

The Last Covid

The Warriors of Albion

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Published: 2021



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Prologue

Central Military Commission of the Communist Party of China. Beijing. 48hrs before Covid Release.

The lighting in the room was subdued. The CMC Vice Chairman, Zhou Enlai thought this appropriate for the matter at hand. In front of him was a table with seven seats, the three that had belonged to those deemed to be responsible for the recent debacle concerning the Australians and New Zealanders were now empty. They had been ‘disappeared’ and all history of them, erased. Four sets of eyes looked back at him, seemingly unconcerned.

On paper the CMC Vice Chairman was under the responsibility of the Central Committee, but in practice since Mao’s time, he reported only to the Paramount Leader of the CCP, Xi Jinping.

Yesterday in a recent private meeting the Blessed Leader had been incandescent at the reports flowing in from their naval commanders referring to irradiated vessels that would have to be scuppered. He was in such in such a rage that he had actually screamed and ranted at Zhou that the recent ‘Loss of Face’ to the Westerners would not be tolerated! The result being that Zhou knew that his own political and physical survival depended upon something being done to strike back and quickly.

The Chinese Ministry for State Security had learned from a highly placed Member of the British Parliament that the United Kingdom had recently armed the Australians and New Zealanders with nuclear weapons to be used at their discretion.

The effrontery of the Westerners!

After over fifty years of Chinese espionage throughout the Western nations it had been decided that the Australian and New Zealand Governments along with their armed forces had been undermined sufficiently for the next steps in The Great Plan to take place.

The previous week two Chinese naval attack groups containing hundreds of ships, supposedly on naval exercises had ‘accidentally’ strayed close to the northern Australian coast. In actuality they were awaiting the order to turn and finally attack Australia in a decisive blow. This would consist of attacks against all military installations, first with the landing of troops and then cruise missiles delivered to the more remote locations.

The plan also called for the troop air transports from southern China to be in the air as the fleets began to turn. It would take the Australians many valuable hours before they realized what was happening thanks to the work of many Chinese 'Associates' on the mainland! Port Moresby would be taken easily first followed by a quick hop onto the mainland whilst the foolish Americans and deluded Europeans looked the other way.

No one could have known of the plans but the treacherous Australian and the New Zealanders had somehow found out! It was suspected that British satellites had been overhead feeding Cheltenham and Canberra live intelligence!

A small nuclear device had been detonated in the path of the two fleets as a preliminary warning. Chinese casualties had been slight, a few hundred troop-carrying aircraft were lost and a few thousand or so naval personnel. The Chinese fleets had no choice but to prudently turn away, the Great Plan frustrated at the first hurdle, China defeated and shamed in the eyes of the world!

In a tempestuous meeting it had been tempting to allow the Generals their way and respond with a counterstrike but the CMC Chairman knew that although they held the weak American government in check through the same means they controlled the Europeans, any Nuclear attack by China, no matter where or how small, would have the same effect on the decadent westerners as when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor!

The Paramount Leader had indeed completely lost control in the meeting; Zhou had never seen or heard of this happening before! The Blessed Leader banged the desk repeatedly and shouted at him that the British were still treating China as they had in the 1920's!

Revenge on the Australians and New Zealanders would be taken in a suitable manner, at a later date, but the British were the priority and must be made to pay and pay dearly and soon!

There had to be a better way, a more subtle and non-attributable way to punish their British enemy.

And there was.

Chapter 1

Porky carefully lifted his head above the embankment and looked across the Thames estuary towards Canvey Island with his battered binoculars that only had one working 'ocular', "Looks like a small PLAN (*People's Liberation Army Navy*) boat, seems to be drifting too."

"Driftin' our bloody way, ah bet! Always the bloody same!" muttered Little Tom, who was actually six foot eight and built like a brick outhouse.

I was afraid and nervous and couldn't stop myself, "For god's sake stop moanin'!"

We could all see that the small vessel was indeed drifting towards us courtesy of the incoming tide and would reach the nearby pebble filled shore within the hour.

One of the Newbies actually stood up, obviously proud of his new combats with the grey *Army Reserve* logo on the arms with the Royal Engineer' flash below. *Stupid does* I thought and before anyone could tell him he was a stupid arse, or to *get the fook down* there was a *Crack* sound that emanated from the Chinese vessel. His head vaporized into a thin red cloud that descended upon us all.

Porky confirmed, amidst the squeals and moans of disgust from the rest of us, "Those bastards have got a hypersonic rifle mounted on the bow. Anyway they know we're here now so let's move."

He pointed behind us into the industrial estate at a two-story brick building that had been a garage before the latest and deadliest Covid, designated Covid 69 by the boffins at Porton Down, had reached our green and pleasant land.

There were five of us remaining in our little band; we wouldn't count any of the Newbies sent to us from Central Command in London until they had managed at least a month's survival with us. However they didn't seem to last long. Once upon a time at the beginning, the section had been typically eighteen in number; a typical army section, but Covid 69 and the general lawlessness in the places we had to go to had worked to reduce our number.

So at the start of this tale our sorry group consisted of the following;

1) Our brave leader and Sergeant nicknamed Porky because he was short, overweight and used to be a butcher in real life. "Not much change then!" he would often murmur to himself when the bullets began to fly.

2) Little Tom had been a miner in one of the last coal pits somewhere in Gloucestershire before the Covid 69 took most of the miners and they closed it down. His main *claim to fame* was that he would drink himself stupid on any kind of available alcohol he could find!

3) *Sir Peter* so named because he was so well spoken and seemed to us to have been born with the proverbial *Silver Spoon* in his gob! In his previous life he'd had a public school education with good prospects before he found out there was easy money and lots of it, to be made by dealing drugs!

He was one of the rare people that Covid 69 had actually benefited, because he'd been on remand in Wandsworth Prison awaiting trial and looking forward to at least a hard labor ten-stretch, when thanks to *The Emergency Military Powers Act, 2028* he was conscripted into the Army Reserve as opposed to the Regular Army that had been whittled away by successive governments for as far back as I could remember and now couldn't cope with the Chinese incursions.

Poor old Sir Peter still had pretensions of being an officer, totally ignoring the realities of his and our present situation. We all knew he would never be called *Sir* because at the very least he was marked on the Army List as a *Felon*.

4) *Biker Bill* who wore his denim motorcycle jacket, his *colors*, beneath his combats; many a new officer at Central had tried and failed to discipline him. Rumor had it that some had, late at night felt the texture of the long motorcycle chain he habitually carried.

5) And last but not least there was myself.

As I look back now I must have been such an innocent in Civvie Street. I'd been walking home to my wife and daughter from work in one of the last aircraft

factories still operational in Bristol, England. These days the same place lies desolate and empty, the complex machinery inert forever. Pigeons have taken over the gigantic aircraft hangars and rabbits fill the runway in the evenings watched by the occasional fox from the long grass.

My work had been tiring with long hours due to the declining workforce and desperate Ministry of Defense requirements. That fateful day I was wearing my useless facemask, as a good citizen should and clutching my *Permission to Travel* document in my sweaty, nervous hand just in case one of the last remaining Policemen or a Militiaman should stop me. I took care to avoid the occasional poor soul who had succumbed to '69 and lay in the street awaiting the infrequent *Body Carts* that toured the highways and byways of wonderful old Cider land.

Everything changed for me that day; a passing army patrol saw me and stopped on its way to the west coast to deal with an armed gang that was giving the Police problems. The patrol needed to make up their numbers sharpish and I must have looked a suitable candidate, '69 free and fairly fit.

"God help me!" I thought when the truck screeched to a halt and two soldiers, Little Tom and Sir Peter both armed to the teeth and looking very fierce had dropped to the pavement in my path. I was informed that I was to be forcibly recruited under the powers given to the British Army under *The Armed Forces Supplementary Recruitment' Bill of 2028*.

Despite my protests I was forced to discard my overcoat, briefcase on the spot and don a smelly rough denim combat blouse. I was appalled when I detected what might be a bullet hole surrounded by a dried brown stain! What poor soul was I replacing? I never found out.

The truck gained speed, leaving the scene of my kidnapping and I gazed longingly out of the rear of the truck wondering if it was worth it to leap out and run. As if reading my mind Porky punched my arm and impressed upon me that the penalty for desertion was summary execution. A battered old Armalite was then thrust into my soft hands.

During the bumpy ride out of the beleaguered city they taught me the basics of the rifles' operation and that was the entirety of my initial military training. More would come later if I managed to survive what was known as the *Newbie Period*.

At one point during the journey Porky had shouted above the racket of the three liter diesel to get my attention and accidentally christening me with my nickname that I grew to hate, "Hoy, Brizzle!"

For all I know my briefcase with my empty sandwich box and I-Phone is still lying there in the middle of Filton High Street, ignored by the infrequent pedestrians as just a bit more refuse from somebody who had succumbed to '69.

I suppose I had, in a way...

With the skill borne of much practice we hid ourselves in the derelict buildings and awaited the beaching of the Chinese motorboat. Suddenly a small whirring shape flew up from the craft and towards our previous position.

In a stage whisper Biker Bill said, "Drone!"

Quickly, we wrapped ourselves in our thermal capes that would hide our bodies and our heat signatures and Porky said, "Let it go, Little Tom, let it go! That's an order!"

LittleTom loved to shoot at drones and now he had a sulk on and his lower lip quivered with rage. I wouldn't have been surprised if he had ignored Porky except when Porky said, "*That's an order!*" you knew he was serious, deadly serious!

The Chinese operator was good. The drone hovered close above the body of the late newbie, and then rotated three-sixty scanning the terrain. It soared in our direction to make Sir Peter quiver with fear and loudly break wind as he always did when he felt threatened, which was most of the time. Sometimes we were convinced that he would indeed make a good officer!

The glass-fibre hulled fast torpedo boat grounded on the shore and two Chinese soldiers jumped into the water with securing ropes to tie around nearby rocks. We deduced they must have had some kind of engine trouble because there was no sound of any engine or electrical output. We could see the one on deck with the drone control, sitting up behind the Hypersonic rifle. From the stern a door opened in the aft bulkhead and six PLAN Marines appeared and hopped over the side into the shallow water. Immediately we saw them we were jealous of their pristine body-armor and shiney new QBZ 95 assault rifles, although the last one to gain the shore had a QBZ-95 RPG instead.

Immediately Little Tom perked up and said in a tone that brooked no disagreement from the rest of us, his eyes gleaming with avarice, "The RPG is mine!"

Nearby Biker Bill sniggered nastily and muttered, "Not if ah get there first!"

We watched as the eight soldiers scanned the terrain and slowly walked over to our previous position. Although war hadn't been officially declared we regarded them as our enemy, China having laid waste to our country alone with yet another, more successful and more deadly Covid release.

They must have thought that we'd retreated and were far away and still running because their leader suddenly straightened up when he saw the newbie's body. Words were exchanged amid some laughter and two of the troop began rifling the pockets of the unfortunate squaddie.

In a way we were disappointed at them with this unprofessional performance; they were obvious amateurs.

Near to me Biker Bill tittered as if he was trying not to laugh at a rude joke. Porky turned and glared, "What have you fooking done?"

"Jus' left them a little presey, Porks!"

One of the enemy soldiers rolled the newbie over to see what other equipment he might have and discovered one of Biker Bill's fragmentation grenades. Before the two unfortunates could register their horror, the pin that had been held secure by the weight of the newbie flicked up and flew away! There was an almighty bang!

Porky knew the game was up then and shouted, "Fire,"

Our rifles clattered away for a few seconds and the six remaining men danced the crimson gavotte of death. This immediately caused some consternation on the boat where the drone pilot twiddled away and we knew that there were only seconds until the explosive-carrying drone landed amongst us. Another crewmember climbed behind the hypersonic rifle to add to our impending displeasure.

Sir Peter might have been a big twonk but he wasn't totally useless and had his HK417 marksman's rifle pointed at the boat; two quick shots that burst through

two bodies in two crimson ruptures and silence descended. There was no sign of life on the boat; it looked like we had killed them all.

Behind us, about a street away, there was a subdued explosion as the uncontrolled drone crashed, detonated and spoiled someone else's day.

Being the good well disciplined soldier he was, Biker Bill ran forward bayonet fixed and barely examined the carnage as he focused on retrieving his prize, namely the blood covered RPG.

Little Tom saw what he was doing and screamed, "Come back you thievin' git! That RPG is mine!"

Porky fumed, thinking, *And I criticized the Tinkys for being unprofessional...*

Suddenly a hatch flew up on the upper deck and the ship's four engine room crew appeared readying their weapons, one pointed an arm in Bill's direction. It looked like he was toast!

We were too far away to stop him being targeted, but he was a bloody clever so and so. Quickly he readied the RPG and from a distance of fifty yards he fired at the ship's hull, roughly where the engine room was as it turned out. There was a tremendous blast as armaments and diesel fuel blew. The engine room crew disappeared within the red fireball that reached out in all directions, blasting past Biker Bill and creating a mini-mushroom cloud of burning oil.

"E's 'ad it!" screamed Sir Peter.

