7th bombings, more trains were involved and more people killed and injured. The death toll stands at 271 and the injured at approximately 800. Prime Minister Brown has called the attacks outrageous and asked persons in the United Kingdom to raise their awareness of possible further attacks. We send our condolences to the British people.

"While we're officially in a recession, my advisors state that it is clearly a depression. Unemployment is at near record highs and only exceeded by the unemployment level during the Great Depression. Presently, unemployment rates are at 15%, lower than the 25% plus of the Great Depression which only returned to 15% by 1940.

"At the present time, our greatest concern is the distribution of food. Food is available, I repeat, food is available. We are suspending incentives for production of biofuels and penalizing for use of corn and soybeans for other than human or livestock consumption. The available fuel will be expensive, but the choice is that or going hungry. I will not allow that to happen. If you have the capacity to grow a garden, please do so. Heirloom seeds will be available at all county extension service offices, free of charge.

"I believe if we all pull together, we will get past the disarray in our economy and the terrorist attacks.

"Thank you and good night"

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I was talking about training the new people to be Soldiers, if not Warriors. In the process, I sort converted from former Soldier to current Warrior. I had to out run them, outdo them at every task and shoot better. It was about ten times worse than AIT. I did sixteen weeks of One Station Unit Training (OSUT) at Fort Benning consisting of both Basic Combat Training (BCT) and Advanced Individual Training (AIT) with the 198th Infantry Brigade.

Now, about that speech. Most of us watched on TV, at least those that could crowd into Chosin's main floor. It appeared to me that he got his head out of his butt and was starting to make changes needed to resolve SOME OF our problems. Pretty dirty trick, if you ask me, to pull guys out of Iraq and Afghanistan and send them to the nuked cities for rescue work. It was too damned late to rescue anyone, anyway. Body clean up was more like it. The might find a few souls who managed to survive because they found shelter, but not too many.

Do you know how much radiation protection that MOPP gear provides? Plenty until the charcoal starts to sift out of the over garments and after that, none. Figure a couple of days, max. You want radiation protection; you get one of those suits like they wear in nuclear power plants. There is the civilian Demron suit for around \$1,400, or more for a top of the line Hazmat suit with SCBA. Ok, you don't know that one – Self Contained Breathing Apparatus – a Scott AirPak or similar, what the firemen use... Among the leading manufacturers of SCBA for the USA fire services are: MSA, Draeger, Survivair, Interspiro, Scott, and ISI (International Safety Instruments). MSA is the company that made our gas masks.

Which, of course, brings up a point. Matt said we had around 50 Millennium gas masks. What about these new folks? We had 5 cases of SKSs and the firearms we collected from the MZBs, ergo, guns running out of our ears. Plenty of ammo and food, too. Could they get gas masks? They could if someone went to a location where they could make a phone call and the vendor (Approved Gas Masks) was still in business. Think about it, the mask was \$300, a spare filter \$45, the voice amplifier \$280, spectacle frames \$54, tinted outsert lens \$35 and bag \$55. \$769 times 50 plus shipping was around 40 grand. And, they weren't even pulling guard duty yet!

When I shared that with Kelly, she said she understood why the buy in was so high. "A billion here, a billion there, pretty soon you're talking real money." A gentleman who called The Dirksen Center with a reference question relayed that he sat by Dirksen on a flight once and asked him about the famous quote. Dirksen replied, "Oh, I never said that. A newspaper fella misquoted me once, and I thought it sounded so good that I never bothered to deny it."

A week to ten days later, all of the new people were sporting the gas masks and Matt was smiling from ear to ear. I got curious and asked.

"That lawyer? Somewhat of a survivalist type. He wired the money to pay for the gas masks. I put up the money for the cabins and he repaid me in Krugerrands."

"You had that kind of money lying around?"

"Business has been very good for years. Recently, it's been even better, you should know, you helped pack the orders. Good markups in this business. Besides, I paid cash and he repaid me in gold at \$1,250 an ounce, below market."

"What's it running now?"

"Close to \$1,500 and silver is pushing \$30."

I'd have to think on that one. I knew how good business had been since I started working for Matt. It was more of a six person operation, most of the time, and he and I did all of the packing. When he hired Kelly, we were running three weeks behind on deliveries. When Cheryl started to help, we finally got caught up. I think he paid her the same wage as I earned and they lived together, so maybe they saved most of their money. Some people are like that, frugal 99% of the time and, spend like a drunken sailor when they see something they really want or need. I guess that might explain the suitcase they never let get out of their sight, probably full of \$20 bills.

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Before Matt gave us the bag of silver and those five gold coins, Kelly and I were making ends meet but only getting ahead slowly. Not that it was a bad thing, that's just how it was. We still had 4 gold coins worth around \$6,000 and the bag of silver, now worth around \$21,000 plus. That was more money than we'd had in our lifetimes. What little we spent now was at the warehouse and usually dimes or quarters. A dime was now worth about \$2.15, a quarter about \$5.36 and a half about \$10.73.

We had to really push Mel's people to get them up to speed. The shooting wasn't the hardest part, it was the physical conditioning. Even pushing it took nearly 2 months for most of them to be able to pass a simple PT test of sit-ups, pull-ups, pushups and running. Since I was one of the younger men, guess who did much of the PT training? By the time we were down to a half dozen still needing to pass the test, I could have passed the Crucible. And, so could Kelly, she was right in there with me working with the women.

"You're one lean, mean fighting machine."

"Thanks, but I could say the same for you."

"I've only lost about two pounds."

"Kelly you replaced it with muscle mass. I'm surprised you didn't gain weight."

"How much weight have you lost?"

"About ten pounds. In terms of fat, probably more like 20, but, like you, I have more muscle. It was tough at first not letting the newbie's know how out of condition I was, but we both managed to stay a step ahead of them."

"Could we pass the Crucible now?"

"Probably with our eyes closed."

"I've been working with the M14 Matt gave us. I'm up to 600 meters now. What does it take to be a DM?"

"With the M14? 600 meters – you're there. I'll tell Chosin and you can shoot for him."

"Would they break us up?"

"I don't think so. I think it would be ideal to have a DM paired with a sniper. We're not that short of DMs anyway with the new people like Mel. You know with the new people, this place is getting crowded. We can field almost a Company now."

"How many is a Company?"

"Around 140. We're not there, but we have over 100, all told, counting the teenagers who can shoot."

"Have the boys been much trouble?"

"They're easier to teach than their fathers. The older people become the independently minded they become. They're also in far worse shape than the kids. I assume it's the same with the girls?"

"Yes, but the difference isn't as large as you're suggesting. Most of the girls are fit and their mothers aren't that far behind. If we get a chubby girl, most likely that applies to her mother as well. We use a different approach on those people, working them into condition slower."

"Then you have some who aren't ready?"

"Only a few. Their living in the woods on short rations made some difference. Before they had a chance to start pigging out, Mel told them what he understood we'd expect. Many of them stayed on diets. They have more people than we do, who do you think will lead their second Platoon, since I assume Mel will lead the first?"

"Probably one of our Vietnam vets, hopefully a Marine."

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"Honey, Matt was by. He wants to see you in the big house ASAP."

"What's he want?"

"He didn't say."

"I'll be back."

"Yes Matt, you wanted to see me?"

"Upstairs Brady with Chuck, Chosin and Mel."

"What's going on?"

"Brady, Mel's group has two Platoons and only one Platoon leader."

"Kelly and I were just taking about that. I figured you put one of the Vietnam vets in the position, preferably a Marine."

"That's just it Brady, none of the other Nam vets are Marines. The only person we have who fills the bill is you. Doing all of that training moved you up from a grunt to a Marine."

"I have no experience as a Sergeant, I only made Corporal."

"Corporal is an NCO rank. You led a fire team, right?"

"Yes."

"Think of it as a promotion to Sergeant, or Staff Sergeant if you prefer. You've had experience now as a drill instructor and have the most recent active duty service of any member of the MAG. Besides, we've seen you working out and you really have become a Warrior."

"There are other people far more qualified than I am. What about Seal, Ranger, Grenada or Panama?"

"Seal and Ranger have staff positions. You're far better than Grenada or Panama. Kelly will be one of your DMs. We wouldn't offer you the job if you couldn't do it and do it well."

"Well, I, uh..."

"Do it Brady," Matt said."

"I accept on the condition that Kelly approves."

"We'll assume she does unless we hear different."

"What was that about?"

"They told me who they picked to lead the 2nd Platoon in Mel's group."

"Anyone I know?"

"It's someone you know really well. By the way, you're now a DM."

"Well, who did they pick?"

"Me."

"You were a Corporal."

"I guess if we had ranks, I'd now be a Staff Sergeant. You'll be one of my two DMs. They told me a Marine Staff Sergeant is normally achieved after 10 to 12 years in service. In the combat arms units, a Staff Sergeant usually is billeted as a Platoon Sergeant for 30+ Marines. He may also be tasked as the Company Gunnery Sergeant, or a Platoon Commander if required. He is the senior tactical advisor to the Platoon Commander by virtue of time in service, previous deployments, and experience and is responsible for the proficiency training and administrative issue of his Marines. I told them I'd take it subject to your approval."

"I approve of you in every way, Brady."

"I was afraid you say that."

"Worried you can't cut it?"

"I'm worried about the responsibility. As a Corporal, I was in charge of a fire team, not a Platoon. A fire team is about half a squad or 4 people."

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"She said yes. What do you want me to do? We still have a few men who aren't up to the task."

"We're going to assign Seal and Ranger to finish off their training. How are they with the firearms?"

"Proficient. Their problem is mostly not meeting necessary physical standards."

The MAG – Chapter 9

"Too many beers and too much pogy bait? We'll fix that. Give us four weeks and we'll divide them between you and Mel."

"What more do you expect to happen? We've had our three events, the meltdown, the terrorist attacks and those MZBs."

"There is no rule that limits the number of disasters Brady. The rule of threes is an old wives tale that probably related to people dying. It's either superstition or urban legend."

"See Matt, maybe I was right after all. The nukes, the chemical attacks and the biological warfare could be three separate events. From that point of view, if we include the meltdown and the MZBs attack, we're up to five."