"We can only hope." Said Little Tom.

"E's too much of a twat for that, trust me," muttered Porky resignedly.

The explosion was merely a blast of hot air when it reached us and as the heat dissipated we looked for Bill. Suddenly someone with no hair or eyebrows and with a rifle with a glob of melted plastic where the stock had been stood up and screamed in triumph, "Mine'll be a number 46 with rice!" before collapsing.

Chapter 2

The Right Honorable Karl Menzies, His Majesty's (not so) loyal Opposition Member of Parliament for North Islington drove his Porche slowly out of the Dartford tunnel then pressed the accelerator as he headed in the direction of Rochester on the near empty road, trying to make up for time lost at the numerous checkpoints on his way out of London.

Strictly speaking he should have had his bodyguard with him if only to help move the numerous bodies of those who had succumbed to '69 that occasionally appeared in the road, but generally, once away from population centers the roads were reasonably clear with only the occasional swerve needed.

He thought to himself, "No, no need for a police bodyguard on this run; if they knew what I'm doing I'd be for the high-jump!"

For the umpteenth time he mentally kicked himself, bashing his palms on the steering wheel in frustration, "Oh god, why was I so stupid? Stupid! Stupid!"

His thoughts went back to his first 'Jolly' away from Westminster, not long after he had come down from Oxford and just prior to his very well connected wedding

to the oldest daughter of the Somerset Ponsonbys that had also made him very rich.

The aforesaid Jolly was something to do with the Overseas Aid that the 'virtue signaling' political elite in Westminster had been still sending to China in the naïve belief that they were buying influence; millions upon millions of pounds every year despite the fact that the rapidly militarizing country was beginning to threaten its neighbours as it flexed its military muscles.

But analytical thinking was always in short supply amongst the sitting M.P.'s of the British Parliament and was above Karl's *Pay Grade* as he very often said to himself; an excuse when his PPE (Philosophy, Politics and Economics) degree fell short in the real world, which happened more often than he was comfortable with. He knew he wasn't the sharpest crayon in the box but in common with much of the then Political Elite, he was a member of the cross-party 'Chumocracy', so could do no wrong!

But he had.

They had all been put up in a very plush hotel in Beijing and the first thing he noticed was that the chaps from the Overseas Aid Department liked to party and could put the drink away like it was going out of fashion! A jolly time was had by all and no one noticed when the Chinese girls appeared, expensively dressed and smelling so wonderful! Oh so wonderful!

To this day Karl couldn't remember how he ended up in bed with Suzie. To himself he called her Suzie Wong with his typical arrogance because he also couldn't remember her unpronounceable name anyway; but it didn't matter because it turned out that she was Chinese MSS (*Ministry of State Security*) anyway!

As soon as the incriminating photographs of Karl and Suzie with a companion short movie (with surround sound) along with recordings of his indiscreet ramblings about his fellow Members of Parliament were shown to Karl, he was in no position to refuse them anything!

Just before they all flew back to London Karl was approached by Ling Yung, a dapper Intelligence Officer of the MSS to inform him he would henceforth provide whatever information his London handler asked for and exert his MP's influence when instructed. Standard Operating Procedure for the MSS for over fifty years!

Karl raged and screamed and thumped his fist especially hard when the agent heard him describe 'Suzy Wong' and burst out laughing so hard that tears rolled down his hateful Chinese face.

For a brief moment Karl even thought about doing the right thing and considered contacting MI5 on his return to England. However he would be ruined politically, financially and the Somerset Ponsonbys would cut him loose damned sharpish!

Fortunately for the Chinese 'doing the right thing for your country' was an alien concept to a large number of the members of the UK establishment!

Since then Karl had lived an uneasy existence sometimes interrupted by shivers of cold fear that could appear at any time and would run through him at unexpected moments reminding him of the consequences of being unmasked as a traitor, especially now with the introduction of the *Special Powers Act of 2028*.

Lately, oddly enough with the appearance of '69, Karl had relaxed a little as the whole official fabric of the country along with the Security Services, fought vainly for its very existence but nevertheless began to wither away. The plague had cut a swath through the population as well as the political establishment and even better still, through the Chinese embassy! One had to admire the Chinese for their ruthlessness in even sacrificing some of their own security people! Karl had not been contacted for over a year and had begun to think that he was free!

Unfortunately for Karl, he wasn't the only person the Chinese referred to as an *Associate* (so much more refined than the term *Traitor*). The previous day he had received an anonymous instruction from such an *Associate*. He was told to attend a meeting at a location in Sheerness, coincidentally and conveniently near the coast if you were disembarking from a Chinese Navy vessel; Ling Yung would be there somewhere in the sparsely populated town waiting for him.

During this time period there was occasional and unopposed Chinese navy activity around the coast because the battered and much reduced Royal Navy had bigger fish to fry. The bulk of Chinese troop ships were held up in the Indian Ocean by the allied fleets of India, Australia and New Zealand.

The threat of the use of nuclear weapons by Turkey if the Chinese used the Turkish border to enter the docile EU countries was also an impediment to them.

Karl hoped for a Party position when the CCP took over, as he was convinced they must but he abruptly came out of his daydream when the SatNav beeped as his car entered the outskirts of Sheerness.

The streets were deserted except for the occasional body sprawled messily on the pavement or more inconveniently in the road. Paper and assorted rubbish blew about in the early morning wind and Karl slowed down at an intersection to turn right. He still activated the car's indicators out of a lifetime habit although there were no other moving vehicles to be seen. He looked left and received a shock by the appearance of a short line of what could have been British soldiers. He stalled the car as the men walked across the road in front of him; one of them appeared to be wearing badly burnt clothing topped with a dark blue Chinese navy cap. No hair was visible on his ruddy face, either. In fact he looked liked he'd had a jolly good toasting.

Karl was glad he was on the winning side at that moment!

The five soldiers crossed in front of the car, all ignoring him and the oddity of an actual civilian vehicle driving around; with the exception of the enormous thug that brought up the rear. He flicked Karl the bird and mouthed the immortal salute for government types, *Winker*.

The men finally disappeared and Karl's pulse returned to normal. He restarted the engine.

Anyone in the vicinity just at that moment would have been surprised and curious when Karl's mobile telephone chimed the arrival of an incoming text; the civilian telephone networks had disappeared very quickly with the onset of '69 and had been gone and consigned to everyone's distant memory alongside VHS recorders and DVD's, never to return. But his was a 'special' phone delivered to Karl by his oriental friends at a 'dead letter' drop near Parliament Square that he had to check on a regular basis, or else.

The message was brief; *Side door, Millers Camping, 45 Russel Street.*

After walking from the car, several streets away, Karl reached Russel Street and number 45. He pushed the side door open and it creaked on its neglected hinges, *No chance of me sneaking in then.* he thought.

He found himself in a short, unlit passageway with an open door down on the left. As he slowly moved nearer he could hear movement and his heart began to pound. Entering the room that was piled high with camping equipment he was grabbed at the door by two burly Chinese men in track suits, one pushed a Type-77 pistol (7.62×17 mm Type 64 calibre semi-automatic pistol) into his neck whilst the other did the frisking.

Karl was then dragged to the opposite end of the room and into the Manager's Office where as expected Ling Yung sat puffing away on his favorite cigarette, a *Lesser Panda*.

Smells like shit! Karl thought but did not say.

Ling Yung noticed Karl's look of disgust and smirked, "Not as good as English Fag, eh?"

Karl was pushed down into the seat opposite and was conscious of the presence of one of the thugs behind him whilst the other disappeared out into the street.

"Why am I here? What is so important to drag me away from London? Why not just use the Dead Letter Drop?"

Ling Yung did a bad imitation of an English 'Toff' and said, "Bit of a panic at the moment, Old Bean! One of our London *Associates* has gone missing. You may not know him, The Right Honorable Sidney Starmer. That's a laugh, isn't it Karl, honorable? But be assured he knows you..."

Karl felt a shiver run down his traitorous spine, Starmer had been a good 'Chum', definitely a good egg despite being with the Liberal Party!

But Ling continued.

"But don't ask too many questions, Karl, my friend. Take this." Ling Yung pushed a USB stick across the table.

"Yes?"

"We need you to take this back and plug it into a computer, any computer, in the Admiralty Command and Control Centre. The software will do the rest."

"I can't do that! I don't have anything to do with the Navy."

"We know that you are on the latest ad-hoc Select Committee due to visit Admiralty House; something to do with the new *Press Gang* regulations for bolstering the serving personnel numbers."

Karl felt faint. His new *friends* knew too much, but then he wasn't surprised; Chinese money had been flowing through the UK Universities and Westminster for years. Nevertheless he didn't understand what their problem was.

As if reading his mind, Ling Yung smiled, "Have you heard of our aircraft carrier the SHANDONG?"

This was something of a hobby-horse of Karl's, "Vaguely, launched 2017, carries forty-odd aircraft or something like that."

"Well, you're pitifully small Royal Navy that we had managed to reduce over the years with the influence of our other Westminster *friends*, actually managed to get an Astute Class hunter killer submarine, the AUDACIOUS we think, near our North Atlantic Battle Group."

Karl was on tenterhooks at this incredible news and was desperate to know the outcome. The bloody Royal Navy people were notoriously silent and would only repeat the WWII saying, "Loose lips, sinks ships." when questioned.

"And?"

Ling Yung's smile turned nasty, "The SHANDONG and three of our Type 055 Destroyers lie at the bottom of the ocean somewhere in the Bay of Biscay, along with the British submarine I hope!"

"So what will this USB do?"

"It will download a program that will send us the location of all RN ships. But that's not all; have you heard of something called *Operation Valhalla*?"

Karl thought, "No. Not even a whisper."

"Try and find out; it could be important to us," and with an imperious wave of dismissal, "Now go!"

Karl snatched the USB in anger then felt a slight draught of air on his left cheek that he assumed was from outside. He then watched in amazement as Ling Yung's expression changed to one of horror when a smallish red spot appeared on his chest then quickly burst into a crimson fountain! Karl was revolted when blood gushed out in arterial spurts onto the narrow table and ran over the edge to splash his shoes.

Ling looked up at Karl before his life departed and the lifeless body crashed forward onto the desk.

Silence.

Karl could hear the rapid *pi-pat* of blood splattering onto the concrete floor, appallingly slowly, although the actual time must have been seconds, he vocalized somewhere in his mind; what a veritable torrent! And the smell as the corpse released it's bowels; awful!

Something hot touched his cheek and he turned to look into the baby blue eyes of the awfully burnt thug he'd seen not so long ago. The creature held an ugly Chinese pistol with a suppressor attached and from beneath a dark blue Chinese navy cap, the burnt face smiled a smile that didn't reach the eyes, "Fookin' traitor!"

Chapter 3

We had moved a couple of miles away from the burning Chinese boat and we watched the belching black clouds from the safety of the upstairs of a semi-detached that we had commandeered. I say commandeered because the occupants were still in possession of their property. Unfortunately they had been dead for several weeks courtesy of '69. We gently gathered them together in the back bedroom, the door sealed by a thick blanket nailed to the frame by yours truly.

In the distance toxic black smoke roared hundreds of meters into the sky letting the Tinkys and anyone else with guns, know there was something that might be worth investigating. On the other hand, if you were local, you'd want to be getting far away as possible before the naughty boys with the guns appeared!

Porky had been on the Sat phone for a good half an hour with Central Command in London telling them of our recent skirmish with the Chinese boat. We all hoped what would then follow would be instructions for us to re-enter the London Security Area for a well earned rest.

We could tell by the expression on Porky's face that something else was up.

He put the phone away, "Sorry Lads, we have an emergency personnel pickup just down the coast. We have to return the said Person to London ASAP!"

This announcement sent Little Tom to moaning again. He was very good at moaning.

"Are we the only fukin' soldiers they've got? An' who's the fookin' 'said Person?'"

This of course set Sir Peter to start whining again, he was constantly worried about jeopardizing his skin, "Will it be risky Sarge?"

Porky glared at Sir Peter with unconcealed contempt and he muttered to Little Tom, "For fook's sake stop yer effin moanin' yer winker! This comes direct from MI5. We've to pick up a high value Target, alive preferably. Oh and he's a Member of Parliament as well! Ooh, and before yer ask yes there'll be some Tinkys about! Now the lot of yer shut yer gobs and mount up."

We readied ourselves, checked our weapons and proceeded to walk the short distance to the A226.

We waited in an old bus shelter for the arrival of some transport and were thankful the shelter was quite long. We all sat together at one end so as not to disturb the sleeping forms at the other.

After all we had been through we could barely bring ourselves to gaze upon the mother. She wore a large raincoat that had been opened at one side to wrap and encompass the still body of her seven year old son, and then buttoned up again.

Dead about a week I thought.

Of course Sir Peter couldn't shut his gob. Nervously sniggering as he stroked his rifle, he spoke to the dead woman, "It's a bugger when yer miss yer bus, Innit?" He then brayed like a donkey at his own wit, "Where yer goin', the graveyard?"

It took both Porky and myself to restrain Biker Bill who like myself, had a wife and child out there somewhere fending for themselves. Bill had jumped up and screamed, "You cold-hearted bastard." And strove to shove his bayonet into a now screeching and farting Sir Peter.

Sometime later after we had settled down, we heard the rumble of an approaching vehicle and a MAN LSV (Logistics Support Vehicle) truck turned the corner driven by none other than our 'friend' Johnny Greenteeth who must have been the only Military Policeman left in the whole of the army. We remembered him well for getting all of us in trouble many times, mostly for scuffling with the Regulars during various drink-based misdemeanors. Love him? Did we hell!

The truck stopped and he leant out and smiled his revolting *never-used-a-toothbrush-in-my-life* smile, "Going my way chaps?" He knew damn well where we were going and we all scrambled into the rear. No one wanted to sit up front.

I gazed out of the rear of the truck as we pulled away, mentally wishing the woman and her son goodbye.

I'd heard from a medic that Covid '69 had a mortality rate of nearly 67% and just for the hell of it, I'd looked up population numbers in the British Library in London during my last rest period. I guesstimated that the population of the UK was heading down to 23million, the same as it had been in 1831! I couldn't tell anyone these unpalatable facts of course; we had seen people shot for spreading Defeatism...

It wasn't a comfortable journey, in any sense. We were thrown about when the vehicle swerved and occasionally we would have to jump down and move a blockage in the road. Usually close to a village it would be a makeshift barricade, a poor attempt to stop newcomers entering and bringing the '69. A quick look down the winding deserted streets would tell us it had been in vain. We would see heaped but discarded body carts or just the departed lying in the streets.

Once we leaped from the rear of the truck when the road was blocked by single-decker country bus. Looking through the dusty windows we could see several families that had tried to escape. The gangway and overhead racks were full of their belongings that they would never need again.

The last ones to die, a mother and father it looked like, lay near the front door and were still holding hands but surrounded by opened pill bottles and unused tablets.

I had a pry bar and forced the boarding door open creating a lot of noise in the process. The pungent smell of death forced me back momentarily but by now we were all used to it. I managed to reach the handbrake and shout to the others who waved to Johnny Greenteeth who nudged the bus with the front fender of the truck. I moved the steering wheel until I could see the road behind was clear and pulled the handbrake on again then I heard the loud barking of dogs that seemed to be coming closer. Peering out of the doors I was shocked to see a pack of what might have been pets not too long ago, but now ravenous and wild leaping from the shelter of the trees onto the road, desperate for fresh meat!

Panicking because I was unarmed I slammed the remnants of the door shut and held it in position as an enormous Alsatian scabbled with the most enormous paws I have ever seen to open it for the tasty morsel inside (moir!).

Thankfully the guns of my comrades started up and the air was filled with squeals of canine pain and in a few moments the pack withdrew leaving a few dead and wounded behind. No doubt when we left the pack would return and cannibalize the unfortunates.

I stepped down from the bus and tried to close the door and show the occupants a modicum of respect when Little Tom marched over with my rifle and said with a broad grin, "Ah bet yer a fookin' cat person now!"

The time passed slowly, we passed by seemingly endless empty fields and as we got closer to Sheerness, we occasionally would see someone in the distance who would either wave or run away in panic. There was no sign of any working factories or garages, we even passed one of the mini-nuclear power stations that had started to spring up the year before but behind the barbed wire there was no sign of any security team, no steam belching from pipes, no whirring turbines, nothing.

Finally we reached the outskirts of Sheerness and Johnny Greenteeth brought the truck to a halt, "Right me bonny lads, off yer get and be quick about it! Ah've got Places to go, People ter see etc!"

Again we had to restrain Biker Bill who this time had his motorcycle chain out.

"No one would ever know what happened to 'im! Please let me!"

The truck slowly moved off with Johnny Greenteeth smiling down at us, "See yer, see yer; wouldn't want ter be yer!"

For a moment I wished I'd let Biker Bill have his way.

Chapter 4

The cold North Sea wind blew through the streets devoid of life. Discarded newspaper blew to and fro beneath our slowly marching feet. If we cared to look closely we could read the headlines, *Latest Vaccine proves ineffective!* and my personal favorite from the *Daily Express*, *Was Covid '69 released deliberately by Chinese?*

Of course it bloody was!

We stopped in a Tesco doorway while Porky answered the sat phone that had rang a moment before. He nodded and nodded and then wrote down an address that Sir Peter quickly found on the SatNav. There was more detailed description of the target too.

We set off again with a warning from Porky that there would be Tinkys about.

Quickly we reached our destination, the street that ran parallel and opposite to Millers Camping, 45 Russel Street. We were faced with the rear gardens of a long line of terraced two beds, two floor houses. Little Tom tried to guess which one would be opposite the camping shop and forced a back door. We were all surprised when a reedy voice of a thin ten year old boy spoke indignantly, "Ere, what yer doin'? You've broken me mam's back door!"

Biker Bill gently grasped the boy's shoulders and moved him aside then marched into the living room, again with the reedy voice shouting, "Ere don't go in there..."

The lad's parents sat together on the settee, arms around each other in death, the television crackling away with the static of no transmission. Before leaving and closing the door Biker Bill quickly looked through the net curtains at the camping shop across the road and two doors down and said sarcastically "Little Tom, yer were nearly right!"

Sir Peter and I entered the upstairs bedroom where the young boy had obviously been living. Empty baked bean tins were scattered around the room amongst dirty clothes strewn on the floor. I gritted my teeth because I knew we couldn't help the child; there were no longer any orphanages or Social Services because there weren't the people to run them! I peered through the faded net curtains with Porky's binoculars as Sir Peter set up his rifle on the dressing table, "One on the roof." I called down.

"Stay there. Give us exactly fifteen minutes!" was the reply.

Ten minutes later Porky, Biker Bill and Little Tom watched from behind the rubbish bins in the alley as a well dressed gentleman in an expensive overcoat appeared from the street and entered the side door.

“Isn’t that the Winker we saw in the car a while ago?” asked Biker Bill.

Porky smiled, “Ooh yes! Looks like he’s our Naughty Boy as well!”

It was mid afternoon and an incessant cold wind blew up the street from the sea. The houses faced directly onto the pavement, having no front gardens and Sir Peter and I were taken by surprise when directly across from us a front door opened and a little girl, about eight or nine year old wearing dirty jeans and a pink unicorn sweatshirt stepped onto the pavement. The door behind her slammed shut in the wind and she held in one short arm a tin of Heinz Baked Beans. She bellowed at the front door below us, “Bileee! Ah’ve got something ter eat!”

Immediately the head popped up from the flat roof of the camping shop and we could see a weapon coming to bear for some easy target practice.

It was a trifle early but Sir Peter didn’t hesitate and fired with his silenced rifle, both of us hoping that the people inside the shop wouldn’t notice. In the small bedroom the rifle spat too loudly for my liking, the silencer was worn out, like most of our gear.

We heard a faint smacking noise when the gunman’s chest erupted into a torrent of blood that was picked up by the wind and sent to splatter impressively all over the road and a nearby abandoned car.

“How’d you do that Peter?”

“Explosive dum-dum. Good eh?”

I was impressed. Sir Peter might have been a knob, but he knew all about guns!

The little girl never noticed because the wind took the noise away and she knocked once on the door below and pushed it open as she was used to. Sir Peter smirked at me, “Sloppy-Woppy! Who didn’t check the front door, Brizzle?”

Someone came out of the side door of the camping shop holding a small machine pistol and before he got to the blood splatter, Porky ran up behind him with his knife. A strong left hand over the mouth and a right-handed throat slash and it was silently over.

Little Tom and Biker Bill quietly entered. Sir Peter and I packed up to go over, just in case. We clumped down the worn wooden stairs, the young boy and little girl looked at us from the kitchen table where they sat, their feet swinging but not touching the floor, dirty spoons in their small hands. They were sharing the cold baked beans and a bottle of coke as they had many times before.

Before we reached the side entrance Little Tom and Biker Bill came out dragging the well dressed man by the scruff of his expensive coat. Down the alley Porky was talking on the Sat phone arranging our pick up, I supposed.

Biker Bill had the man’s wallet in his hand and was sorting through the contents that once inspected were tossed carelessly into the street, “Drivin’ license, crap. Ooh, House of Parliament I.D. card, shite! Yer won’t be needin’ that where you’re goin’. Money; five fifty pound notes, effin’ useless!” The man whimpered when Biker Bill released the notes and documents that were

immediately taken by the wind and quickly scattered amongst the other refuse. No one would find any of it because there wasn't anyone to look and it would be a long, long time before there was. Little Tom held a USB drive up under the man's eyes, "Wonder what this is for, Traitor!"

The man whimpered anew.

Chapter 5

Johnny Greenteeth picked us up at the same place he had dropped us off and in the same truck too, although it had several new bullet holes in the side door and some damage to the front bumper where dried blood could be seen.

Johnny saw me looking and said with his trademark arrogance, "A gang tried to hijack the truck, just outside of Margate," he patted the outside of the cab door with affection, "Bloody well made, these trucks!"

I glanced over the large front wheel and I swear I saw a tattered forearm, hand still attached with a wedding ring too, jammed in the suspension.

We climbed into the rear with our captive whose expensive coat was now ruined. We were surprised to be confronted by two prisoners, handcuffed and shackled to the benches. One was a young man of about twenty with an arrogant sneer even better than Johnny's and the other was an older man of about fifty, rough looking and handy with his fists by the look of him.

Johnny shouted through, "The young'un thought he could murder a Margate policeman for kicks and the other was caught fraternizing with some Chinese soldiers, telling them the layout of the land; just taking them to Londinium for the Military Tribunal."

The older man looked at me and our eyes met; we both knew that any mention of the Military Tribunal was a death sentence.

The journey back to London was uneventful except for the occasional Chinese Drone that flashed overhead, controlled from the depths of an anonymous Chinese warship just over the horizon. Overall, I felt depressed at the sight of the seemingly empty towns and countryside. If things didn't change soon then the *Blessed Albion of King Arthur* would be no more!

The truck slowed to a halt at the first London checkpoint. At each side of the road 50-calibre machine guns pointed at us and we knew that slightly further up the road there would also be some heavy artillery, its range set to this spot.

We heard a plummy-accented officer ask to look at Johnny Greenteeth's orders then he appeared at the rear and looked in at us. His face curled up in disgust, not at the prisoners I should add, "God almighty, bloody Territorials! We must really be in the shite!"

Porky and Little Tom looked at each other and grinned impertinently at the man.

"Army Reserves to you, Winker!" said Porky and the Guards Officer flushed pink with indignation.

"I, I, I'll have you lot put on a charge! Insubordination, a Capital Offence!"

By this time we were all tittering and the prisoners even guffawed out loud, Little Tom leant over, the muzzle of his obviously well-used rifle mere inches from the man's face, "G.F.Y!"

"G.F.Y?"

Johnny had heard all this and slowly pulled the truck away from the Officer who looked like he was about to have a heart attack. The five of us shouted in unison, "Go Fuck Yersel!" and fell about laughing. After all, we had to find our fun wherever we could!

The truck stopped outside an anonymous metal-clad factory building on a trading estate in Hackney.

"Here yews are! Admiralty Services Building No. 4," shouted Johnny, waving his arm at us in a 'Shoo' gesture for us to disembark. He then quickly pulled away with his two remaining passengers. We all hoped never to see him again, but *the devil looks after his own* doesn't he?

We dragged our prisoner past the guards who looked at the unkempt state of us from the side of their eyes, not moving their heads. Their uniforms were immaculate. I thought they'd probably never seen a Chinese soldier...

In the large foyer we reported to the front desk where a snooty clerk took one look at us, *Harrumphed* at our disheveled appearance and proceeded to tap away on his keyboard, making us wait. I sensed that Porky and Little Tom were about to lose the plot again and I leant over the desk, pressed my complete hand onto the keyboard and it resulted in some very loud beeps, causing Mr. Snooty Clerk to squeal in shock.

"Were you on the 3rd level of Super Mario then, me babbers?" I asked.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" he exclaimed. He was outraged and shouted, "Guards!"

With impressive quickness we were surrounded by leveled weapons and the tension climbed even higher when the safeties on our guns clicked off, all on their own like!

Suddenly an army RSM pushed his way through, "Stand down men."

"Can I 'elp you gentlemen?" He was obviously a veteran soldier and we could see he held himself as a man who had seen the bullets fly. The guards drifted away, disappointed.

Porky smiled and did a parade ground salute with the coming to attention thing too, "Yes Sergeant Major! We 'ave this 'ere Traitor to deliver to the RNP (*Royal Navy Police*)."

Behind the sulking clerk's desk there was an array separate desks with the corresponding designation for whatever your pleasure was; Military Police, Intelligence, Naval Air Division, Naval Home Command, Fleet Support and many others. At each desk sat an Officer in combat uniform, tapping away at his computer terminal, or talking to someone on the phone or just staring at us.