"It's over when it's over and not before. Does it matter if it's three or five?"

"No I suppose not. Now that we're up to four Platoons, what's the plan?"

"Why are you asking us? You're as much a part of the decision as we are."

"I assume we're going to continue the patrols and the observers?"

"Is that your recommendation?"

"I guess, it has worked so far."

"We feel the same way and I only asked to see what you would say. We've seen you shoot and have seen how you teach. What we couldn't see was how you think."

"A test?"

"A learning experience, for us. We have a total of 8 squads, or will have once the others finish their training. We propose to use three and one-half squads to handle the OPs and four to cover the woods on patrol. When the last squad is ready, we'll go with four and four."

"Why not use one Platoon for the OPs like we have and one for patrols? We could keep five and one-half squads in reserve and ready to respond to either if something comes up."

"I told you, didn't I Matt. I figured that's what he'd want to do. You owe me ten bucks."

Matt handed Chuck a pre-65 half dollar and told him to keep the change. I wondered how many more tests I was expected to pass. My suggestion made sense because we had only a limited number of handy talkies. Putting 4 squads on patrol would have improved coverage but limited the comms. Win-lose or lose-win, it amounted to the same result. Unless we could come up with more radios of some kind, we'd have a problem.

"If we had more radios, we could go with 4 and 3½. Do we have any more 2 meter radios?"

"Fresh out; do they have to be 2 meter?"

"No, any radio would work as long as they have enough range to reach back here. Why, do we have other radios?"

"You know what FRS/GMRS radios are?"

"They sell them at Radio Shack."

"The GMTS radios can use up to 5 watts of power. That's more than enough to reach back here. They're Midland 2-Way 26-Mile Waterproof Radios with NOAA, Model: GXT800VP4 and come in a 2 pack. They have rechargeable Ni MH batteries and will work on a pair of AAs."

"How many radios do you have?"

"We bought 30 packages so we have 60 radios."

A FEW surprises? I wonder where they were hiding the Abrams tank and the Bradley Fighting Vehicle. Those radios weren't that expensive and if they bought them at retail and paid tax, they wouldn't have spent \$2,500. That wasn't the

point, why were they using the 2 meter radios when they had these? The range on a 2 meter radio was better, but not that much better. Forget the retail; these guys got everything at cost, or close to.

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In a way, it was like being struck by lightning, this 'promotion' was one hell of a shock. Reflecting on the time I spent with Mel's people, I'd done half their training and knew them inside out. Their strengths, their weaknesses, and how some of them thought. Maybe it wasn't as big of a stretch as I first thought. Kelly might be a member of my unit and one of my DMs, but she was my wife first, last and always. I sure wasn't going to call her Jacobs so that meant I've have to be on a first name basis with the entire Platoon. Easy enough to do, you don't spend that much time training people and not know first and last names. What would that do to discipline? I decided to discuss it with her and get her opinion.

"Kelly, can I ask you a question?"

"Sure, what do you want to know?"

"What to call you. If I put the Platoon on a first name basis it could affect discipline when we get in a situation. I just don't feel comfortable calling you Jacobs."

"Why not, that's my name? You call me Jacobs and don't give it another thought. I know who keeps your bed warm at night. How are they going to handle it now that we have more people?"

"When we get the last fire team, we'll have 4 Platoons, or 8 full squads. They have more radios, I just found out, and we're going with 4 squads on Patrol and 3½ on OP."

"Do they plan to switch around?"

"We didn't decide."

"We?"

"Chosin, Chuck, Matt, Mel and me. The directors are Chosin and the four Platoon leaders."

"So you have input into operational planning?"

"I was surprised too, Kelly. I mentioned several others I thought should get the position, but Seal and Ranger have staff positions and Grenada and Panama

weren't ready according to Chosin."

With four squads on patrol, we could start one every hour and create a two on-six off schedule. Our squads consisted of eight riflemen, including the fire team leaders, and a squad leader. Every other squad had a DM and led once squad, the one with Kelly. Working together at the OPs, taught us to work together to the point where we could read each other's minds. Tramping through the woods on patrol made noise discipline net to impossible.. We worked on it and cleaned twigs and such out of our regular paths.

We'd been here for about three months and only had two confrontations, the first with the MZBs and the second with Mel's group. From time to time, the President would deliver another address outlining the progress the military was making. It was generally less than they hoped for, but San Francisco and Denver had been cleaned up and they were trying to do what they could to clean up the nuke targets. The CDC had isolated the virus, but couldn't identify it because it had been engineered. As of his most recent broadcast, they were working on a treatment and a vaccine at the same time. He didn't know how long that would take, at least six months, he said.

The FBI had linked the bombings, chemical attacks and the release of the virus to a single group of Saudis attending US colleges. They hadn't located any of them, yet. The Extension service offices now had the seeds to distribute and he urged everyone to get one seed kit for each family. It contained around 40 varieties of seeds.

His final note talked about the UK. They had also been attacked with the virus and had called for the Britons' to remain isolated at home. Considering the state of England's healthcare system, that was probably for the best. The various members of the UK each maintained their own separate healthcare systems. That included England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Although Ireland and Northern Ireland share the same island, they're separate countries and Northern Ireland is part of the UK while Ireland is a separate county.

The county extension service office was in the county seat, but we'd be entitled to one kit for each family or a total of 30 kits. Chosin said I should go with Mel to pickup the seeds. A list of the resident families was made for the extension service in case they were keeping track. Mel was selected because he's the lawyer with contacts in the county seat. I was chosen because of my sniper qualifications. Mel had his HK 91 and I had the Super Match because we were going during daylight hours. They hadn't lifted the dusk to dawn curfew.

We figured 40 minutes each way plus maybe another 40 minutes getting the seed kits. Two hours plus any delays, maybe two and one-half hours, tops. We got there without problem and found ourselves in a line, our first delay. When we'd

worked our way to the front of the line, Mel gave the guy the list of names and said we were picking up 30 kits, one for each family on the list. The bureaucrat behind the counter said one kit per person.

Mel turned red in the face and positively sputtered. Then he took out his cell phone and called the sheriff, asking him to come to the extension office code 3. About 20 minutes later the sheriff showed up, it was a long way, two blocks. Mel explained the situation to the sheriff and told him we couldn't afford the fuel to drag all 30 families to the extension office. The sheriff looked at the list and said, "I wondered where they were."

"We headed to the park and found an open area we can cultivate if we have the seeds."

"What's the problem Barney, give Mel the seeds."

"No can do sheriff, one can per family."

"You have a list of the families. You can keep it to make sure they don't come back individually for another can."

"It's highly irregular."

Mel went from red to crimson and I thought he was about ready to pull his Kimber .45.

"Calm down Mel, before you have a heart attack or stroke," the sheriff said.

"This butthead is just mad because I got a judgment against them a couple of years back."

"You fellas carrying?"

"Yes. You gave me my CCW, you should know it's legal."

"I have one too, sheriff, I worked in a gun store."

"Damn it, Barney the line is getting long, give them their seeds."

"He'll have to sign for them."

"I'll sign, give me the paper."

"You have to sign 30 papers."

"Whatever."

"I can sign my own," I offered.

"How many cans do you want?"

"Just one, but we're together."

Mel just scribbled something on each signature line, his handwriting was awful. We got the boxes of seeds and headed home. When we passed an open café, Mel asked if I wanted lunch, his treat."

I said sure so he parked and we went in. The menu didn't have much to offer, you could get a burger and fries or fries and a burger. And if you were really hungry the blue plate was biscuits and gravy. An egg added a buck fifty and grits were two fifty. The hamburger and fries? Six bucks. Cheese was a buck extra. The cheapest drink was homebrewed beer and they'd never heard of Sam Adams.

When we got back, the seeds went into the warehouse. That's another thing, the warehouse. It seemed to be able to hold whatever was put in it. Everything communal went in there. Plus it acted as a grocery store of sorts. I couldn't understand why some things were free and others you had to pay for. The non-renewable resources were generally free and the renewable resources cost. Example? The \$3,700 scope was free, the eggs were sold by the dozen and they were still a dime a dozen, which meant the price was up to around \$2.50.

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A person generally doesn't go from being a DI to a Platoon leader, 'The Sands of Iwo Jima' notwithstanding. John Wayne's role was Sgt. Stryker. Based on one of the two vets named Stryker who won the Medal of Honor? The Stryker IFV is named in honor of Spc. 4 Robert F. Stryker, who received the Medal of Honor for his actions during the Vietnam War, and Pfc. Stuart S. Stryker, who received the award for his actions during World War II. Both men were killed in action. They were not related. My new role was a combination of leader and friend. It would take some adjustment, on my part. They sure groaned when they learned I was their new Platoon leader. It was different now, they were in top condition and all we had to do was keep them that way, plus spend some of their free time on the range. Our Platoon was much smaller than the usual military Platoon. They basically consisted of four fire teams and a weapons squad. Each weapons squad now had a Ma Deuce, we had four and two M1919A4s and we had eight. Add a grenadier and one person with a handful of rockets and you had a weapons squad.

You had to ask yourself, to what end? More MZB attacks? FEMA calling to collect

the food? The military rounding up people to put them in camps? I wasn't sure because McCain reversed himself on the gun issue and allowed people to claim those they'd turned in. With the bug out there, McCain had basically implemented a quarantine, limiting people to a 25 mile radius from their homes, or, I suppose where they were staying.

We didn't have any of the internal strife that Halfast wrote about in 'Lights Out' so we didn't have our own Jon Olsen. There was the occasional bickering, but that's nothing new. When an issue came up, it was quickly resolved, usually by Chosin and sometimes Mel.

In less than 30 days, the remaining trainees finished their training and were assigned. Those of us already on 'active duty' overcame the rough spots and were pulling together. It wasn't all OP and patrols. We had a garden to grow and decided not to bother with the netting because it would cut the sunlight too much. The five acre garden patch would do for this year and if we were still here a year from now, we could use the harvested seed to grow ten acres. Besides, we could plant late fall crops and get a more production. The secret was in the varieties that you planted, we got the list of winter garden crops from:

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/cat...ml/pnw/pnw548/>

How? The cell tower was now back up and we could use it to connect to the internet. According to the radio, the government had 'disconnected' the bombed cities and brought the power grid back up. We didn't know it had been down, but that might explain why we lost the cell phone. While the epidemic/pandemic wasn't under control, yet, the quarantines seemed to be working and the number of increased cases of the virus was leveling off. And, after the last trip to get the seeds, the MAG site was on total lockdown.