At the mention of the word *Traitor* the RSM's interest perked up, "Traitor, eh?" he looked Karl up and down, "Looks like 'e's not short of a few bob! But the rich types can never 'ave enough money, can they?" he pushed his face nose to nose with Karl and enquired, "An' who'll give it to them?" Before he could receive a reply, he answered for himself, "The Chinese of course!"

Just when we hoped the RSM was going to start swinging his fists and assault the prisoner Porky leant over and in a low voice said, "He's a Member of Parliament. Apprehended with Chinese Spies, may they rest in Tinky-Peace."

The RSM beamed with pleasure, ecstatic, "Luverly! I'm gonna' look forward to sorting this one!"

Sir Peter, ever the boot licker, tried to ingratiate himself and join in the fun by bellowing, "Sarge tell him what the prisoner said about that Operation Valhalla thingy!"

Porky rolled his eyes as a deathly hush descended in the room, all activity ceased and all eyes turned to us, the temperature of the room seemed to plummet. The RSM gulped and backed off sharpish, marching away with the prisoner in double time trying to forget the previous five minutes; it had not happened.

Looking at Sir Peter, Porky only had time to say, "You gobshite!" before we were approached again by three Military Police and quickly ushered through a side door accompanied by an irate looking Intelligence Officer. We were lead own several flights of stairs and into the lower levels where it was ominously quiet.

More Intelligence types appeared, armed and for the first time in a long while we were disarmed and each put into a separate holding cell, our boots and belts removed.

On the walls of my 'cell' there was the usual graffiti interspersed with Chinese writing and symbols. The Chinese writing worried me a little and then a lot when the door opened several hours later and two MP's stood there beckoning me to the door. The tall ugly one held a truncheon and the short ugly one had what looked like a cattle prod; "Next!" they shouted in unison, their faces beaming with pleasure. Not quite Morcambe and Wise, I thought.

What followed was a perfunctory interrogation by an Intelligence Officer. The Ugliers had delivered me and left the room but not before Short Ugly looked at me meaningfully, pressing his cattle prod to produce a brilliant electric light.

The powers that be quickly determined that we didn't know anything. Later when we got together to discuss this unpleasant experience, it came to light that Sir Peter, in a cowardly effort to spare himself had tattle-tailed about everything, every minor infraction of military regulations we had committed and there were a lot of them, infractions I mean not regs. So much so that the Interrogator in the end tore the pages from his book and crumpled them up with a gesture of contempt, despairing, "Guard, for god's sake get him out of here before he drives me up the wall!" And of course Sir Peter had mentioned that *he really should have been an Officer*.

Little Tom had caused a bit of a stir when he'd been delivered to the interview room by threatening the Ugliers, in the presence of the Officer, to "Shove that cattle prod/truncheon (*delete as applicable*) up your arses!"

Finally we were all ushered into a room that was covered floor, walls and ceiling with large white tiles. Fluorescent lights shone down and illuminated the one large drain in the centre of the floor. Our weapons and backpacks lay on a long trestle table that made me think that if someone from Civvie Street was to walk in he'd think, *Quite a lot of guns and stuff!* The packs had been professionally searched and the rifles given a thorough inspection too. Nothing was out of place of course, but we just knew.

We dressed and arranged our webbing the way we liked it, our packs on our backs and rifles held across our front to bring to bear quickly. A door opened and an MP Colonel entered, followed by the RSM we had *met* in the entrance hall who now held a clipboard. Both were dressed in MTP (*Multi Terrain Pattern*) camo smocks.

“I am Colonel Sykes and am here mainly to stress on you all, especially you,” he glared at Sir Peter who I’m sure would have kissed the Colonel’s camouflaged bottom, if he could, “Forget about *Operation Valhalla*, do not mention it again even to each other, or you will return to this room...” He left the rest unsaid and pointed to the drain in the floor.

The penny finally dropped that we weren’t in a strange shower room without the showers, but in a place used for carrying out executions in an expedient manner! We all nodded without comment.

“Sergeant, send these men somewhere out of the way where they won’t cause any more trouble.”

The RSM scribbled on his clipboard then gestured for us all to follow him, “This way you lot!”

Chapter 6

We left London at the rear of a convoy taking supplies to the garrison at Bristol Airport. Once on the M4 it was a grueling journey as our APC (Armored Personnel Carrier) would often swerve to avoid some obstacle or other and be slowed down by the slower progress of the four supply trucks in front of us. The progress was slow and to begin with we were surprised when we heard the convoys fifty calibers mounted on the lead APC open up, but our driver, a ginger-haired stocky individual who looked all of sixteen years old set us at ease, in his barely understandable Scottish accent, “Dinna worry lads, sumbody musta seen a spotter for one of the local gangs.”

“Have you done this journey before?” I asked.

“Aye, regular, at least once a week. We did try and vary the route and come off the M4 a coupla times, but there’s all kinds of different scallywags jus’ waiting to have a pop at uz. There’s the usual Cockney Mafia lookin’ fer anything they can get their hands on, then there’s the Jihadists out near Sluff (*Slough*) with more guns than common sense; we’ve slotted loads of ‘em but more seem to pop up the nex’ time! But the most dangerous is them organized gangs in Swindon, run by soldiers who’ve deserted.”

“Soldiers?”

“Yeah. We’ve caught a few and it’s summary execution at the side of the road for them! Some Tinkys wiv’ ‘em as well.”

I sat back in my seat, thoroughly depressed. I realized that if ever the ‘69 disappeared and the Chinese went off to aggravate someone else, then it would take a lot of effort to clean the country up, if indeed it was possible.

As evening descended the convoy turned off into the service area at Chieveley. The service station was long gone; burned out along with the petrol station. And

the remains of several cars were littered about with flat tires and smashed windows. Our six vehicles were deployed best we could manage amongst the ruins. We were lucky that the lead vehicle was the most modern in the convoy and had an infra-red array. This was connected to a small caliber hypersonic rifle liberated from the Chinese and the unit was used as a kind of 'robotic sentry'.

Captain Forbes from the Royal Artillery was in charge and he detailed three groups of two non-drivers to set up in the abandoned vehicles 'just in case' because although we were a good distance from the nearest town and the scallywags didn't like to venture too far in the dark and rain, sometimes they did when they were desperate enough.

Sir Peter and I settled down to spend the night in a not-so-old Peugeot people carrier with dried blood around the windscreen opening and we could only hope that the computer had told the Hypersonic Array that we were 'friend' and not foe. Sir Peter set up his sniper rifle pointing to a gap between two hillocks that separated the car park from the distant housing estate and I had been loaned a pair of Night Vision goggles to complement the NV scope on Sir Peter's gun.

Of the vehicles spread about the car park we were the furthest out and as darkness fell silence descended, broken by the occasional whirr of the hypersonic array. The first armed incursion came just after midnight; we must have been spotted coming up off the motorway. At first a small group of four appeared from the direction of the motorway and slowly inspected our grouping, looking for sentries out in the open and anything lying about worth taking. The Hypersonic Array went quiet and stayed immobile, its controller biding his time waiting for them to come nearer. Some signal must have been given by the interlopers because suddenly a group of twelve appeared behind them all armed with various makeshift weapons, also walking rapidly towards us from the motorway. Then the 'icing on the cake', another dozen appeared between the hillocks in front of Sir Peter and I from the direction of the distant housing estate, also intent upon the loaded supply trucks.

"Showtime." I whispered to Sir Peter. Behind us the Hypersonic Array came to ear-splitting life and noisily elevated itself a meter. Engaging the motorway group, the weapon chose individual targets with a *whirr* then a *bang* as it discharged, *whirr, bang, whirr, bang*, on and on endlessly. The distant bodies screamed and some flew apart or bits flew off them before a lucky three managed to escape, running away screaming and covered in the blood and entrails of their amigos.

The interlopers in front of Sir Peter and I were quite close when we three groups in the cars opened fire. No makeshift clubs and cudgels for this lot! They were armed with a selection of weapons from shotguns to army issue Armalites to Chinese QBZ-95 assault rifles. I thought for a moment that the Tinkys might have supplied the QBZ's but quite obviously not with any training because in a moment, despite many shouts of '*Allahu Akbar!*' from them they were all thankfully, dead, dying or wounded.

Over our PRR's (*Personal Role Radio*) I heard Porkey say, "Brizzle-Inspection."

With that I left Sir Peter and joined Biker Bill and Little Tom on an inspection of the enemy. Nearby Porkey and Captain Forbes climbed two hillocks and looked into the night towards the council estate for signs of any counter attack.

If you are of a generous state of mind, you might consider that our attackers had been a mixed bag of Covid 69 survivors who, through no fault of their own had gone feral as their country and way of life, built up over a thousand years had fragmented, then disappeared.

Mostly of the dead before us were male from sixteen to sixty with about a third being female in the same age range too. All of the men wore western dress, but it was a surprise to me that several of the women, but not the majority, wore the Moslem headwear, the Hijab or Shayla.

There were only two survivors who were not too badly injured, a young woman of about twenty and a middle-aged man. Both had arm injuries and as they stood up blood dripped down and through their fingers making a noisy *splat* as it landed on the tarmac. They both displayed zero remorse for attacking us, trying to kill us but still expecting care when captured. After all, they had their Yooman Rites!

“Aren’t you going to do something about our injuries?” the young woman asked, expecting to be cared for by these men with guns. Men had always showed her favor, she expected it; she was a skilled manipulator...

After a moment the Captain came over with Porky and sent the rest of us back to our positions. The last we heard was some talking then raised voices before the beginnings of a woman’s scream and a man’s shout. Then two pistol shots followed by the sounds of two lifeless bodies striking the tarmac.

The following morning we pulled out and the day was bright and sunny. The remainder of the journey only took six hours and as we approached the outskirts Bristol I could see the signs for the Filton area where my home was and thought, “So near yet so far.”

I was very surprised when the convoy veered off the motorway and up the off ramp.

Big Tom looked my way, “Porky had a word with the Captain last night and we’re gonna’ take a short diversion.”

The heavy vehicles pushed aside the occasional burnt out car that threatened to halt our progress through the lifeless streets. My heart began to beat rapidly in my chest and my mouth was dry as the large noisy vehicles eventually trundled down the narrow valley of Jefferson Road with its endless rows of semi-detached Englishman’s castles. Could it be true that I would see my wife and daughter again? I could hardly believe it.

My hopes soared even higher when Little Tom grinned and said that if we found them then my time as a soldier was over and I would be left behind!

Soon we pulled up in front of No.24 and all of the trucks shut down their engines and once again the men took up sentry positions. I was oblivious to the total silence and lack of any signs of people in the vicinity when I jumped out of the rear door, pack and weapons forgotten behind me.

The front door was intact and I retrieved my front door key from where it had been hanging around my neck on a piece of soggy string for over a year. Biker Bill and Porky hung about the front door, not entering but giving each other grim and wary looks.

The hinges of the front door creaked loudly with neglect and dust lay heavy over all of the furniture, “Catherine,” I called then shouted, but no little feet came

tappy-lapping towards me. "Betty," I called in a more desperate voice that received no reply.

I looked desperately in the living room releasing clouds of dust into the air when I touched the sofa. Looking in the kitchen I could see that the back door had been forced and the cupboards ransacked. Looking at the dust told me the break-in had been a long time ago.

I ran upstairs again creating plumes of dust from the carpet that a long ago Betty had coveted as if it had been woven from gold. The bathroom was empty; Catherine's small Bedroom was empty.

I slowly pushed the main bedroom door open, fear in my heart and the urge to scream building in my throat; all I remember now, or allow myself to remember is that the curtains were closed and in the large bed two dust covered mounds lay together, unmoving forever.

I froze in horror and as if in a dream I felt Sir Peter's fine hands pull at my shoulders and turn me round. Porky entered the room to close the door and I was led down the stairs in shock.

Since the '69 arrived and it became evident that it was no ordinary virus I had realized that these were dangerous times to live in. I was not really surprised when I'd been shanghaied into the army but somehow, because I seemed to have a natural Covid immunity I always thought that they would be spared too and would wait for me to return.

A saying of that well-known American philosopher Forest Gump summed up my naive hopes, *Stupid is as stupid does.*

Sometime later Porky sat beside me in the APC while the rest pretended to be busy and deaf, "It was Covid-69, most definitely. They won't have suffered long..."

There were many things I needed to know but knew it would do me no good anyway so I determined to keep quiet and I did except for the escape of an occasional sob that joined the tears running freely down my face.

The engines fired up and I took a last ever fleeting look at the closed door of No.24.

Chapter 7

We spent several weeks on duty around what had been Bristol Airport. The facility had been built during the WWII on a promontory well above sea level and was being kept open with any available personnel available, to await supplies from our American allies, supplies that would never come.

The new U.S. government had moved closer into Beijing's orbit and joined the E.U., in the accepted groupthink that the U.K. was finished, a lost cause. The E.U. had never forgiven us for Brexit anyway...

When we were off duty at night and confined to barracks, as it were, Biker Bill would be the first to shout, "Ok me babbers! Time for a drinkee!"