"We need more labor for the garden. I think we should eliminate the patrols for now and just maintain the three OPs."

"My Platoon has the OPs at the moment, do you want us to keep them, or switch around," I asked.

"Keep them. We'll get our best snipers and DMs to cover them. Do you have enough people or do you want some of Chuck's and my people?"

"I think if you want the best, we'll take some of your people, Matt."

"You are about our best marksman; feel free to chose who you want. Try to go with four on and eight off. That will mean you need a total of eighteen people, six for each shift."

"Any objections if Kelly and I take a shift?"

"I guess not. I saw her using your Super Match and she's nearly as good of a shot as you are. A little practice on her part and you may become number two."

"I think you should put a Zeiss on your M1A and try and stick to daylight shifts. That will put two snipers in the same OP," Chuck suggested.

"She's not up to speed on the Barrett."

"You think? Think again. It may be a little heavy for her to carry, but shooting it isn't a problem. She's been shooting the M1022 and can shoot about a mile, putting the bullet in the target nearly every time. Her only problem is doping the wind and you had the same problem for a while. Personally, I rate the two of you as nearly equal in your skills."

"Pretty hard not to shoot well when you have a \$3,800 rifle with a \$3,800 scope. That goes double for the Barrett."

"Is there anyone you know of who can outshoot you?"

"Not that I know of, no. Excluding Kelly, I guess."

"Kelly and you will take the center OP. We'll get our second and third best teams to take the same location. Once we have it laid out, you can make up the schedule."

"Gottcha."

That was both good and bad. We didn't have to haul three rifles and their ammo as far but that was offset by how much everything weighed. The exercise was good for us; it helped us stay in condition. We got it set up and then added time for physical conditioning so the two of us could stay in top shape. I assigned a couple of my top people to do PT for the two Platoons. I passed the word that they would stay in shape, or else.

During drills, we found that the response time had been cut in half by making the people stay in top physical condition. With our cutting off the patrols, my greatest fear was that someone would find a way into the conservation area where we couldn't observe them and attack us from the side or rear. I voiced those concerns on more than one occasion but the other four men didn't agree with me.

Kelly and I had spent 4 hours at OP Two and were just finishing up our run. I heard a rifle shot, but being only one, I couldn't tell the direction it came from. The same problem Chosin used to have with those three hunters. We swerved to the cabin, threw on BDUs and got our rifles and pistols. Uncertain what to do,

Kelly and I headed for the big house.

"Get a patrol out, right damned now. Follow that up with a second one hour behind and have the remainder of the people working in the garden with their rifles. If the patrol finds anyone, we can respond in force, lickedy split."

Bammmmm, another bullet whined putting the location of the shooters to the left of the compound if you were looking to the front. Mel, Chuck, Matt and I gathered forces and headed in the direction of the shot. We didn't have time to put out the first patrol so they would be coming with us. We no sooner entered the woods than another shot came, from our left indicating 'they' were behind the MAG site. We split into two groups, one continuing on and the other heading towards the back. As we reached the back and began to move through the woods, a third shot rang out, again to our left.

"Chosin, Matt. We're surrounded on three sides."

"How big of a force?"

"We haven't found anyone, yet."

"It could be a few as three riflemen."

"Possibly, or it could be many more."

"The OPs don't report any activity."

"Do you have enough people to go to the third location?"

"I'll see what I can do."

Was it my worst nightmare? Or, was it just three riflemen creating a diversion so the majority could attack from the front? Because we'd killed every last one of the MZBs, there was no one to put out the word to stay away from our place. The nearest large city was around 100 miles away and if it was the gang in that city, they had sure come a long way. I only knew of one gang in that city, MS-13. Mara Salvatrucha gang members maintain contact between groups in the United States and El Salvador for several specific reasons. In El Salvador, a hand grenade sells for \$1.00-\$2.00 US currency and an M-16 rifle will sell for approximately \$200.00-\$220.00 US dollars. This communication and alliance provides a mechanism for MS gang members to access military-style munitions and also establishes a network to traffic illegal firearms into the United States.

This time, if we weren't all killed, we have to leave at least one survivor to put out the word, "Don't mess with those folks up by that conservation area, they're bad

news." The first team reached the apparent location of the first shot and found nothing. The second team reached their area with the same results. A call was sent back to the CP that it appeared that the shots had been diversions and they'd better keep a good eye on the front.

When we arrived at the third location, we immediately came under fire. It appeared that there were more of them than us, based solely on the volume of fire. I ducked as a round went whizzing by my ear and then Kelly went down. I belly crawled to her and she had a through and through in her left biceps. It was bleeding pretty badly and spurting so I assumed an artery was involved. I pulled out my advanced clotting sponges (ACS – actually a small bag of QuikClot) and put one on each hole then wrapped her arm in gauze and next an ace bandage. That seemed to stop the blood and I left her be and joined the others.

I pulled the Zeiss off my rifle and began pouring lead at any target I could see. I couldn't tell if I was hitting them or if they were ducking. After maybe ten minutes, that seemed more like ten hours, the fire from their side lessened, a little. Most of their fire was auto while most of ours was semi-auto. Poppuns. Sounded like M16 fire. A grenade came our way, but fell short. Our grenadier lobbed a 40mm HEDP back at the guy. As our M1919A4s came online and lay down a withering burst of fire, the other side backed off.

The Ma Deuce, being the heaviest machinegun, had gone with the first group. I put out a radio call and they were humping it here. It would probably be over before they showed up. I saw one guy on their side retreating and fired, but missed. I didn't see him again, so there was at least one messenger to pass the word. The hardest part was to keep my anger, because of Kelly, in check and not do something foolish.

We were soon joined by other members of my Platoon while others moved to the front to back up the OPs. An attack came at the front, but not before the reinforcements had arrived. Between the snipers, DMs and the others, this gang ended up much like the MZBs, all dead. I say much like because one of the MZBs had survived, until we shot him after questioning. When the return fire stopped, I sent out a fire team to check on our attackers. The results? All dead or, dead now. They came back carrying several M16s and said there were more grenades. We gathered everything up while I waited for medical assistance for Kelly and the other wounded.

"My hand is numb."

"How numb?"

"Totally, I can't move my fingers, but I can rotate my wrist."

"Can you move your forearm?"

"A little."

"Must have hit a nerve, hon. There are several major nerves in the upper arm."

"Will it be ok?"

"I suppose that depends on whether the nerve was cut or just bruised. Nerve tissue doesn't grow back very fast if it grows back at all. If it was bruised or pinched, you may get it back."

"You ok? You didn't get hit or anything?"

"Luck of the Irish, I guess."

"You're German."

"Yeah, whatever. Here comes the Doc."

"Whatcha got?"

"Through and through in her biceps. I used ACS, gauze and an Ace bandage."

"Let's just leave it on until we get her back to the big house."

"She says her hand is numb."

"Wrist?"

"Same thing. She can bend her arm at the elbow and can rotate her wrist."

"Steady blood flow or spurting?"

"Spurting."

"Probably hit the brachial artery, won't know until I check. She was lucky you got it bandaged really quickly."

The MAG – Chapter 10

At least they had stretchers. I don't believe that Kelly could have walked all the way back to the big house. I reattached my scope for easier carry and got her rifle and the Tac-Force vest they'd taken off her. I'm glad I was in condition, two rifles and 1½ loads of ammo added up. The timber was dense enough they couldn't

walk back in a straight line, hence when they emerged, I was ahead of them. They loaded two stretchers in the back of a pickup and off we went with me sitting on the tailgate.

They did triage when all of the wounded were at the big house and Kelly was in third place. The ER nurse worked on the second patient and the doctor lost the first. He turned to Kelly and started to treat her wound. He cleaned it out, found the partially severed artery and closed it with a few stitches. He said that it appeared to him that the nerve was bruised but not severed. He suggested that I go and report in to Chosin. I took the hint and did just that.

"You see the tattoos?"

"Yes, MS-13. We got around 25 to 30 M16s and some grenades from the bunch out back."

"We got more than that from the front group. They didn't have many handguns. They had a whole lot of grenades, though. I suppose we killed them all and nobody will get the word to leave us alone."

"I think one got away. I shot at him, but missed. Unless someone else shot him, he's gone."

"Good, there nothing like advertising."

"I was thinking something along the same lines. When we went up against the MZBs, there was only one survivor and we killed him. That may have been a mistake."

"It wasn't, but can you tell me why?"

"Uh, because he saw the home place?"

"Right. The guy you're talking about that got away only knows that his bunch ran into a lot of fire. We left the bodies lay up front for now and if he sees them, he should assume that we're an overpowering force."

"Are we?"

"What, an overpowering force? Up to this point, yes. Two battles and one killed. Less than a dozen casualties. That's one hell of a lot better than we did in Korea or Nam. In Desert Storm, we had 956,600 troops and our losses were 356 killed in action and 776 wounded in action, one tenth of one percent. We're over that, but considering how many we lost in Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, we're ahead of that curve. How's Kelly doing?"

"Doc repaired her artery and said it didn't appear that the nerve wasn't severed. He was still working on her when he told me to come see you and report in."

"Probably wanted to give her a more thorough exam."

"Why, she was shot in the arm?"

"Maybe I spoke out of turn, ask her."

"Chosin knew something I didn't about Kelly? He had his finger on the pulse of the MAG site and probably knew more than most, but really, what could he know that I didn't? I tried to think of something than thought back over the past month. It came to me in a flash and Kelly could confirm it."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Tell you what?"

"That you were pregnant."

"I just found out a few days ago and was afraid you'd pull me off the team."

"You're off the team anyway until that wound heals. Did Doc give you any idea how long it would take for you to overcome the damage to the nerve?"