The light in our porta-cabin would be doused and the main door locked behind us as we silently traipsed towards the chain link fence where Little Tom had

created a large vertical slit. The officers knew what was going on but turned a blind eye because we all knew the end was near; the island known as Albion by the Ancient Greeks was now just about finished.

Through the fence, down the hill into the trees and into the dark rear garden of *The Jolly Bumpkin* pub where the Publican, commonly known as *Wedge* (because he was *thick* at one end, the head end) dispensed a never-ending amount of homemade Scrumpy, also known as rough Cider. Sometimes it was very rough...

Half a dozen MRE's (*Meals Ready to Eat*) allowed one to guzzle the potent cider as long as you wanted. And at nine to fifteen percent alcohol, that wasn't long except for Little Tom, that is.

Wedge's face held his professional publican's smile when we entered and piled our weapons nearby where we could keep an eye on them. He gratefully received our payments and hid them away under the counter. The smile disappeared however and his face was suffused with anger when he saw Little Tom walk in, "What yew doin' here yer greedy bastard?"

Little Tom smirked back at him and placed his MRE's on the bar, "Pint of Cider, Fatboy and be quick about it!"

Wedge fumed and spluttered at his arch enemy as he poured the pints. The problem was that Little Tom could seemingly drink and drink without getting drunk and on one occasion he had drank throughout the night when everyone else was unconscious in a drunken stupor, watched over by a raging, red faced Wedge!

A pint was banged down on the bar in front of Little Tom who took a sip then smirked again, putting his face close to Wedge, "What about a drink for me fookin' mates then?"

We all laughed and pounded the counter. Wedge couldn't bring himself to refuse, not because we were all armed to the teeth, sporting pistols and combat knives etc. but because we were regular customers and as much as he disliked the fact, we were valuable customers.

Behind Wedge was an opening into the *other room* where the officers drank and did not acknowledge our illegal presence just as we did not acknowledge theirs, during everyone's personal journey into drunken oblivion.

The following day we were treated to the sight of a small transport aircraft that came in from the north flying just above the trees before rearing up to reach the runway. After a bumpy landing the green Cessna came to a halt and two Royal Navy Officers disembarked and hurried towards the Admin Block. The fact that one had a small briefcase chained to his wrist did not escape us and was enough to get the rumor mill going, without comment about the other one who was well armed and obviously a bodyguard.

"Ooh look at them bastards," muttered Porky who had a nose for intrigue and this time his curiosity had been obviously aroused and we realized that he wouldn't rest until he knew what was going on. Biker Bill nudged me and gestured at Porky whispering, "Ah bet yer, by the end of the week he'll know everything!"

I think I rolled my eyes, thinking who cares?

The font of all knowledge was of course *Stewie* the Chief Steward who ran the Field Kitchen. The following evening at *The Jolly Bumpkin*, when he was four pints of strong cider in, Porky slid alongside him and we amiably surrounded him. Sir

Peter came over all *Matey* and stroked Stewie's vanity, "You should really be an officer too, just like them two sailors who came in a coupla' days ago, they looked very important! It must be very difficult to do your job what with them whispering away an' all..."

Stewie was now in an alcohol glow, surrounded by his new 'best mates' and was feeling magnanimous, "There's nothin' gets by me. Nothin!" he even tapped the side of his nose with a forefinger!

Sir Peter pressed another Scrumpy into Stewie's hand, now his 'best friend forever', "Oh, do tell..."

"Well those two came from Faslane, up in Jockland," he leant over conspiratorially, nearly falling over but for Big Tom steadying him, "That's where the Nooclear Subs are kept!"

I interjected, "Ah thought the shipyards were closed, because there not being enough workers."

"That's where you're wrong Brizzle, its all hands to the pumps to get the last subs away..."

We all stood there, metaphorical mouths gaping open in wonder, we were on the hook, and this gossip was fascinating!

"Away?" I asked.

"Skeleton crews, very hush hush. Ah caught them reading some Top Secret docs at the table this mornin'. They didn't realize I was clearing the table behind. Maps of the Far East ah think and everything stamped in red *Operation Valhalla* Top Secret. Funny name, that."

A sobering chill ran through our little group and in our minds we all saw Colonel Sykes back in London scrutinizing us and saying, "Forget about *Operation Valhalla*, do not mention it again even to each other."

I could still feel the chill in the white tiled execution chamber and shuddered.

As if of one mind, the five of us drifted away from Stewie who stood there swaying, "Is it something ah said, lads?"

For the first time ever, we returned to camp early.

The following day the two Naval Officers were still around, nervously and impatiently waiting for transport to London. Apparently there had been several firefights between army patrols and the Jihadi gangs that infested Reading and there was an ongoing attempt to suppress them using artillery, making the M4 temporarily a little dodgy to use.

That evening we had recovered from the previous night excesses and were back in *The Jolly Bumpkin* to do it all again. Despite the publican Wedge having a face like a slapped bum, we were in good spirits and for me it helped to suppress the images of No. 24 Jefferson Road, Filton, Bristol that now haunted me continuously.

Porky leant against the bar, his combat knife belted to his left chest and his military SatPhone that he had to carry 24/7 in a pocket on the other breast. We were just starting to get the alcoholic glow going and the night promised much entertainment because Fat Gertie from Totterdown had appeared, a much impressed Biker Bill referred to her as all *Tits n' teeth*. Behind her were a trio of her pals, all short skirts, big boobies and hard avaricious faces.

“Come over ‘ere me beauties shouted Little Tom, wiggling his glass of cider suggestively.

Porky’s SatPhone went *Beep-Beep* three times in a row and he nearly dropped his glass, “Oh, shit!”

It was as if an electric shock had ran through us all and we went silent. Wedge turned the music down as Porky nodded twice into the phone and shouted to everyone that could hear, “Stand to! Stand to! Enemy in the wire!”

Enemy in the wire was a term held over from the Vietnam War meaning that the enemy was amongst our positions. To us it meant that the Tinkys were up on the airfield or somewhere about.

We grabbed our weapons and fled into the dark. The Officers must have taken another route because we didn’t see them again that night. Behind us were a dozen or so troopers from different parts of the airfield staff, pencil pushers mostly but still armed with mostly unused rifles. We pushed forward and could hear behind us somewhere in the darkness Wedgie shouting at Gertie and her girlfriends to ‘shut the fuck up’ as he doused the lights.

Immediately we entered the blackness of the trees we became silent and warily began to prowl back up to the airfield where we could now hear some small arms fire and the subdued glows of several fires.

Sir Pete had always had good hearing, seemingly unaffected by all of the gunfire he had experienced. He tapped Porky on the shoulder, “They’re running towards us!” None of the rest of us could hear or see anything but the dull glows above.

We stopped at the edge of a small clearing where our path split to lead up to the airfield or down a wide bridle path towards the Severn Estuary far below.

Porky told the pencil-pushers to spread out where they were and our little group of five hid ourselves in the bushes to the side of the bridle path. Silently we spread out, guns ready and it wasn’t long before a group of eight PLA (*Peoples Liberation Army*) Special Operation Forces carefully entered the open space intending to turn onto the bridle path down to the Estuary, where no doubt they had a boat waiting.

Somebody, either Biker Bill or Little Tom issued a tremendous beer-burp which made the Chinese soldiers immediately open fire in our direction. Fragments of tree and stone whirled all around us but we still maintained return fire to prevent them from moving. The noise was awful for a brief time, but there were over twenty of us hidden and the enemy didn’t stand a chance! Within moments there were eight corpses riddled with bullets lying in the clearing and silence fell.

Before we could move, Sir Peter muttered, “More”. We heard him and crouched quickly back down. Some of the troopers that had followed us didn’t realize what was happening and a few actually stood up, relaxing their cramped legs and congratulating each other.

From the airfield direction silenced rifles spat from behind the foliage and four of the troopers shrieked and fell. Unfortunately for the Chinese they had given their position away. We now knew where they were and returned fire, keeping them stationary.

Little Tom was in his element and grinned when he threw several well aimed grenades that produced several screams but silenced the late comers. As silence descended we moved forward to secure the area and ensure that the enemy was dead.

“ere, this looks like that Naval Bloke’s briefcase,” said Porky, “The handcuffs are still intact.”

They were indeed and oily with thick fresh blood too!

We were just beginning to relax when Porky’s SatPhone did the ‘Beep-Beep’ thing three times in a row. He quickly held it to his ear then shouted, “Take cover!”

I lay on the ground next to an irritated Little Tom who began to moan yet again, “What the fook is it now?”

I looked up just as a large bird-like shape swooped silently above us from the direction of the airfield, “What the hell’s that?” moaned Little Tom to be answered by Sir Peter, “It’s a low-level Reaper drone! Never seen one of them before.”

Before Little Tom could tell him to ‘Bloody well shaddup!’ there was a brilliant flash when the rocket motors of the two under-wing Hellfire missiles ignited and sped away.

The missiles sped into the air on a horizontal vector then veered downwards and out of our sight into the darkness. Little Tom stood up, a little prematurely I thought, and dusted himself off, wondering if there was still time to get back to *The Jolly Bumpkin*.

Porky stayed on the ground and smirked at Little Tom in the half light, but intent on covering his ears.

From far away and below us two tremendous booming explosions lit up the sky and Little Tom was thrown off his feet. The look of surprise on his stupid face made the rest of us laugh; we then stood up to see a frigate-sized vessel ferociously burning in the estuary. Minor explosions and fireworks began with the vessel beginning to list.

“Right lads, back to the airfield!” shouted Porky who still held the blood-covered briefcase.

We re-entered the airfield not by the slit in the fence we had used earlier but through a large section that had been blown away. There were bodies lying all over, Chinese and Brit. Nearby there was a large hole blasted in the side of the passenger reception building.

Carefully we climbed through the hole and made our way to the accommodation area. In the main passageway lay the two Royal Navy visitors who would never go home. Both were riddled with bullets and one was missing a hand at the wrist. Done to free the briefcase, I assumed.

My first thought was that Operation Valhalla possibly was the reason for the incursion, but then again what did I know, a press-ganged civilian from a Bristol street?

By dawn the fires were out, temporary building repairs were underway and the Tinkys laid out awaiting inspection by our Intelligence people now inbound from London.

We didn’t have long to wait. By eight o’clock we heard the *slap, slap, slap* of helicopter blades coming closer. Just in case the Tinkys had managed to get a helicopter carrying ship past the English Channel we took up firing positions and silence descended, only interrupted by the subdued complaining of Little Tom.

The call went out to stand down and we stood up to watch a Puma medium support helicopter come in to land. Behind it, hovering were two Apache attack

helicopters. I was gob smacked because we had seen no RAF since the Royal Navy Aircraft Carriers had been sunk by the Chinese in the Bay of Biscay, six months earlier.

The side door of the Puma slid open and eight Intelligence officers quickly disembarked, all business, with heads lowered and carrying their equipment bags in their arms.

The men reached us as the helicopter lifted and once it was gone, they straightened up. A shiver ran through us as the dreaded Colonel Sykes looked at us, surprised.

“What the Fuck are you lot doing here?”

Before he could say more Porky held out the bloodied briefcase, “Is this why you’re here sir?”

Colonel Sykes examined the military bar-code on the suitcase and his sense of relief was actually visible on his face. He looked at us as if seeing us anew and actually smiled.

“Good work, you men! Damn good work!”

Later that day we flew back to London with Colonel Sykes in the big helicopter. We thought he had taken quite a shine to us because he had promised us some *special work*.

Chapter 8

The country known as Great Britain slowly began to cease to exist as a functioning entity once the Covid 69 tightened its already strong grip. No help was forthcoming from Europe or Scandinavia, the countries in those regions being firmly held back from interfering by either the Russian Federation or the all-reaching tentacles of Chinese influence that had been developed in every level of the Democratic societies over many years.

The threat of an incurable infection *appearing* in their country was used as blackmail by the only country that had a vaccine that could eradicate Covid 69. This time it had been developed before the virus was purposely released on the U.K.

Any manufacturing or research on ‘69 by those countries opposed to the Chinese had been efficiently prevented by the wholesale industrial sabotage that had also been going on for years within the western pharmaceutical industries.

This strain released against the British had a mortality rate of approaching sixty-seven percent which was further increased by up to fifteen percent by what grew to be known as the *Secondary Covid Effects*; the extra deaths being caused by the infrastructure of the country slowly disappearing, clean water, medical care, lack of food distribution, lack of Law and Order and so on.

As a result great portions of the English countryside and most cities lay empty of human life. Survivors and those yet to succumb mostly moved south to the refugee camps near London that were nominally under the protection of a slowly crumbling British government.

However, some people did not move and hung on in areas they had known all their lives and were comfortable with. Procuring food became the most important part of their daily lives just as it had for their ancestors in the Middle-Ages when wolves and wild boars abounded to make travelling dangerous.

Now the main threat for a traveler was the numerous roaming dog packs that thrived just outside the towns up and down the country. Their bountiful sustenance was the numerous uncollected Covid victims, rats and the occasional live human.