"He said it was anyone's guess. It could be a few days, weeks, months or maybe never. However, I can move my wrist a little."

"How much?"

"About this far," she said. The movement was there but didn't amount to much, maybe a quarter inch. I knew nothing about the nerves in the arm, would it start at her wrist and progress to her hand or was that another nerve? Doc was tied up with some of the other wounded so I didn't bother him.

"You're not mad are you?"

"Of course not, it's about time we started a family. "Do you have to stay or are you free to go home?"

"I was just waiting for you to get back; I'm free to go."

"I have a bit of a load to haul, should I take it and come back for you?"

"I'll be ok if I can lean on you a little."

"Wait here, I run this stuff home and be right back."

I made to the cabin and back in record time. My guess had been right, Kelly need more than just a shoulder to lean on. We got home; she undressed and crawled into bed. She asked for a glass of water and then downed a pain pill and the antibiotic Doc had given her. When the pain pill kicked in, she was out like a light. I suppose that for every time you guessed right, it's offset by guessing wrong. I returned to the big house to see if Doc was free. He was.

"What's the deal with her arm? Will she regain full use?"

"Eventually she should, but when it will happen is less certain. I presume you know she's pregnant?"

"I found out, yes."

"Normally, I wouldn't limit her activities this early in her pregnancy. Given her wound, I'd prefer she remain at home, get as much rest as possible and allow it to heal. It could take as long as two months, or even more, to regain full use of her arm and hand. She'll be in her second trimester by then and would need to be pulled off duty. By the way, congratulations."

"This is one hell of a world to bring a baby into."

"It won't last forever. Things have a way of working themselves out. When was the last time you saw a President reverse himself like McCain did on the collection of firearms? He's a good man caught between a rock and a hard spot. He may be a maverick but that may be what the country needs. They moved the capital back to Philadelphia, or did you hear?"

"I hadn't. I was wondering what they'd do with Washington nuked."

"It was on the amateur bands before radio and on radio before TV. We lost one man?"

"One woman. She was shot in the liver and it took too long to get her back here for treatment. Not that I could have saved her, but as it was, she never had a chance. It wasn't a FMJ, but either a hollow point or a soft point hunting round. It's possible to treat some liver injuries without surgery, but that didn't apply in this case."

"Anyone I know?"

"I'm sure you do, or Kelly did. She was from Mel's group."

"If we're going to have to keep fighting off the lawless, we really need to get good body armor."

"Tell Mel and Matt, maybe they can do something."

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"I don't know, Point Blank is located in Florida. Even if we could get permits to travel that far, the Interceptor OTV is only available to the US military. To top it off Brady, we couldn't afford to buy it, were it available. Considering where Kelly was shot, it wouldn't have made any difference."

"I wasn't thinking of Kelly, Matt. I was thinking about our fatality. Doc said it was either hollow point or soft point hunting ammo. If we have to keep fighting off the lawless, we need it."

"I'll look into getting something like what SWAT teams use. No promises, it may not be available either. Second Chance is located much closer, in Michigan."

"You'd still have to get travel permits."

"Right, to exit Tennessee, enter Kentucky, Indiana and Michigan. I'd speculate a permit like that would have to come down from some kind of regional Commander."

"Well, it was just a thought."

"I didn't say it couldn't be done, I just said no promises. It will cut in our available resources. Thank God the MAG put most of its excess funds in precious metals. If it costs \$1,000 per set, that's over 100 grand. Besides, I seem to recall something negative about Second Chance."

"It was that Zylon thing."

"They replaced those. Plus, they went bankrupt. We'd need level III or IV vests, with ESAPI plates. Probably run us over a quarter million. That would really zap our resources."

"Aren't there any body armor sales people in Tennessee?"

"There's Pro Tech. I have phone numbers for two of their reps. Maybe we could get it from them, they have level IV. They could deliver to the store; we'd just have to be there when the delivery came in."

"Get a size chart so we'll know what sizes to order."

"Sure Brady. You'd better get home and check on Kelly."

When I got home, she was still sleeping so I got the cleaning equipment and sat down and cleaned the guns. For no more rounds than she fired, the A3 was really dirty. Man, would I like to get my hands on a HK 416 for her. I'd readily settle for the upper, if I could find one. H&K claimed that you could mate it to any M16/M4/AR15 lower; one more thing to ask Matt about. The only US forces using the 416 was Delta Force and a few other SOCOM units.

Kelly came out later, her robe pulled over her shoulders.

"What's for supper?"

"What would you like?"

"What I'd really like is a pizza and a beer. I don't suppose I can drink beer because of the pain med, but a pizza sure sounds good."

"There's one or two of them in the freezer, I get one. Let me start the oven first. I think you're right about not mixing beer with the pain meds."

"I'll settle for a Coke, I guess."

"How's your arm?"

"It hurts, what do you think?"

"I talked to Doc. He said it will take you a couple of months before your arm is back to normal. By then, you'll be in your second trimester. He said your duty days are over until you have the baby."

"I'll worry myself to death with you out there and me here for seven months."

"I talked to Matt about getting body armor. Pro Tech has reps in Tennessee and he has the phone numbers. I think we should use our gold coins and buy our own. He's going to get a size chart and I get you one based on your present measurements."

"Ugh. That means if I gain any extra weight, I'll have to diet. I won't be able to exercise as much, if at all, and am going to really get out of shape. Did you clean my rifle?"

"It was really dirty."

"I don't see why, it was clean when I started."

"Nature of the beast. I'd really like to get you an HK 416 upper."

"I thought they weren't out yet."

"They're out. What's not out is the civilian version. The lower receiver controls whether is semi-auto or full-auto. I planned to ask Matt if he could get me an upper."

"He probably can, he got the Barrett rifles."

"Yeah, from the boss man himself."

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Matt said he'd try. He'd only go for the upper since as far as he knew, they weren't producing the semi-auto lowers. That upper would be on me, not on him. I also pointed out that since we still had 4 gold coins, we were willing to pay for our own body armor. I gave him our measurements, but he hadn't called yet. Matt said that gold was up to \$1,750 on private trades. There weren't any other kind, because the markets were closed.

I'll cut to the chase. After several attempts, Matt finally got through to Pro Tech. He also got through to H&K. H&K agreed to sell him an upper, delivered to his place of business if they could get a copy of his FFL and he'd wire the money. Pro Tech said they hadn't stopped producing vests and had a large supply of level IV plates. If he'd give them the sizes and wire the money, they'd deliver the vests to his place of business. Which PD was buying the vests? He told them he'd have to get permission to disclose that.

"Brady, I can get you what you want, but it will cost you all 4 ounces of your remaining gold."

"No problem, Matt. When can you get the stuff in?"

"I have to get everyone's sizes and phone it in. The guy said a week to ten days. We'll have to go to the business anyway, I have to fax H&K my FFL. I'll get Cheryl to get the sizes and you can ride shotgun with me to the store to send the fax. They said they could do overnight delivery on the upper."

"Want to just stay over? We left some of our STS at home?"

"Might be a good idea, it will save fuel."

"When do you want to go?"

"Now?"

"I'll tell Kelly and get my rifle."

"Kelly, I can get you the upper. Matt and I have to go to the store and fax his FFL and I suggested we stay over because the upper will be delivered tomorrow."

"Ok. Ask Cheryl to look in on me, would you?"

"No problem."

The only real difference between Kelly's A3 and the HK 416 was the muzzle velocity of the ammo. H&K rated the 416 at less than 2,500fps. I figured the benefits far outweighed the loss of velocity. The main thing was that the 416 only had about ¼ as many stoppages as the M16/M4. A stoppage could get you killed faster than anything. Getting body armor wouldn't ensure that no one got killed, but it improved their chances. Overall, the M16 seemed to be a little fussy about the ammo you used. Ammo that worked just fine in an A1, wouldn't work in an A3. The M16A1 fired the low velocity, solid lead M193, which can't pass through more than 1mm of RHA steel. The M16A2 fires the high velocity M855, which can pass through 6mm of RHA steel. There is also the M995 Armor Piercing round. We had both M855 and M995.

We took our time driving back to the store. One thing that can happen if you hurry is you can get yourself in a situation that you could have avoided had you gone slower. We didn't have any trouble on the way, hence we didn't know if it made any difference or not. Matt had a computer program that he could use to wire money from one account to another via phone. He faxed the copy of his FFL and received a fax back detailing the account number to make the deposit in. That took all of two minutes and he said we should head for our place until the morning.

I wondered if he had most of his money in gold and silver and a suitcase full of '\$20 bills' where the money that he wired came from. Other than a heavy covering of dust on everything, our home hadn't been touched. I turned the power, gas and water back on so we could clean up as soon as the water was hot. We hadn't really left much food behind, a few cans of green beans and some macaroni and cheese. I had a part loaf of bread I brought from the cabin, a tub of margarine and a package of powdered milk.

I stripped the dining room table and put down mats. I rinsed out two pans and

fixed dinner, using two boxes of macaroni and cheese. When we finished eating, I rinsed the dishes off and put them in the dishwasher. I ran it because we could use paper bowls in the morning and if I used a pan, I could hand wash it. The delivery from H&K showed up around 10:30am and we headed back to the MAG site. It took all of a minute to convert the A3 to the H&K upper and I took it to the range to sight in the Aimpoint sight. A couple of clicks and it was good to go.

"That's sure boxy."

"It is that. I sighted it in for you, but when you can, you have to verify the sighting. The beauty of this system is the ability to hang anything you want off the forearm."

"Like?"

"The Aimpoint, a Surefire light, a grenade launcher, almost anything you want."

"Give me a few days and I'll go sight it in. I want to wait until Doc says the wound is healed. I have a little sensation in my fingers, but can't hold anything yet. I heard someone died."

"Susan, from Mel's group. She either took a hollow point or a soft point through her liver. Doc said sometimes an injury like that doesn't even require surgery. In this case, he couldn't save her."

"I knew her, she was nice. She was about our age, blonde hair and quite the figure."

"Top heavy?"

"She was what men dream about, I suppose. She was, if you'll excuse the expression, your typical blonde."

"Air head?"

"More like a vacuum. But she sort of grew on you and she wasn't a quitter."