Robber gangs also began to roam free, becoming yet another danger outside the towns. Without any effective police force the Common Law was simplified due to necessity and became quick and harsh. The penalty for anyone deemed to be a thief or robber and unlucky enough to be caught also regressed to more primitive times; under the watchful eyes of the New Aldermen and Lord Mayors a hand would be lopped off and for a second offence hanging ensured there would not be a third.

We were on what Colonel Sykes euphemistically called a *Delivery Run*. It had taken us four days to walk from our drop-off point to the large town at the mouth of the River Tyne called South Shields that had been a thriving sea port and shipbuilding centre in better times. But now the streets were like the streets of most towns in Britain and were dark and empty of human life at night. There were the usual inert human forms lying here and there having succumbed to the '69 and of course the ever present rats busily scurrying from one to another. No lights had issued from any buildings when we had arrived in the town centre the night before.

It was Little Tom's idea that we hide ourselves in one of the boarded up pubs and he chose *The Stags Head* because the name appealed to him and Porky was indifferent. The sign hanging above the door promised good beer and food within, but I was feeling wistful and thought alas, that promise would have to wait another two hundred years to be fulfilled!

From the gaps in the boarded up windows we could watch the comings and goings on the high street that would lead to the reason for our mission, our Target. During the morning there had been a constant drift of desperate looking people in one direction; past the bar then up the hill in the direction of where the Tinkys were working. The area had been shipbuilding and repair centre for hundreds of years and amongst the remaining populace were still retained the heavy engineering skills necessary for building and repairing large vessels. Several of the facilities on the nearby waterfront had been used for the gigantic North Sea oil platforms until '69 had arrived, at which point the heavy machinery was abandoned and all activity ceased.

Biker Bill had put on some civvies he had found at the back of the bar; an awful black shell suit and gritty trainers that had seen better days. He then left the bar watched by a grinning Little Tom who called out, "Ah always knew yer was a fookin' Chav!"

Leaving via the rear door Bill mingled with the miserable passersby's but hidden under his thin nylon jerkin was a Chinese made pistol, fully loaded. He came back at midday, entering the building shivering because of the wind coming off the

North Sea, “Bloody hell! Lovely blue sky, sunshine as well but it’s as cold as Johnny Greenteth’s heart!”

He sat down, warming his hands over Porky’s gas stove, prompting Porky to say, “Well?”

“From what I could gather the Tinkys are using some local labor for the heavy lifting, paying the men with the Chinese equivalent of MRE’s, or some heating oil. The closer I got to the top of the hill the more Tinky marines were about just lookin’ at the locals before they got near the entry gates at the top of the bank and there’s more security around the ships below.”

“Ships? Colonel Sykes said there was only one.”

“Ah got to the top and near the gates where they were checking people in. I could see down below there were two ships, a Type 055 Destroyer and by the damage to its bow it’s definitely the NANCHANG.”

The NANCHANG had been with the Chinese North Atlantic Battle Group just north of the Bay of Biscay when the pitifully small Royal Navy Carrier Strike Group, then unsupported by the Americans or the Europeans had hit them from the West Atlantic. The battle had been ferocious with the Royal Navy Group all but destroyed but it was a pyrrhic victory for the Chinese Fleet; two thirds of its ships were sunk. The end result was that nearly all the surviving Chinese ships had received some damage and had been scattered. Most made for the French or Spanish ports where the E.U. now under the influence of the Chinese would give them shelter and repair. A few, like the NANCHANG had found themselves chased into British waters by the few Royal Navy ships that had survived but the Chinese Battle Group had ceased to be operational, its integrity destroyed.

Porky answered, “Well that’s why we’re here. It’s a Stealth guided missile destroyer, with cruise missiles and missile-launched anti-submarine torpedoes. When it’s seaworthy it’ll get around to Faslane where our nuclear subs are based in about a day, or if they get out to sea they may just fire a cruise missile or two over the Pennines and into Faslane. Who knows? What was the other vessel?”

“A Type 093 Replenishment ship with superstructure damage.”

In the corner of the room Little Tom sat, full of self importance his left arm draped over the handle of a small electric powered trailer. It had two chunky rubber wheels that held a heavy looking grey box, thirty centimeters on a side.

Colonel Sykes had designated him *The Primary Deliverer* for the device and ever since Tom had acted important and a little aloof from the rest of us and occasionally would smirk at Sir Peter and say, “Ah should ‘ave been an Officer!”

On its top of the grey box was an access panel to the device activation keys. Colonel Sykes had carefully told Little Tom in our presence, “At the right moment, open the lid and enter the code number to arm the device.”

Biker Bill had cheekily interrupted, “What’s the number, then?”

“1066 of course!”

Colonel Sykes looked at Biker Bill, waiting for the obvious response whilst the rest of us sniggered. The Colonel wanted an indication that Bill knew about the Battle of Hastings and understood the significance of the number or the irony of using the date of the last invasion of England.

There was no response as Biker Bill looked back with eyes that were empty of comprehension.

“Dear God!” Colonel Sykes muttered, shaking his head.

“Then what?” Bill persisted.

The Colonel then uncharacteristically had laughed out loud, “Then sonny boy, make sure you’re at least three miles away when you key in the code number for the second time, but into this device,” with that the Colonel produced what looked like an I-phone but with a stubby antenna at the top, “It’s essential that you are all behind a wall or something and not looking back when you press the *Initiate* button.”

Bill opened his mouth to ask The Stupid Question, but the Colonel anticipated him and put up his hand to stop him, “Or the nuclear flash with burn the eyes out of your thick skull!”

Seen’ as we were Little Tom’s mates he had given us a sneaky peek when we were in the back of the truck. The top panel had been opened by Little Tom who wouldn’t allow us to touch his new toy and we were all mightily impressed at the gold and silver colored device and the sexy numbered keypad.

“Looks like a bloody Cashpoint machine to me!” said Porky.

His feeling hurt, but not really, Little Tom replied snootily, “This ‘ere is an enhanced 1.5 Megaton SADM.”

“Named after Saddam Hussein is it?” laughed Sir Peter.

“No dumbass, it stands for *Special Atomic Demolition Munition*. We got it from the Yanks when they still loved us and it’s been tweaked by the clever buggers in REME.”

Sir Peter immediately took on a familiar worried expression, “Is it radioactive?”

“No of course not, otherwise the Tinkys would be able to detect it with one of their drones!”

Over the next three days we took it in turns to do a *recce* of the surrounding area making sure to always end it as close as we could get to the repair facility. When it had been my turn to pretend I was one of the locals I had slouched down the main street, called grandly *Ocean Road* that lead to the sea. I passed a few locals on the other side of the street and they looked at me warily and hurried away, making me feel like a Covid *Typhoid Mary*.

The end of the road split to run in a North and Southerly direction parallel to the shoreline. To the North the road ran directly to the repair facility and as a consequence was closed and guarded by several bored looking marines crouched behind a barricade of useless electric cars.

To the left of the north road was a public park connected to a long path that wound its way up a small hill where in sailing ship times, rich sea captains would retire yet still be able to look out to sea. Looking to the top I could see the movement of yet more guards at the upper level.

The South Pier was before me, unguarded, open and ignored. There was one of those bronze tourist maps held up by a pole at the side of the pavement and it illustrated the layout of the river mouth where the Tyne opened into the North Sea. The river mouth held out two long piers from the North and South shores, the

one on our side being over a kilometer and a half long with a lighthouse at the end. The ends of both piers were a paltry three hundred and sixty meters apart, a bit tight for a big ship in bad weather I thought, me being an armchair expert in such matters! I didn't realise then, but pieces of an idea began to swirl around in my mind, information unformed and unconnected to anything solid. It was not until later my subconscious creation would come forth...

Then I saw the guards pointing at me. It was time to go.

Chapter 9

At the end of the third day we all sat in the empty pub, giving our access reports. Biker Bill said, "There's no chance of getting through the main gate with our *Delivery*."

Little Tom concurred, "Same here from the western approach road. Too heavily guarded."

"We could go up river and try to deliver our package in a boat" suggested Sir Peter.

Porky shot that idea down, "Too far, too iffy and anyway I've seen a patrol boat going up and down."

I gave my report, mentioning the guards on the road.

Porky thought for a moment then shrugged his shoulders in hopelessness, "Well it looks like we're stuffed! Mission is a no-go. Bloody hell!"

In a flash of what proved to be pure brilliance on my part, confirming that I was worth the one measly stripe I wore, if only because I was so modest, I explained about the access to the South Pier, "We could deliver our package under cover of darkness to the lighthouse at the end of the Pier and hope the Tinkys don't have any night goggles!"

Porky excitedly beat me to the rest of the plan, "Then we could yomp down the coast to those cliffs where we could watch for when the ships move, then press The Magic Button!"

Big Tom spoiled the party, "But when is our target due to move?"

Before our hopes were totally dashed and despair returned, Sir Peter chirped up, "My New Best Friend says in two days time."

We all turned and looked at him, we were impressed! He blushed a little.

"I was up near the main gate yesterday and noticed one poor soul with a walking stick. Turns out he'd been a Forman Plater on the battle-damage crew until he'd had his accident. The Tinkys slung him out into the street as soon as they realized he couldn't work. Poor soul was starvin'"

"Until you offered him an MRE, ah suppose?" asked a skeptical Little Tom.

Sir Peter loved being the centre of attention and perked up at this inference of how clever he was, "Two tins of baked beans, actually! I'll see him in the morning for confirmation."

Porky was amazed, "Maybe you should have been an Officer after all, Peter."

Chapter 10

That night Porky and Sir Peter went out looking for transport because once we'd delivered our package, it would be best if we left the area quickly. They started at each side of Ocean Road where cars were parked at each side. They ignored the ones that looked like they'd been there a long time; the batteries would be flat and it would need effort and time that we didn't have to get the vehicle started.

Again Sir Peter came through after realizing that we were looking in the wrong place; the Ocean Road was at sea level but at each side as it neared the coast the side streets climbed up severe inclines to level out at the posh houses on the top. We turned up a street on the right, the ones on the left lead to where the Chinese patrolled. It was at the top of such a street that we found a large estate car that had fairly recently pulled into the kerb at an acute angle. By now we were experts in death and could see merely by the state of decomposition of the driver that he had not been there too long for our purpose.

There were no street lights of course, just a weak moon behind thin cloud to illuminate our way. When we opened the driver's door it issued a loud shriek into the night betraying un-oiled hinges and us to anyone that cared to look. Nearby net curtains moved in numerous windows as Sir Peter rocked the car to hear the sloshing of petrol in the tank.

Once the late owner was out of the way Porky settled himself in and turned the key. The ignition light burned with a dull glow, "Bugger it!" he moaned.

It seemed that Sir Peter was on a roll, he said, "Let's bump start it. Release the handbrake and steer it down the hill, then near the bottom put it into second gear!"

My thoughts began to wander again as they seemed to be ever more prone to, just lately and as Porky slammed the car door I thought I heard my old English teacher from school, thirty years before, telling me, "If you have a poetic soul you might view these goings on and say, *that fateful night a gap in the clouds allowed the Moon to shine down upon the last heroes of Albion to give them the luck they so desperately needed.*"

Sir Peter watched with baited breath as the car reached the bottom of the hill and the engine made a weak putt-putt noise of failure then suddenly roared to life in the enemy-occupied night, its dipped headlights lighting up the street before Porky shut them off.

We gripped our weapons and stared into the darkness in case the Tinkys appeared to investigate the noise. The car came up the hill slowly and Porky positioned it for the following night, switching off the internal light but leaving the engine to run for the next hour, hopefully enough time to put some charge in the battery and give the engine a run. It would be too dangerous to go driving about in case we were seen by the Tinkys or a Quisling. Not all Traitors were Members of Parliament. Most, but not all.

We rested up the following day with only Sir Peter going for a recce to see his New Best Friend. He came back an MRE and a tin of bully beef lighter to report,

“The Tinkys have thrown everyone out of the docks and are preparing to sail on the high tide, which is about three o’clock in the morning.

Chapter 11

At one o’clock the following morning we were making our way through the back streets towards the South Pier. The roads were beginning to break up, grass and weeds sprouting forth to slowly move the curbstones and tarmac alike.

Nearby I noticed that in some of the houses the windows were shattered. Who would come to mend them I idly questioned? Unconsciously my mind had wandered away yet again to a calmer more peaceful place in an imagined future. The answer I received from the dark dead buildings was that no one would come to repair them ever and in a hundred years there would be no buildings but only small grass hummocks covering the rubble for as far as the eye could see.

On its left the South Pier was open to the Tyne and we could be easily observed by anyone caring to look. On the right of the Pier there was a funfair, now lying unused and abandoned, never to be used again. We decided to go through the fairground and reach the Pier under cover of darkness where hopefully we would be too far from the coast to be seen.

As we entered, Little Tom at our rear pulling his trolley, we were suddenly surrounded by a motley group of about twenty local men of various ages all armed with steel bars, knives and one even had a machete! A tall fair haired man with arms covered with tattoos grinned, he had worked in the fairground most of his life and it was his turf even now when no one came, except us. “What’ve we got ‘ere lads?”