"Oh, that Susan."

"You know who I mean now?"

"Yeah, I do. Not hard on the eyes, but awfully hard to carry on a conversation with. She didn't have anything you don't have and you can carry on a conversation. She was the only woman who had trouble learning to shoot."

"Why am I not surprised? Probably too busy eyeing the instructor."

"Could be, but I didn't notice. There were too many students in each shooting class."

"Ok, you got the 416, where do we stand on the body armor?"

"As soon as Cheryl gets everyone's sizes, Matt will order it."

"Did you pay him?"

"No, but I will before he has to pay for it. He hasn't given me the prices yet."

"Do we have enough gold?"

"It's up to \$1,750, now. We have more than enough."

"Go pay him so we don't have to do it later. We'll eat when you get back."

I did as she asked and when I got home, Kelly was trying unsuccessfully to put together a meal. I made her sit down and finished the task of preparing tuna and noodles. It was easy to do if you had two hands, but with one, it was slow going. She and I talked while the casserole cooked in the oven.

"All of this is a bit overwhelming."

"When we were at the house, everything was fine. There was a coat of dust on everything but we had utilities once I turned them back on. I had a passing thought about moving back home."

"Would that we could, I quit my job at the Creamery and there's no way they'd hire me back. You worked for Matt and he's closed the business. What would you do for work? If you worked a deal with him and bought the business, you'd have the same problem he says he had the inability to get supplies. It must be worse, rather than better, because of the terrorist attacks and the economic collapse."

"I'd need you to work at the store with me. Getting supplies would be the biggest problem and regardless of the price of silver, that bag we have won't last forever. It was just a thought; we seem to be sitting ducks here."

"Maybe, but every day that passes sees us getting more prepared. Speaking of which, did he tell you when the body armor would be in?"

"He said he'd call in the order tomorrow. They'll give him a firm price and he'll have to go back to the business to wire the money. I didn't tell you that did I? He

has a computer program he uses to wire money. I don't know what source he tapped, but it went right through."

"There seems to be a lot we don't know about Matt."

I wasn't going to ask Matt about his money. I knew that his parents had died, but none of the details. I also knew that his father had lived in Texas and had been a cattle rancher. One could fill a book with information I didn't have about my employer. Beginning the day Cheryl and he got married we'd learned more about him that we'd known before. It appeared, at least to me, that he had far more money than we knew. I began to wonder if he got that way because he was a tightwad; or, because he had another source of money. I stifled the thought because it was none of my business.

He and I made two more runs to the store, the first to wire the funds and the second to take delivery of the Pro Tech body armor. When we got back to the MAG site, the body armor was distributed based on the list Cheryl had made up. I helped Kelly try hers on and it fit very well. My armor fit much better than the Interceptor I wore in Iraq. It had front and back panels, side panels and the shoulder pads. The outer vest had MOLLE loops.

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I removed the 3 magazines from each side of the Tac-Force vest and replaced those on the left side with smoke and the ones on the right with one concussion and one fragmentation. The remaining magazines were unloaded and reloaded with Black Hills 168gr Match Hollow Point. While my loaded standard could shoot the 175gr, that was pushing the limit. Conversely, both rifles could shoot the 168gr Black Hills. With the weight of the new body armor, eliminating 120 rounds of ammo reduced the weight of the vest enough I could get by. I'd still have 180-rounds of ammo, 8 20-round magazines in the vest and 1 in my rifle.

Perhaps because she was so slim, Kelly began to show early and in a matter of weeks could no longer wear her vest. Her arm was still healing but her hand had nearly recovered. She said it was about 10% numb and still improving. It was enough so she could go to the range and practice. She was shooting about 1½MOA, not quite as good as before.

"CP, OP Three, we have a vehicle."

"Roger, details?"

"We have one Chevy sedan with four passengers. Can't see any firearms, but they're moving slow. They seem to be looking some something or someone."

"OP Two, CP, do you have them?"

"Roger. They're only moving about ten miles per hour. We don't see any firearms either."

"OP One, do you have them?"

"CP, OP One, wait one."

"Roger."

"CP, OP Two, they're slowing but haven't stopped."

There was a squeal as two people tried to call in at the same time.

"CP, OP One. They're stopped halfway between OP Two and us."

"Roger, what are they doing?"

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"CP, OP One. They're just sitting there in the sedan."

"Roger, OP One. This Matt, I want Brady's Platoon, up front to back up the OPs."

"I've got to go Kelly. I'll be back in a bit."

"Be careful, Brady."

"Aren't I always?"

"No you're not. Maybe I should come too."

"Sorry babe, but Doc hasn't cleared you for duty."

"Matt, Brady. We're assembling and will be then in five minutes."

"Brady, move your Platoon just opposite the car."

"Roger. Make that ten plus mikes."

"Roger. All OPs keep that car in your sights. If they dismount, be prepared to take them out, if I give you the word."

"CP, OP One, the driver has dismounted and is see a pistol, but no rifle."

"OP One and Two, hold your fire. OP Three, watch for another car."

"There was another squeal as all three OPs tried to acknowledge Matt's transmission."

"One."

"Two."

"Three."

"Brady where are you?"

"About halfway there."

"You meet with the driver when you get there and find out what they want."

Click, click.

When I arrived with the Platoon, my second and I stepped out of the wood with rifles at low ready. I looked the guy over and he was wearing a M1911 and one of those old military holsters with the flap down and hooked over the post. I think the model was 1940, it didn't have a swivel.

"Can we help you?"

"We heard there was a bunch up here by the conservation area and were checking it out."

"Ok you found us, now what?"

"We'd be interested in trade if you're willing."

"What do you want to trade for and what do you have to offer?"

"We need food and a little ammo for our hunting rifles."

"What do you need for food?"

"We need flour, yeast and shortening to make bread. We could use some sugar and coffee if you have it. And, we're starting to get low on shelf stable foods like beans, rice and pasta."

"How do you intend to pay or what do you have to trade?"

"We have serviceable weapons we took off a group of attackers. We need .30-06, .270 and 7mm magnum and birdshot if you have it."

"Let me check."

"Matt, they're looking for a few food items and 4 kinds of ammunition, .30-06, .270, 7mm magnum and birdshot if we have some."

"What do you think?"

"I think they're on the up and up. They have weapons they took off a group of attackers to offer in trade."

"Bring them into the compound, but keep your eyes on them. If they have handguns, let them keep them, but no rifles."

"Roger, fifteen mikes."

"We'll walk to the compound fellas. You can bring your handguns, but leave your rifles here. I have someone keep an eye on your car. I'm Brady Jacobs; could I get your names?"

"Paul Heddens pleased to meet you. The other fella in the front seat is Dave Markle and the two in the back are Leroy Grant and Bob Swab."

"Did you bring the weapons with you?"

"Are you nuts? We thought that if we could find you, we could work out some place to meet on neutral ground."

"How did you hear about us?"

"Some Latino showed up in town telling tall tales about your 'compound' and saying how you must be a military unit with tremendous firepower. He had a small wound, more of a graze. We started to patch him up and then saw the tattoos. He got a Band-Aid and run out of town."

"They were MS-13, the gang from the capital, we think."

"Is it true you have a military unit?"

"Well... we have a well trained and highly effective militia. We are well armed and proficient plus a significant portion of our people are military veterans. That's probably more than I should say, but you'll see for yourself."

"You're just a youngster yourself."

"Iraqi Freedom. Went in out of high school, did a tour, finished my 4 stateside and got out then I went to work for a survival and preparedness store."

"Until this happened, I always thought those survivalists were a bunch of nuts and possibly white supremacists. Then I heard they took the name preppers to get around the negative image. We weren't prepared but God awful lucky."

"What can you tell me about those attackers?"

"We think they came straight from an armory or ammo issue point or maybe both. There were about thirty of them, armed to the teeth. They were wanttobe's; must have never hunted and only barely knew how to use their weapons. We have a lot of hunters in our community. We didn't mow them down; more like we took them out with several well placed shots. We didn't have a lot of ammo for our hunting rifles and we shot up a good portion of our ammo."

"Why don't you just keep their rifles?"

"We talked about it and I can tell you, nobody was interested. We'd settle for more ammo for our rifles and some food. We'll keep the grenades and those rockets they had."

We cleared the woods and entered the open 80 acres.

"Well I'll be damned. Who'd have thought there was a large clearing here? Is that a big pond or a small lake?"

"I've wondered that myself. It's about 40 acres and stocked."

"I think I read somewhere the anything over 20 acres is considered a lake. Is it very deep?"

"It seems to be."

"Definitely a lake, ponds are 8ha or less and shallow. How big is that garden?"

"It's around five acres. We're there, Paul. I take you in to meet the other directors. Chosin is the owner and Matt and Chuck worked with him to form a mutual aid group. I was only recently anointed. Another group joined us and Mel was their leader."

I hadn't participated in many negotiations and sat back so I could learn how it

worked. They had 27 working rifles, full auto with removable handles, the A3s. They had 42 cases of ammo. In exchange, they wanted enough food, especially the special items Paul mentioned, for 40 people for three months. They'd take whatever hunting ammo they could get. Terms were agreed upon and a meet set for four days hence in the recently mowed hay field at our farmer's farm.

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"What took you so long, I was worried."

"We had four men show up looking to make trades. That MS-13 guy who got away was winged. They want some food and ammo in exchange for some M16A3s they picked up. It would finish arming Mel's people with A3s."

"Did they have any news?"

"They told us about the attack."

"No, I mean national news. McCain hasn't been on radio or TV for several weeks."

"No Kelly, they didn't."

Speak of the Devil.

"My fellow Americans,

"First, allow me to address the matter of the virus. The CDC had yet to develop a vaccine or treatment for the virus. However, our self imposed quarantine has worked to a great extent and there have been very few new cases.

"Second, our fuel situation, although dire, has improved, due in part to the quarantines and in part because of the high prices.

"Third, more food is now available, although the prices remain somewhat high. The USDA has implemented a subsidized food program for those unable to afford the available food. It is similar to the previous Commodities Credit Corporation, modified to reflect current conditions and the 1996 law changes.