His mates sniggered; they were used to intimidating the locals just by their numbers and threatening manner to get what they wanted.

Blondie went on, “Some grub and other stuff in them packs as well, ah bet! And Wots in that trolley fuckface?” he shouted at Little Tom who stood looking quite relaxed, as if he had to deal with threats every day and wasn’t really concerned.

Blondie approached Porky and for the first time in the near dark noticed the silenced rifles, our combat fatigues and pistols. He also began to have the first inklings that things were not going to turn out well for his merry band.

With a weak smile he forced himself to ask, “Got any grub?”

“No.” replied Biker Bill who knew the type of creature that Tattooed man was and disliked him on sight.

Porky tried reason first, “We are members of His Majesty’s Armed Forces and impeding us in the execution of our Duty...”

Blondie now laughed out loud, “Armed Forces. Don’t make me larf; there isn’t as much as a PC plod anymore!”

“Get out of our way.”

“Or what?” shouted a rough looking woman clad from head to toe in black leather Bikers gear, waving a metal pipe threateningly, “One shout from uz an’ the Chinese soldiers will be here, quick as yer like! Give uz your rations and that nice pistol you’re holdin’”

Little Tom dropped the towing handle of the trolley and that was our signal when it hit the ground. Porky lunged forward burying his combat knife into the chest of a very surprised Blondie using the textbook upward thrust method. Uttering a short squeal, Blondie collapsed, lifeless, his career in the fairground finished. Simultaneously Porky fired his pistol into the assembled thugs who were standing too close together. They thought they were tough, but they were just wannabees.

The crowd scattered shrieking and shouting in fear knowing their reign as the top dogs down the beach was over.

We pursued them amongst the desolate arcades and continued to bring them down. We couldn't afford for them to warn the Chinese. Sir Peter climbed on top of the candy floss van and spotted three running in the direction of the road block. Three pulls of the trigger and the individuals fell into the road, unmoving.

When all fell silent we hurried onto the Pier and made our way to the lighthouse that stood at the end, silent and inert. Biker Bill used his Pry-Bar, broke the lock on the door and Little Tom pushed past us with his trolley, happily self-important, "Make way, things to do, places ter go!"

After a few moments we looked up to see him mounting a short antenna where the shattered beacon had been. He reappeared amongst us and slammed the door.

"Let's get the show on the road!" he grinned.

The amusement arcade was crawling with Chinese marines hurriedly examining the bodies of Blondie's sadly deceased gang. By that time it was two o'clock and we decided to make a detour amongst the sand dunes to bypass the amusement park, hoping we could make up for lost time to get to the car. We looked back when we heard a shout, only to see the Marines jumping into an electric truck and head in the opposite direction for the docks.

"Looks like the ships are leaving on time!" I said.

At two-thirty we reached the car and stowed our gear. Porky turned the ignition key to be rewarded by a slow turnover and a dimming light. "Dammit!"

Sir Peter chirped up, "Let it roll downhill, Porks."

The rest of us were starting to panic and I nearly wet myself when the engine suddenly roared to life!

We didn't have much time to waste so the only way was along the straight coast road, heading south. If the Chinese had a drone airborne we were toast!

With no headlights our progress was aching slow. Every now and again the car would swerve to avoid stalled vehicles containing bodies and the attendant rat swarms.

Once we even past a dog pack sitting at the side of the road watching our passing car as if each mutt was waiting for its Master to come home. Each head followed our progress as we went by; probably hoping we would stop and be their next snack. A large German Shepherd, obviously the leader, sat surrounded by dogs of all sizes, the two at the front were miniature poodles chewing happily on a rat carcass. At least that's what I hoped it was.

Three o'clock approached and Porky pulled the car over, leaving the engine running while we disembarked and he walked a short distance away for silence as he activated the SatPhone.

To our left was a low stone wall overlooking the sea and in the distance to the North the clouds had cleared. We could see the two Piers glowing in the strong moonlight against the dark River Tyne and the North Sea. Just to cheer us up a freezing wind began to blow in from the North Sea, probably from Norway or somewhere else that was bloody cold!

To the left of the two lighthouses that denoted the Pier ends and also where we had left 'The Package', the enormous dark bulk of the NANCHANG slowly moved towards the open sea closely followed by a large dark grey shape that was difficult to make out against the color of the river from where we were; the Type 093 Replenishment ship.

Porky returned and we hunkered down behind the wall. Little Tom entered the code into the I-phone like device, closely watched by a jealous Biker Bill who had the beginnings of a childish pout; we all knew he had what used to be stylishly called *Mental Health Issues* to do with creating explosions. Seeing this, Tom grinned and passed the device to Bill with a, "Go on then, press the button yer big babby!"

Biker Bill's face beamed with pleasure and his eyes sparkled with undiluted joy when he pressed *The Magic Button*. A millisecond later and the night turned to day with a tremendous flash of atomic power that seemed to burn for ages, but probably only a few seconds. The whiteness faded to red and we risked a peek and beheld a crimson mushroom cloud of fire that was still climbing into the clouds. Then the rumbling began beneath us and the earth itself began to vibrate! The stones that made up the top of the wall flew away like bullets and that made us cringe down even more. Sir Peter scrambled to rip off his wristwatch, "Oww the bloody thing is hot!"

Porky turned and looked at the car where we could see smoke escaping from under the bonnet. We had forgotten the ancillary effects of a nuclear explosion; one of which was the Electromagnetic Pulse! All electronic equipment and most electrical motors would be burned out unless it was contained in a *hardened device*.

On the road the car engine stalled and small flames licked the rear of the windscreen. We quickly ran over and retrieved our gear then stood up to look at our handiwork; of the Nanchang and the Replenishment ship there was no sign. The old Piers, built over a hundred years ago, had had half their length vaporized and in their place was a swirling mass of boiling water and a rising cloud of slightly radioactive steam.

Near to us the empty houses along the Coast Road all had shattered windows and some were missing roof tiles. On the opposite side of the road several electricity pylons now leaned away from the blast at slight angles.

Quickly we marched away along the deserted road and behind us our car finally burst into flames.

Once we had created some distance Porky fired up his SatPhone that was supposed to be a 'hardened device' and we all crowded round and listened to static for ten minutes.

Sir Peter said, "Probably charged particles in the atmosphere above us due to the E.M.P. The phone might work in a few days when we're out of the area."

Unknown to us the nuclear explosion had been picked up by one of the Royal Navy's nuclear submarines in the Irish Sea and the information relayed to London.

Biker Bill was still buoyant after *The Big Bang* but a morose Little Tom scowled at Sir Peter, "Smart arse!"

On the fourth day marching south along the coast we had reached Whitby, another near deserted coastal town. We hadn't made good time because it had taken us two days to carefully transverse the Middlesborough coastal area that was infested with tribal gangs that existed solely through emptying the local shops and supermarkets then fighting each other for the spoils. We knew that the gangs wouldn't last long, their *business model* wasn't viable in the long term and another month would see them fade away.

Eventually we were in a quiet area just south of Whitby and we foraged amongst the silent houses for foodstuffs. The dwellings proved to be either deserted or depressingly, still containing the bodies of the late owners. Sometimes there were children silently present either with their parents or lying in their beds amongst their favorite toys. On these occasions I would feel a little spark of anguish within my chest trying to burst into a roaring flame at the first opportunity that would surely destroy me, one way or another.

The hate I felt for the enemy knew no bounds.

We decided to rest for a day and ended up in a small terraced house with a superb view of the sea from which we could watch impotently, the French fishing boats slowly moving to and fro now that the hated 'les rosbefs' were no more.

Business as usual for China's friends.

As usual Sir Peter and I took up positions in the upstairs bedrooms keeping watch over the front and rear approaches. Downstairs Biker Bill, still in a good mood heated tinned sausages, tinned beans, tinned corned beef and some other unidentified tinned food all together in a large pan. Oddly enough, it smelled quite good!

Looking out the front window we watched Porky jump when the SatPhone suddenly came to life! We laughed a little when he did a little skip of joy.

Porky told us that we would be picked up in the next day or so. He didn't have any other details except to say that it seemed that the situation with Covid 69 was that it was still running rampant through the population. What remained of the Government and armed forces was continuing to deteriorate.

Three days later the silence of our coastal area was broken when we heard the chug-chug of a struggling diesel truck coming up the hill towards us and for once we were nearly happy to see Johnny Greenteeth with his revolting smile beaming at us from behind the wheel. Because it was late afternoon we thought it wise for him to stay overnight so we would set out the following morning in daylight.

Johnny sat at the only table in the small dining room and had some of Little Tom's stew. He slurped and slopped and only Porky could bring himself to sit down opposite. We hovered nearby listening for the latest news, occasionally

glancing at Johnny's eating then wincing and glancing away, revolted if the truth be told.

"Well it's like this, Porks. Things are winding down everywhere. Diesel and ammunition is getting hard to come by and don't mention food rations! One minute a mate of yours in the stores is passing you stuff then next time he's not there. Just faded away like!" For a moment it looked as if Johnny was going to cry, but he struggled to keep his voice from cracking and banged his fist down on the table, "Bloody Covid! Bloody Tinkys! Bloody! Bloody! Bloody!"

With that said Johnny dropped his spoon with a clang into the bowl and held his head in his hands, sobbing. Biker Bill walked over and put a firm hand on his shoulder, "Things 'ill turn out allrite, Johnny. You'll see."

"Yes, yes of course! Mustn't let things get to me but there seems to be no end sometimes." Johnny smiled and resumed eating but slowly as if he'd lost his appetite.

I thought that the legendary British *Stiff upper lip* was still alive and well up here in the north amongst all the dead people.

The drive back to London down the A1M took three days because of several types of holdups. I lost count of the times we had to stop to clear the road where vehicles had crashed or more often than not, had been abandoned when their owner had gotten so ill that all they could manage was to switch the engine off and crawl to the hard shoulder to die.

We also took it carefully as we approached overhead bridges or footpaths. On one occasion a very large lump of concrete just missed us as we sped by at forty miles an hour. We were so shaken up that the next time we approached a worrisome overpass we moved over to the side of the road and stopped the truck. Biker Bill and I quietly managed to get on the overpass where we found a large group of teenagers, some with spliffs smoking away between their lips waiting for our approaching truck. They stood amongst empty cider and beer bottles that told us they'd been here for days. Large stones were balanced all along the handrails, covering the full width of the road and ready for a slight push to drop on whoever passed below. One of them passing through the windscreen would be lethal, but they didn't seem to care!

They all spun round to face us when we appeared, rifles ready. The self appointed leader, a young man of about sixteen or nineteen smiled and held up a can of Special Brew, "Only 'avin' some fun, general!"

With that the rest tittered and carried on with their partying; smoking and drinking, not appreciating the threat we presented.

We allowed the ones to go that we thought were too young to know any better, making them reluctantly leave the booze behind and once they were out the way the older ones lost their swagger under a hail of bullets.

On the journey and between holdups we would gaze out of the rear of the truck, sometimes see a few people working in a field, sometimes they would stop and stare or rarely, wave to us. One sad soul even waved at us with a small Union Jack and I felt my eyes watering; it made me so sad...

The sight of the empty land whizzing by was almost hypnotic and I drifted into my daydream state that, looking back, I think must have been a way of coping with trauma and stress. I idly wondered what the future held for the land of the remaining *Anglo Saxons*.

The empty expanse of the countryside stood still, silently waiting as it had nearly two millennia before for the new settlers who would cross the North Sea or the Morimaru as the Celts had called it.

Settlers would also come by crossing 'la Manche' as the French called the English Channel. With the fading away of the Royal Navy it had been quickly decreed that the territorial waters right up to the British coast were to be the sole property of France. For years they would sail far and wide but never dare to set foot on the Plagued Isle of their eternal enemies.

Against the wishes of their own governments who still quarantined the British Isles where the Covid 69 and its many mutations were endemic, the New People would still come; for a life unrestricted by the diktats of their European/Russian masters and despite being warned it would be a one-way trip and they could never, on pain of death, return.

To start with The New People would find a vast empty land, barely populated, where they could easily establish farms and manufacturing businesses by just walking into what was just lying empty, rotting, rusting and unused. Usually the previous owners and some of the workers would be still there to bid them welcome, their bones bleached dry by twenty years of nothingness.

For the New People it would not be a risk-free venture for many reasons, most importantly they could not leave; no country would have them back.

Then the remaining British who fiercely resented what had been done to them would fiercely detest the Newcomers, but that resentment would fade surprisingly fast when food became more available due to the improvements in farming that the foreigners would bring merely because of their numbers.

And of course, always in the background was the dreaded '69. The Covid 69 had mutated over the years and the native population was mostly inured to it, but to the Newcomers it could be deadly. There was still no cure for the virus, not even from what was left of China.

Chapter 12

The Right Honorable Karl Menzies, His late Majesty's (not so) loyal Opposition Member of Parliament for North Islington sat on his bed, the only item of furniture in his cell. Although the building he was in was designated as a Military Holding Centre, it was still just a grubby Central London Polytechnic. He looked through the glass panel of the door and saw the ever-present Military Policeman and thought of calling to him; even a short trip down the corridor to the toilets would be a welcome break in the monotony.