"Fourth, we have increased lawlessness. Much of this has been traced to the various street gangs throughout this country. Your government is using all available resources to contain this violence. In some cases, the gangs are better armed than our law enforcement agencies. These gangs include: Bloods, Crips, Black Disciples, Hells Angels, Latin Kings, The 18th Street Gang, Mara Salvatrucha, Mexican Mafia, Maravilla, Norteños, Sureños, Vice Lords and the Black P. Stones."

"Consistent with the Militia Act of 1903, Title 10, Subtitle A, Chapter 13, § 311 we ask that the unorganized militia, in conjunction with local law enforcement agencies, move to quell this violence. Information has been or is currently being provided to all law enforcement agencies. I realize members of the other party oppose this move. I say we have no other choice. Until order is restored, much of our effort in other areas will not achieve the intended goals.

"Thank you and good night."

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"That was interesting, organizing the unorganized militia. Will that make us law enforcement officers?"

"I don't think so Brady. Let's get this meet with Paul's group out of the way and we can revisit the matter. I don't see how we could provide more than half of our force to the endeavor."

"Kelly would have to stay here. If we could get Doc to certify her for duty, she could help out if a problem arose."

"Is she fully healed?"

"Enough so that she's been to the range several times. She needs a little more practice to improve her consistency."

"Did she getting the feeling back in her hand?"

"Roughly 90%, the last time we talked about it. The wound has healed."

"I suppose we could keep her as a reserve. Her not being 100% and her being pregnant counts against her being on the front line."

"Ok, but don't let her hear you say that."

We arrived a day early for the meet with Paul. We brought the half of our force we were considering to volunteer to the sheriff ad militia. Great minds run in the same groove, Paul, et. al., showed up later the same day, also early. They had the rifles, ammo and magazines. We had 200 rounds each in .270 and 7mm plus 480 in .30-06 Greek surplus in enblock clips in bandoleers. We had a case of shotguns shells in assorted shot sizes from #2 to #6.

As far as food went, we had a full beef, 4 hogs, 100 chickens, one case of hams and about 100 pounds of fish fillets. On top of that, we had flour, yeast and shortening for bread, sugar and coffee plus beans, rice, pasta and tomato sauce.

We added one bottle each of several spices and a case of sliced mushrooms so they could make a pasta sauce.

This time we got a chance to look at their shoulder arms. Paul had a Garand, two of the others had .308s and one was carrying a Mossberg 500. We always carried some extra .308 ammo and they took a case of it. For what we provided, we got the M16s, ammo, magazines, and several rolls of pre-65 half dollars. Paul claimed that silver was up to over \$35 an ounce. We asked if they had heard the President's speech and Paul said they had, but didn't plan on joining the militia. We told him we hadn't made up our mind. The Garand was our contribution to winning WW II and should not be looked down upon.

I wondered about us providing them food. We gave them frozen meat. Why hadn't we provided chickens, hogs and cattle? The proverb says: "Give a man a fish; you have fed him for today. Teach a man to fish; and you have fed him for a lifetime"

"What was that about? I thought we were planning on providing half of our force to the sheriff."

"We are, but they don't need to know that. Keep your cards close to your vest Brady. Nobody needs to know were cutting our force here in half."

"You don't trust them?"

"I trust them, within limits. We don't know that much about them, yet. We'll have our gunsmith check out the A3s and issue them. With those few rifles everyone will have an A3 in addition to whatever other arms they have. I guess I should have gotten you the 416 upper when I got Kelly's. I may still do it, if you want one."

"What about all those gangs McCain mentioned?"

"As hard as it sounds, I expect we'll hunt them down and kill them."

"That's not the American way, Matt. Aren't they allowed a trial before execution?"

"Under the Fifth Amendment, to an extent, yes; have you read it recently? There are exceptions."

No person shall be held to answer for any capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due

process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

“Do you mean the militia part? I hadn’t thought about that. Let’s see, in the militia when in actual service in time of public danger? I suppose it will be ok if that’s the position law enforcement takes.”

“If it’s not, we probably won’t have any part of it. Be prepared to grit your teeth when the LEOs discover we have full-auto weapons.”

“Do you think they will try to disarm us?”

“I doubt it because we outnumber the number of sworn deputies.”

“Why should we take a chance?”

“It’s the right thing to do?”

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I won’t claim that joining the MAG was the best thing that ever happened to me, that honor belonged to Kelly marrying me. It did beat whatever was in second place. It hadn’t been determined which half of our force would make up the militia being offered to the sheriff. Someone was working behind my back and it turned out that Matt and Chuck would go to the sheriff while Mel and I defended the MAG site. Doc certified Kelly for duty and I told her we could team back up. She immediately headed to the range and brought back a target showing she could shoot about ½MOA.

She and I didn’t take an OP post or go tramping through the woods. She said that every time she heard water running she had to empty her bladder. I talked it over with Mel and he suggested we just take over the CP. I appeared to me that with the militia bringing law and order, we’d dodged the bullet. So much was happening at home that we didn’t get any international news and couldn’t pull in BBC from the MAG site.

Nothing could have been further from the truth. When we pulled our troops from Iraq, that civil war that nobody admitted to broke out. When we pulled our troops from Afghanistan, the Taliban reemerged. When we pulled out of Korea, the North began to threaten the South. Enduring Freedom involved more than Afghanistan, it included operations in the Philippines, the Horn of Africa and the Trans Sahara. Hugo (Jose Cuervo) had told George to shove it in early ’08. Iran had an election and the conservatives won, again in ’08. We were sitting on a ticking time bomb and had no idea. Did it matter; we were already ‘safely’ occupying the MAG site.

It mattered because we didn't expect what came next, a HEMP attack followed by a first strike from China. We had just enough warning to shield the radios and put out an announcement for everyone to do the same. It would prove to be just the first attack; once the weapons started flying, nobody had the sense to turn off the spigot. We launched on China and China launched on Russia. India and Pakistan exchanged weapons and Israel nuked several countries back to the Stone Age. The UK launched against Russia when Russia launched against them. The only country that apparently didn't launch was France. They were probably in a committee meeting deciding who to attack. You have to give the French credit, they invented Bureaucrats.

With fellas down in Sparta, the county seat, all we could do was hope and pray they'd make it back. Almost due east, we saw the flash of a nuke at Ft. Knox. Immediately thereafter, another went off to the west, probably Nashville. That meant fallout and we began to round everyone up and get them in the big house's shelter. I'm happy now that we hadn't blocked the road. Twenty minutes after the Nashville blast, they started streaming in using what vehicles they could get to run, mainly old diesels.

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I didn't have time to wait for them to show up from Sparta. We had to scoot because we didn't have much time. Mel and I opened the shelter for the first time since Kelly and I moved here. People began flooding in and Mel and I pointed the way. We had to get the livestock under shelter but that had to wait until we had all of the people taken care of. Kelly came dragging most of our guns and our next door neighbor had the rest. I took them and stacked them in a corner for now.

When the fellas showed up, they immediately began sheltering our livestock in what appeared to be a well rehearsed exercise. They were inside the barn for over 20 minutes and I had no idea what they were doing. I asked and was told that the guns were stored in the store room because there was no armory. The fellas finished up and they closed the shelter.

The next morning the CD V-717 indicated we had fallout. We were barely 90 miles from Nashville and the radiation level went off scale. However, we noted when it went off scale and when it came back within scale and applied the 7/10 rule. Our best calculations suggested we'd have to stay in the shelter for nearly 100 days. It would bring us down to slightly under 100mR/h. Chosin said the peak level was in the neighborhood of 900R/h or perhaps a bit less. At that point in time, Kelly would be well along in her pregnancy and there was no way she was going out until the baby was born and it was safe for him/her.

"One hundred days? I thought Civil Defense said two weeks."

"Sorry, but Chosin says it's not safe to be out permanently before 100 days. In your case, it will be longer."

"Longer? That's sex discrimination."

"Close, it's pregnancy discrimination. There is no way either you or our baby is going out before the radiation level drops below 50mR/h. I asked and Chosin estimates that will take on the order of 180 days. We can't use cow's milk because of the Strontium 90, meaning you'll probably have to breast feed or get a nurse. We have canned milk and infant formula if those options don't work."

"Who is watching outside?"

"Nobody. As high as the radiation level is, a person would acquire a fatal dose in 20 minutes."

"How high is it?"

"Nine hundred Rads."

"What's it down here?"

"Chosin has a Geiger counter that has a maximum range of 50mR/h. He has another one that reads alpha, beta and gamma radiation and gives a reading in counts per minute. Its maximum range is 12.5mR/h because 2,400cpm equal 1mR/h. Kelly, you wouldn't believe the things they have in this shelter, some of everything. They even moved things to the basement before the fallout started so we have plenty of everything."

"How big is the shelter?"

"Want to take a tour? Matt said that when they built it, they allowed for growth and it has a maximum capacity of 300 people. Since we're only in the 100 range, we have three times the minimum space."

The shelter wasn't as straight forward as I had explained it to Kelly. There was room for 200 wide-awake people and bunks for another 100 sleeping people. Had the shelter been full, people would have had to sleep in 8 hour shifts and eat in shifts. Put another way, space for 300, accommodations for 100.

I showed Kelly around, trying to remember what I'd been told on my earlier tour. There was the bunk room where she had been, a storage room, his and her bathrooms, a communications shack, kitchen, a very large dayroom that doubled as a dining room. Instead of an armory, there were gun racks in the store room. Entertainment, to keep people occupied and their minds off the disaster, consisted

of a 32" TV with surround sound. It had its own receiver and could be connected to the satellite dish.

A few days later, Matt and I were sitting in the radio shack trying to pick information from the amateur radio net. We weren't having much luck and he turned away from the radio to visit.

"You don't know much about me, do you Brady?"

"Only what I've learned working for you. You're not a fountain of information."

"I've always held my cards close to my vest. In light of the attack, maybe I'd better fill you in a little. My parents only had one child, me. Dad ranched in the Texas panhandle and grew cattle and their feed. Not a big ranch, only 1,280 acres when he started. Over the years, adjoining ranchers either went belly up or retired. His cattle business was doing well, providing him with enough money to buy up the properties. In time, he ended up with twenty sections, farming a portion and grazing the rest."