Karl thought back two months to when he'd been captured by that scruffy rag-bag collection of part-time soldiers and shuddered when he remembered the

callous way they had butchered Ling Yung and his men! They hadn't even tried to make an effort to capture Ling who Karl thought would have been useful to him as protection by threatening the wrath of the CCP when they finally invaded!

At this point in time Karl was living in a state of self-delusion and wishful thinking that flew in the face of reality; a state of mind that used to be common amongst the left-wing chatterers of London, particularly Labour-Party acolytes, Greenies and closet Commies.

He was hoping that despite what they said he had done, he might still escape punishment. He refused to acknowledge the damage his actions had caused or, heaven forbid, that he was a Traitor. He had been thoroughly interrogated over the two months, beaten at the beginning until he was pliable then wrung like a wet rag of every drop of useful information. He didn't know that because of this, five of his Eton Chums including The Right Honourable Sidney Starmer, were now just down the next corridor.

A week ago he'd been dragged into the Polytechnic's gymnasium and stood to attention between two MP's (*Military Police*) and the charges read out to him by one of three lawyers of The Army Legal Services Branch;

"Karl Menzies, Member of Parliament for North Islington;

Under the Emergency Military Powers Act, 2028 and the Treachery Act 1940 (Reinstated 2028) you are accused of High Treason and Treachery; That you did, with intent help the enemy and conspired with others to carry out acts which were designed or likely to give assistance to the naval, military or air operations of the enemy and impede such operations of His Majesty's Forces, and to endanger life. Also that at various times from January 2028 you contacted, colluded with and acted on behalf of an enemy power. How do you plead?"

Karl smiled to himself as he remembered; he had responded *Not Guilty* and proceeded very eloquently to tear their assertions apart by a very clever mixture of truth, half truths and downright falsehoods. He was a Member of Parliament after all! Words were his stock and trade!

It had taken just over fifteen minutes for him to completely bamboozle the panel and when he had stopped he was sure he had out-thought them. They would have to let him go.

He was shocked when the three conferred amongst themselves in hushed whispers that he was just too far away to hear. Finally they sat back, facing forward and the one on the left said, "Verdict; Guilty of all counts. Sentence to be confirmed by the Adjutant General."

This was repeated by the other two. No sentence was mentioned and Karl was about to vociferously object and demand they show their proof when he was roughly dragged away and literally thrown into his cell.

After a week of reflection and with no word from the Adjutant General, Karl relaxed a little, knowing that he was a VIP prisoner, an MP and would have to be treated differently from the lower orders; after all they must show him the proof! This was England, after all.

Karl stood up reckoning it was about eight o'clock and breakfast would be coming. "Ah here it is," he thought as the door swung open.

Two grim faced MP's strode purposely into the cell and pinioned his arms, forced him out of the cell and marched him down the corridor towards a door that he had never noticed before. He was more than surprised when the door slid to one side at the last moment and he found himself in a large courtyard and being walked at a fast pace towards one of the three vertical posts set against the far wall. At the base of each pole was the deep brown stain of dried blood.

He was further alarmed when he noticed five other prisoners standing behind some guards, their arms similarly secured, their expressions fearful. Was that 'Old Smithy' he could see amongst them, his old chum from the Commons bar who had on a few occasions been indiscreet about his Chinese sympathies?

The two MP's pulled his arms back and secured them to the post and as they did so Karl saw the same five soldiers that had captured him march into the courtyard from a side door and take up a line to attention three meters away. They had new uniforms and for once they actually looked like soldiers. The enormous thug was in the middle and again smiled and mouthed to Karl, "*Winker!*"

A Military Policeman, with a mouth full of the most revolting green teeth and no doubt the stinky breath to go with them marched forward and politely asked him if he had any last requests or anything to say. Karl shouted, "You'll regret this when the Chinese fleet gets here, they'll..."

Johnny Greenteeth cut Karl's tirade off in mid sentence by placing a coarse linen sack over his head then pulled the drawstring savagely tight, cutting off further speech.

The traitor whimpered when he heard the officer shout, "Ready, Aim, F..."

Chapter 13

The Last Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister sat in the central position at one side of the long table where the Cabinet Ministers of the Government of the United Kingdom had sat in better times.

Once upon a time the table had been filled by twenty-two ministers each in charge of a specific aspect of government of the U.K. Against the rear wall were extra seats for Ministerial Aides and important Civil Servants, but today there was no one sitting in the extra seats and at the table there were many people absent that would never return.

The Prime Minister slowly gazed across at the four individuals that faced him; a tired and careworn Chief Army Medical Officer of the U.K. He had been seconded from the MOD's Defense Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down where the U.K. Virus research had been carried out and was now grinding to a halt due to lack of resources.

Next on the left, was the Temporary Head of the Navy, a grim-faced individual who had on his shoulders, the weight of the appalling losses of personnel and

capital ships of The Royal Navy. Britain had been the first and only country to oppose the approach into the Northern Hemisphere of the all powerful Chinese Navy.

On the right the Temporary Head of Military Intelligence was also a grim-faced man, prematurely grey these last months, who had been kept busy by the seemingly never-ending numbers of home-grown Traitors, eager to take the Chinese gold.

The fourth Individual, seemingly absurdly and out of place in his tweed suit was an Academic; Charles Langford late of Oxford University, an expert on Population Growth and Culture Shock. His last book, years ago, had been called *The Black Death and Population Impact*. Not a best seller, needless to say.

Charles Langford spoke first, "Prime Minister it is with regret that I must confirm the results of my previous research; the U.K. population faces further decline despite *Herd Immunity* to the virus Covid 69. This further reduction will be primarily because of the fragmentation of the country's infrastructure. Basically our technological society will take a large step back and may even fragment further than need be because of lack of help from our European 'friends' who are bowing to Chinese political pressure as always. Just last week the French, under instruction from Brussels signed another cooperation agreement in Beijing..."

The Prime Minister waved his hand to interrupt Langford, "Yes, yes we know all that. The leasing of the naval base at St Nazaire, I believe. What you're confirming is that we've had it, basically!"

Langford looked very uncomfortable and couldn't bring himself to speak. He lowered his chin onto his chest, nearly in tears.

The Porton Down man then spoke up, "They've been very clever, the Chinese, as always. They released the virus to appear first in London and at the same time arranged that the Europeans close their international borders. They then did their level best to sabotage our subsequent vaccine research whilst only supplying their vaccine to a select number of their European Quislings."

In his younger days the Prime Minister had always been an admirer of Winston Churchill and at that time had realized no matter how much he read and was told about 'Winnie' he could never be able appreciate how the man must have felt in 1940 when the country stood alone, facing invasion.

He smiled bleakly to himself, *Funny old world* he thought, *Well you bloody well know now, don't you?*

He contemplated the current situation; The Chinese had never forgiven Britain for supplying Australia and New Zealand with Nuclear weapons that at a stroke had released them from Chinese coercion and the threat of invasion. This had also had the unexpected extra effect of halting the Chinese territorial and naval expansion in the whole Far East. At the same time it gave the Australians and the Kiwis time to bolster their armed forces because there would be no help from across the Pacific where their American 'allies' sat impotent under their weak Democrat government that had been easily hoodwinked by the Chinese.

Severe *Loss of Face* had occurred for the Chinese Communist Party and the present purposely created pandemic in the U.K., an undeclared war with China was the result! He stood up to stretch his legs and compose himself. The men at

the table waited in silence as he wandered and stopped to look at one of his favorite prints that hung on the wall next to a small oil painting of Winston;

Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war.

If we can stand up to him all Europe may be free, and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands; but if we fail then the whole world, including the United States, and all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new dark age made more sinister, and perhaps more prolonged, by the lights of a perverted science.

Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duty and so bear ourselves that if the British Commonwealth and Empire lasts for a thousand years men will still say, 'this was their finest hour'.

House of Commons – 18 June 1940

Reading that passage by Winston always gave him resolve. He turned back and sat heavily down for this was the final meeting of many he had with these men, these last British Patriots! There had originally been fourteen but the '69 had whittled them away as it had the populace outside Westminster.

He continued with what would probably be the most important Cabinet Meeting he had ever held, "If our country and way of life is to disappear beneath the forces of Chinese Communism, then I think the enemy too must pay a heavy price. Almost certainly a heavier price than they ever could imagine and possibly one that will destroy their malign influence in the world. Are we in agreement gentlemen?"

The four men nodded grimly.

The Prime Minister brushed the thin grey hair that had once been a colorful blonde mess, away from his eyes and looked at the Head of the Navy, "Activate Operation Valhalla."

The man stood and saluted then marched out of the room, closely followed by the Head of the Intelligence Services who was already pressing buttons on his encrypted SatPhone.

Epilogue

In a monumental effort of repair and logistics the four British nuclear submarines had slipped away from the UK months ago.

On a war footing and well apart, the ships had made their way stealthily south to the Horn of Africa purposely ignoring the assembling Chinese Fleet at Capetown, South Africa that they could easily have destroyed.

From South Africa they went eastwards across the Indian Ocean where they were joined by a band of Royal Navy Astute Class Hunter-Killer submarines, each vessel containing a full complement of Tomahawk Block IV land-attack Cruise Missiles with a 1000mile range and Spearfish heavyweight torpedoes. Not even the new American Democrat government had been informed of the British plans, so busy was it appeasing the Chinese after the invasion of Taiwan.

Months had passed as each of the four Vanguard class submarines that made up the U.K.'s entire strategic nuclear missile force, positioned themselves in the South and East China seas, closely accompanied by their escorts. Each of the four boats was armed with up to 16 Trident II D5 SLBMs (*Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles*) each carrying MIRV's (*Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicles*) of 8 warheads each.

A popular and widely held belief, especially in the Main Stream Media and encouraged by the Ministry of Defense was that the U.K. was unable to use the missile system without American permissions. Permissions that of course would not be forthcoming from their new government. It was also accepted in the Main-Stream-Media that the Americans could also simply turn off the GPS satellites on which the submarines depended. This of course was also a myth because the Trident II D-5 ballistic missiles used a type of Stellar Guidance System and Inertial Navigation that would take readings from the positions of the stars and also, most importantly, there were also no 'Permission Codes' required for firing that the Americans could withhold, only instructions from The Prime Minister and the strength of Royal Naval discipline was required.

The truth was that the U.K. had always retained full operational control of their Nuclear deterrent and the Chinese mainland strategic assets were about to find out.

Kaohsiung, South Western Taiwan Coast.

In the top floor of the apartment block where he lived with his parents, a ten year old Li Meng woke up in the dark from a fitful sleep, the cause of which had been a dozen or so small Chinese Navy ships cruising noisily around the bay. Occasionally they dropped depth charges that created an awful thumping noise with the following cascading of displaced water crashing back into the sea. Eventually they had moved off.

There was no light or power; the electricity had been off since the Chinese had come. But something had woken him, not his mother who continued to sob in her room, but something outside his open window that looked out over the bay and the open sea. The visibility out to sea was very good because dawn was not far away and there was no glare from the defunct street lights than ran along the coast road. Li Meng decided that the noise must have come from one of the still smoldering Taiwanese Navy ships that lay on their sides in the surf; they had been making noise by occasionally gushing oil and bodies onto the ruined beach.

In the next room his mother still wept for his father who had been taken away by Chinese Security that afternoon. Li Meng had heard stories and knew he would never see him again. He lay back down in bed and closed his eyes trying not to cry.

A strange fluid-like booming noise rose then faded close by. This made Li Meng sit up again and look over the window sill. In the early dawn light could see an enormous black shape just beneath the surface of the waves, just outside of the bay.

A submarine! He could now see the stubby coning tower push its way from beneath the sea, water streaming from a large hole in its left side. He saw some movement within the hole in the coning tower and a strange flag of crosses in red, white and blue unfurled to lie untidily across the torn metal.

What was that noise? Small hatches began to open along the length of the ship's spine. Even at ten years old Li Meng knew it wasn't normal for a submarine to be anywhere near a coast, let alone a few kilometres from the beach or on the surface! This one must be badly damaged!

Then he wondered if it was it the Chinese back to do more harm?

The dawn light turned to daylight with a terrific roaring when a missile thrust from out of one of the hatches and leaped up into the sky like a gigantic firework. Li Meng was now fully awake and watched the missile turning away towards China. Then another missile leaped up and another until after twenty minutes he had counted sixteen! Down below in the street two Chinese army trucks had screeched to a halt and there was much consternation amongst the officers who screamed and shouted into radios.

The black giant moved off, beginning to submerge even as the rear hatches began to shut, its work done!

Later that morning the Chinese ships reappeared, too late in their pursuit of the enemy ship. They were then caught in the after swell of a tremendous Tsunami that people later said originated from the Chinese mainland. Several of the ships were pushed aground and two were capsized. No survivors were seen.

Later, much later, rumours abounded of many nuclear explosions along the Chinese coast and inland.

Had the big ship been a friend of Taiwan wondered Li Meng? If you were, then god speed you home!