"My mother died first, from breast cancer, just after I got back from Nam. Dad never remarried, I guess he was too busy running the ranch. Then one day he had a heart attack and dropped dead and I inherited the ranch. I went there, looked the place over and talked to the foreman. When it was all said and done, I made him the ranch manager, hired a CPA to audit the books once a year and have been earning the profit every since."

"I've accumulated more money than I can spend. I ran the survival and preparedness business solely because it interested me, I don't really need to work. I met Cheryl about eleven or twelve years back. We dated some and then we moved in together. It's a good relationship and for the longest time we didn't want to spoil it by getting married. I have several bank accounts that I can draw on, my ranch profits account, the business checking account and a saving account."

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"I told you I bought gold and silver back in '99 but I only said I had a lot of gold, I never said how much. I told you we had twelve \$1,000 face bags of silver. I suppose you should know how much gold we have because when Cheryl and I are gone, Kelly and you are going to inherit it. Altogether, we have around 5,000 ounces of gold. That's around 375 pounds."

I was flabbergasted; all I could do was nod.

"I have no idea how the ranch is doing because I haven't been in contact with them. They were running around 10,000 head and I'm sure the government

probably bought up the beef that was ready for market. Figure 5,000 cattle at 1,250 pounds at a buck a pound."

"That's over six million dollars!"

"True, but it's not all profit. Figure my share at 20 percent, maybe less."

"But Matt, that's over a million dollars."

"I'd guess I might clear a million, in FRNs. The dollar isn't worth much these days. So, now you know. The details are all laid out in the will. Kelly and you will have to provide for Cheryl out of the income and assets until she dies."

"Why are you telling me this now?"

"I suppose just in case something happens, not that I expect it will. I can count on you to provide for Cheryl, can't I?"

"Absolutely! I wonder what disaster is going to happen next."

"It will be interesting, that's for sure. With luck, the nuclear powers used up most, if not all, of their weapons."

"A person would expect one disaster, like Katrina for example, but not as many as we've had. We're probably going to need to plow under the garden. Depending on how much the fallout decays, we may even need to scrape off a layer of soil. For all we know, we may have lost the fish in the lake."

"I should point out that Katrina was followed by Rita. Don't forget the nuclear winter Brady. That's pretty much a sure thing with the numbers of weapons they used."

"I thought they dismissed TTAPS."

"A 2007 study, Nuclear winter revisited with a modern climate model and current nuclear arsenals: Still catastrophic consequences, used current climate models to look at the consequences of a global nuclear war involving most or all of the world's current nuclear arsenals (which the authors described as being only about a third the size of the world's arsenals twenty years earlier). The authors used a global circulation model, Model E from the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, which they noted 'has been tested extensively in global warming experiments and to examine the effects of volcanic eruptions on climate.' The model was used to investigate the effects of a war involving the entire current global nuclear arsenal, projected to release about 150 Tg of smoke into the atmosphere (1 Tg is equal to 10¹² grams), as well as a war involving about one

third of the current nuclear arsenal, projected to release about 50 Tg of smoke. In the 150 Tg case they found that:

"A global average surface cooling of -7°C to -8°C persists for years, and after a decade the cooling is still -4°C (Fig. 2). Considering that the global average cooling at the depth of the last ice age 18,000 yr ago was about -5°C , this would be a climate change unprecedented in speed and amplitude in the history of the human race. The temperature changes are largest over land ... Cooling of more than -20°C occurs over large areas of North America and of more than -30°C over much of Eurasia, including all agricultural regions.

"In addition, they found that this cooling caused a weakening of the global hydrological cycle, reducing global precipitation by about 45%. As for the 50 Tg case involving 1/3 of current nuclear arsenals, they said that the simulation 'produced climate responses very similar to those for the 150 Tg case, but with about half the amplitude', but that 'the time scale of response is about the same.' They did not discuss the implications for agriculture in depth, but noted that a 1986 study which assumed no food production for a year projected that 'most of the people on the planet would run out of food and starve to death by then' and commented that their own results show that 'this period of no food production needs to be extended by many years, making the impacts of nuclear winter even worse than previously thought.'"

"I'm not up on Celsius."

"In Fahrenheit, the freezing point of water is 32° and the boiling point 212° , a range of 180° . In Celsius, it's 0° and 100° , a range of 100° . Therefore, one degree Celsius is 1.8° Fahrenheit. A twenty degree change in Celsius would equal a change of 36° Fahrenheit."

"Will we be able to grow food?"

"Maybe in greenhouses but only after the atmosphere clears."

"What about the livestock?"

"They're about as sensitive to radiation as humans. We got them all in the barn and we can access the barn from this shelter. Chosin checked and because of how the barn has been modified, the radiation level was 900mR in the beginning and dropped to 90mR after 7 hours. They have feed and water and we have more stored so feeding them shouldn't be a problem."

"It has a protection factor of 1,000?"

"We poured concrete walls after removing the siding and reattached the siding to

the concrete. They're about a foot thick and the windows seal off the inside very well. You've never been in the barn and seen the piles of sandbags for the windows?"

"Afraid not, I wasn't partial to the smell."

"We'll lose the garden for sure. We allowed for that with the volume of food we've stored. Chosin owns the property, but I've done a significant amount of funding for the MAG. Several of the Nam vets were friends of mine in the Army."

"And, of course with you being rich, the NAG wants for little."

"We still don't have an Abrams, Bradley's, artillery, aircraft, hummers or LAV-25s."

"That's the least of our concerns."

"Why do you say that?"

"They nuked Fort Knox. Once the radiation dies off, we should be able to get all we want."

"Could be, if we want them."

After my conversation with Matt, I had to make a decision. Should tell Kelly about the conversation now, or should I wait until later? The information would be just as fresh to her in 6 months so I decided to wait. Imagine a couple going from earning a combined \$17.50 per hour with lousy benefits to being millionaires. Somehow, we'd managed to pick the 6 lucky numbers in the Lottery. And, money doesn't buy happiness.

At two weeks, some of the folks were already going stir crazy. Chosin, Chuck, Matt and Mel tried to explain to them why they had to stay in the shelter 100 days. They were offered opportunities to go to the barn and feed the livestock or shovel manure. I commiserated with people more my age reassuring them that when we went out most of us could stay out. The only ones that didn't apply to were children and women of child bearing age. We preferred they sleep in the shelter nights until the radiation level had fallen to 50mR/h. 50mR was the maximum yearly dose the government allowed, but these weren't normal times and the radiation would continue to decay. I also explained that the Kelly and it had the desired effect; it shook her up big time.

In the end it became a trade off; people started to get ornery late in the second month and by the middle of the third month, we had to break up more than one fist fight. It was just a good thing that all the guns were locked up in the store room and the shelter was noticeably absent any alcohol. It was sometimes

something as simple as one man looking at another's wife for moment too long. It didn't take much and tempers were getting thin. Rather than risk more fights, people were allowed to go upstairs for one or two hours because the radiation level was approaching 100mR.

Chosin had an Excel spreadsheet developed by someone at Frugal's website titled seven_ten_rule.xls and if you entered the peak radiation level, it would tell you when it was safe to come out. It could also be used backwards to compute the peak level by adjusting the peak level until it reflected the actual conditions. When you had arrived at the peak level, you then knew what to expect. If you later saw the spreadsheet and the actual diverging, you tweaked the peak level. It worked most of the time. The guy who developed was past child bearing age and he claimed it was ok to come out once the level reached 104mR/h, at bit high for younger people who were limited to 50R per year.

Despite Kelly pleas, I wouldn't let her go upstairs and Cheryl occupied her for most of her waking hours. I went up only once, for about 10 minutes, and didn't see anything out of the ordinary other than a fine coat of grit on everything. I hurried back to the shelter before Kelly saw me missing because what she didn't know couldn't hurt me.

I had a CD V-742 dosimeter and watched it carefully not wanting to accumulate more than 50R because I didn't want to stop with an only child.

If the US had been in trouble before, it paled by comparison to our present circumstance. All we needed to round out the picture was for the New Madrid Fault Zone to let loose and finish wiping everything out. Plus, if I'd thought the MAG was prepared for any eventuality, I was off by a mile or more. Out came the tractor and blade, clearing a nice flat spot of contaminated soil. Out came a pile of building materials, all carefully stored in event of possible need. Plexiglas panels, the necessary supplies to erect a greenhouse.

As we discussed, the garden was plowed under rather than take a chance. The dairy cattle were kept in the barn and fed stored feed while the other livestock was eventually let out. The garden was replanted in the newly constructed greenhouse meaning we'd only have to wait a bit longer for vegetables and fruit (tomato is a fruit). Fruit and nuts on the trees were given a careful water bath to eliminate any residual radiation. Plus it was getting unseasonably cold.

"Can't I go upstairs just for a quick look?"

"I'd rather you didn't; five minutes maximum then you get your butt back down here."

Kelly looked and aside from the new greenhouse, there really wasn't much to see. We'd removed a few floaters from the lake and buried them. The cabins and the

grounds around had been hosed down, eliminating most of the residual fallout. Doc told me to stick to my guns about making Kelly stay in the shelter for the full 180 days.

The scheduled meeting with Paul's people to trade food had come and gone while we were in the shelter. They knew where we lived and if they survived and still needed food, we figured they'd show up – they hadn't so far. We had no intention of going looking for them, I suppose in part because they hadn't reveal where they lived. So much for holding cards close to your vest, it can turn around and bite you on the butt.

I read somewhere that the average person eats 60 pounds of beef, 50 pounds of pork, 60 pounds of chicken, 15 pounds of turkey and 15 pounds of fish a year, a total of 200 pounds. Our herds had expanded, but not enough to meet that average. We'd been ok until Mel and his people showed up. Chosin expanded the breeding program to allow for the increased population, but that takes time. Our number of meatless days had increased and our consumption of 'meat' had fallen. Plus, giving Paul's group all of that meat had taken its toll, too.

The attack had started with a HEMP, if you recall. We had a few vehicles that wouldn't run, but most did because they were older diesels, the favorite bug out vehicle for MAG members. We didn't have a diesel but my old Chevy pickup didn't have a computer. Most of the six pickups we got from the MZBs were old and lacked computers. I had spare parts for my pickup including points, condenser, distributor cap, spark plugs, starter and a generator. There were several new, in the box, six volt batteries that could be made to fit.

Even if we couldn't have gotten any of them to run, there was the small herd of horses and mules. We wouldn't need the mules to pull plows until the tractor gave up the ghost. There was an assortment of 'horse' drawn equipment behind the barn that I hadn't paid much attention to. With this latest disaster, I was playing catch-up, learning the things I should have learned as soon as we relocated to the MAG site. I became engrossed in the process and time flew.

"Brady, get to the shelter, you're about to become a father."

"She's in labor?"

"Has been for some time, Doc said not to get you until she got close."

"I hope she waits, I wanted to be there when the baby was born."

"You'll have to scrub up and don a gown."

I completed the process quickly, Kelly was starting to deliver. I got there just in

time to see his head come out followed by the other parts that made me say 'he'. We had talked about names but hadn't picked either a boy's name or a girl's name, deciding to wait and see what we got. Later, while Kelly was nursing our new son, I suggested Matthew.

"Why Matthew?"

"It's the first book in the Gospel and Matt has written his will and we inherit everything. You have no idea how much that is, but it's a lot. He said he considered me the son he never had and you his daughter-in-law."

"Stop, you've sold me. Mind if I pick the middle name?"

"What did you have in mind?"

"I'd pick my father's name, Mark."

"Matthew Mark Jacobs? If we have another boy are we going to name him Luke John Jacobs?"

"We could do worse."

"Ok, it will be Matthew Mark Jacobs. When you're up to it, you can go topside for a short time although there's not much to see. We have snow on the ground and it's very cold outside."

"How cold?"

"Unseasonably cold, say about 10° colder than normal for this time of year."

"Is the sky clear?"

"Not completely, no. There must have been a lot of dust and smoke in the atmosphere."

"Anything from the White House?"

"Not since the attack, no."

"What is the overall situation, Brady?"

"The greenhouse, with the help of grow lamps, is producing food. We lost the garden and had to plow it under. I got the pickup to run by swapping out a few parts. The newer vehicles wouldn't run without replacement computers, but everyone seemed to have one. Have I told you lately how beautiful you are?"

"Every woman likes a compliment, thank you. It's sometimes said that a woman has a glow when she has a baby. I hope I get my figure back and don't end up fat."

"What did Doc say about your weight gain while you were pregnant?"

"Well within acceptable limits, even a bit towards the low side."

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"It took you 9 months to put the weight on; I'd guess it will take you as long to take it off. Plus you're nursing and that must account for some weight gain."

We'd blocked the entrance road again and were out cutting timber for firewood. This time we cut extra because no one had how long this winter would last. With the big house and all of the cabins burning wood for heat, it took a lot of firewood. We cut a total of 300 cords, giving everyone ten cords. We were cabin number 12 and we added three for the hunters plus fourteen for Mel's group, making a total of twenty-nine cabins. Chosin had a large stack of firewood before so he settled for the same ten cords everyone else got. We would have cut more, but frankly, it got too cold. In the end, we determine that the temperatures were 20° lower than normal and the sky still hadn't cleared.

The only people in the world who knew what it was like to be nuked were the Japanese. Theories abounded about what it would be like after a global thermonuclear war. Russia had a lot of warheads, but we had more. Between our two countries, we could essentially wipe out civilization. All of the so called 'official' counts of warheads notwithstanding, we had 14 boomers with more warheads on them than Russia supposedly possessed. Add to that our Minuteman III missiles, Mirv'd or not, and 20 remaining B-2 bombers, each capable of carrying 16 nuclear weapons plus those old B-52s capable of carrying at least 8 nukes.

There was no way to either retrofit the B-1Bs in the time allowed or load the B-52s and the B-2s. One could only hope some of them survived in case they were needed. Although we could have gotten tanks and IFVs by going to Ft. Knox, the decision was made to not do it because it was a hot zone.

When finally the day came that Kelly and Matthew could come out and stay out, she was beside herself with joy. I had the cabin warm and hot water in case she wanted a shower. I'd even gotten Cheryl to bake a batch of bread. Considering the rations Kelly had been on in the shelter, I thawed two steaks, lined up two baking potatoes and two cans of mushrooms. Nice steaks, top sirloin about 1½" thick, maybe 12 oz each.

"How long do you intend to breast feed?"

"About a year, then we can transition to baby food and cow's milk."

"What if there's not enough baby food?"

"We have a blender."

"I think they're just about a perfect medium."

"Let's eat, I'm starved. It's nice to have real food for a change."

As always, we didn't visit while we ate. There were many subjects that would cause indigestion and very few that wouldn't. I rinsed the dishes after supper and we cuddled up on the couch. It wasn't long before Matthew wanted his supper and while she fed him, I washed the dishes and put them up.

I haven't told you Matt and Cheryl's reaction when I told them we named the baby Matthew Mark.

"A grandson, and named after me? Hot damn; thank you Brady, you have no idea how much that means."

"I thought you'd get a kick out of it. Mark was Kelly's father's name."

"I don't know much about her family."

"Her father's name was Mark and her mother's name was Grace. Shortly after we married, he had a blowout on the front right tire and the car flipped killing them both. I'll be honest, I barely knew them. I got the impression that they were fairly liberal, what with living in Berkeley. I do know he was against the war in Iraq and didn't own any firearms."

"That figures; Berkeley, you say?"

"The most Democratic city in California, around 90% are Democrats."

"Probably more like were Democrats. What about your family?"

"I don't know about my father. He was a mean SOB and ran off with some woman when I was in high school. My mother was a 3 pack a day smoker and came down with lung cancer shortly before I deployed to Iraq. She died shortly after I returned. Like you, I was an only child and for many years thankful I didn't have any brothers and sisters to have to put up with him."

"Where did you meet Kelly?"

"Los Angeles, actually Disneyland. I went to LA on leave after my mother's funeral and met her in Tomorrowland. We got to talking and one thing led to another and we began to correspond. When I got out of the Army, I went to Berkeley and met her parents, it being a foregone conclusion that we'd get married. We married and moved to town. She went to work at the Creamery and I went to work for you. That's the whole ball of wax."

"She doesn't seem to be a liberal."

"She broke the mold, I guess. More than once she said her mom and dad would have a fit if they saw her with a firearm."

"I turned on the water heater in case you wanted a shower."

"I would after using that shared shower in the shelter. Is it ok if I use up all of the hot water?"

"Sure, it will reheat soon enough and I can take one."

She left and I kept an ear out for Matthew, in case he woke up. She couldn't shower too long with only 19 gallons of hot water. It would take some time for it to recover, but if I only used hot water, it would be tolerable. It had been a long time since we had time together. She came out dressed in her robe and using a towel to dry her hair. When it was dry, she got her brush and began that routine and I left to get my shower.

Kelly got pregnant for the second time that night. Our next child was a daughter and Kelly suggested we name her Cheryl Lynn Jacobs. The MAG site was never attacked again and we never heard from Paul's group. The greenhouse kept us in food until we were able to plant an outside garden four years later.

We went back to town and checked on our homes and the store. The store had been broken into and looted. There wasn't enough left to make it worthwhile for the looter and Matt said he probably wouldn't reopen. I figured we should just get our better furniture from the house and walk away from it. Kelly agreed and on another day, several of us made the trip and brought back a bunch of furniture. We had expected survivors back home, mainly because of the survival and preparedness store. If they were there, we didn't see them. Much of the business had been mail order and maybe that explained part of it.

Kelly and I talked about our lakeside cabin and she said it made sense to just stay here. There really wasn't much to go back to and at least we had a Doctor here. The MAG had everything we needed or could want. I didn't disagree, but I'd never

really thought of retiring before age 30. I overestimate our retirement, we working as hard here as we ever did at the store or Creamery.

Chosin held on past when everyone thought he'd give up the ghost. When he did, the property passed to Matt and we learned his last name was Thompson. Seven years after the attack, Matt joined Chosin and the property passed to Cheryl. We got the proceeds of the will although we hadn't made it to the Texas panhandle. Three years after Matt died Cheryl developed cancer and didn't last long.

With that, we owned 20 sections in Texas and this section we were living on. The MAG continued on for the better part of a generation but eventually the government started a recovery and as communities came back on line, people left. We told them their places here were reserved for them, if they ever needed them. Doc was getting old and just retired here at the lake. That made it handy for us because we ended up with four children, another boy and another girl.

Eventually, we made the trip to Texas to check out the ranch. I showed the manager the will and he explained that he had kept Matt's money locally, not knowing if Matt had survived the war. Kelly and I almost choked when he showed us our bank balance. I asked if there were any more available land, at a good price. He told us he had already bought another 10 sections, but was willing to look for more. We told him not to bother and he took us to town to meet the bank manager.

He could either transfer the balance to another account or we could set up a checking account. Texas bank checks in Tennessee? We ask for the money in what passed for money these days, gold and silver. The price of gold was down around \$500 an ounce and we had to wait while he accumulated the metals. When we realized how much metal that was, we hired an armored car to deliver it.

That big old safe that Chosin had was now filled to the brim with our gold and silver. If Kelly wanted to count it now, it would take her a month. Matt was now 13 years old, Cheryl 11½, Alan 9 and Kelly 7½. Matt was an outstanding marksman and took after his mother. Cheryl was daddy's little girl and I taught her as best as I could before pawning her off on her mother. Alan would get his first rifle come Christmas, that old Marlin model 60.

We lived in the big house now, but many of the cabins still had residents like Doc. They were simply too old to do anything but stay retired. They probably couldn't do anything else because the war was worse than we first thought. Between the warheads and the winter, Russia lost almost its entire population. China still had around 250 million and growing, but no more nukes.

We no longer got oil from the Middle East because the oil wouldn't pump through the glass that the Israeli nukes produced. Speaking of Israel, they were still

feuding with what few neighbors they had left. I guess they just like to argue.

End