

Chapter 1

Nightmares

Monday, 0715 hours October 9, 1994, Alpharetta, twenty miles north of Atlanta, Georgia

Just as Sam turned to look back, he saw Ream take the gun from the soldier's holster who then fell backwards from the force of the surprise attack. Ream immediately raised the gun, Sam turned to see where he was aiming. His eyes opened wide in the bright sunlight, as he saw Ream was aiming at a tall soldier standing at the gravesite. He tried to shout, to warn the man, but nothing came out of his mouth. He was frozen unable to speak. In those next terrible few seconds Ream fired, and as Sam stood there unable to move, time seemed to slow down to super slow motion. He saw the weapon fire—the bullet leave the barrel and streak towards its victim; he tried to move but couldn't.

Sam could see the intended victim's back; a tall, athletic-looking man in military uniform standing in front of an open grave. He could also see the man was totally unaware of what was about to happen. As the bullet neared its target, a second smaller man, also in uniform, jumped into its path. Sam saw the bullet hit this man's left shoulder, the shattered bone fragments of his arm striking the shoulder of the man he was trying to protect. The force of the bullet's impact spun the second man around.

The gunman fired a second shot, and still Sam was incapable of moving, incapable of stopping the gunman from firing again. He watched as the gunman fired, this time hitting the would-be rescuer squarely in the back. The force of that second bullet pushed both

victims to the ground. As the gunman tried to get off another shot, a young MP grabbed for the gun; it went off and the MP took a round in the arm. In an instant, two police officers and four MPs were all over the gunman. He was finally subdued by a dozen hands pushing him hard into the ground.

Sam stood there at the center of this surreal spectacle. He could only watch as the gunman's intended victim rose, noticed the blood coming from his shoulder and then grimace in pain. The wounded soldier stood there for a moment like a man who had been awakened from a deep sleep by a loud noise and who was now struggling to grasp what had awakened him. Without moving or speaking, Sam observed the wounded soldier and then watched the MPs as they wrestled with the gunman. Sam then looked at the second victim on the ground. He was not moving, his eyes open, blood trickling from his mouth, left shoulder soaked in blood and there was a pool of blood forming under his back.

Police, reporters, soldiers and civilians, who had been attending whatever event had been underway at the time of the shooting, were now all rushing about either in a panic to escape the shooting or a frenzy to report what had happened. Hundreds of people moved about in all sorts of manner, all except three— Sam, who was in some frozen, unmovable state, the mortally wounded soldier, lying motionless on the ground, and finally the wounded intended victim, whose face Sam had not seen.

Sam looked to the intended target, the tall soldier who now looked up, saw Sam standing there, and knew just by the expression on Sam's confused face, that Sam had done nothing to stop what had just happened. That Sam had just stood there while the gunman fired and fired again; stood there while the deadly second shot ripped through the fallen man who now lay mortally wounded on the ground in front of him.

Sam recognized the man whose eyes were staring at him so intensely that he could feel his hatred for what Sam had failed to do. Sam could tell that this man was unbelieving of Sam's actions and he felt ashamed.

The wounded soldier who had been staring at Sam then looked down at the mortally wounded man on the ground beneath him.

"Dana!" he screamed. "Medic! Medic! Someone get a medic, now!"

Sam was watching as everyone was now looking at him, but still he was powerless to move.

“Sam!” He heard someone call.

“Sam!” He heard it again, then felt someone shaking him.

“Sam, wake up. Wake up!”

Sam shot up in his bed and for a moment, he did not know where he was. He felt a hand gripping his arm, looked for its owner, and then stared at the women for just a moment as he realized it was Mary. He was in bed, and it had happened again.

“Sam. Are you alright?” Mary’s voice was now clam and quiet. She gently stroked his sweaty forehead.

Sam realized he was not in Chicago, not at the gravesite, not at the site where his dear friend Dana had given his life to save his. “Yeah!” He looked at her, then back forward, and he could see his reflection in the mirror on the opposite wall of the room. He was a sweaty mess; his t-shirt soaked through, his face contorted in confusion and frustration, his eyes swollen with sweat and tears. It was an all too familiar scene.

“Same dream?” Mary asked as she got out of the bed and walked to the bathroom.

“Yes.” Sam sat up in the bed, pushing his back to the headboard to get some support. “I’m sorry.” He looked around and listened for sounds outside of the bedroom. “At least I didn’t wake the kids.”

Mary came back into the room carrying a towel and a glass of water.

“Here,” she said as she extended the glass to Sam. Sam took a small sip then chugged the rest. Mary sat on the end of the bed and then wiped the sweat from his face.

“Sam,” she said quietly as she looked tenderly into his eyes. “You know Dana’s death was not your fault. Ream did it, not you. No one could have imagined that would have happened.” She paused, “This is not your fault.”

Sam continued to stare at the empty glass and did not look up at Mary.

“Every time I have this dream it’s the same. I am watching it all

happen. I see Ream shoot and I see Dana throwing himself in front of the bullet as I look into the grave. I watch as Ream fires again. Then I see Dana fall to the ground, and then I see me. I see the man who Dana saved staring back at me, and it's me staring at me as if I were two different people, one the enraged victim and one the hapless bystander. He stares at me, and I see such hate and anger in his eyes, it burns me so that I have to look away."

Sam looked at Mary, then back at the glass. He took both his hands and brought them to his face covering his eyes as he wiped his forehead with his fingers. He stopped and held his hands over his face not speaking.

"You have eliminated all reminders of Dana from every aspect of your life. You even refuse to put out the pictures of him, even the one of the two of you at Fort Story that you love so much." Mary whispered to her hurting husband. "No one blames you, Sam."

Sam took his hands away from his face and turned to Mary.

"But I blame me." He slipped out of bed, went into the bathroom and closed the door behind him.

Monday, 0715 hours October 9, 1994, Dawsonville, thirty miles north of Atlanta, Georgia

Sitting just thirty miles north of Atlanta, Georgia, beyond the towns of Roswell and Alpharetta, and the community of Cumming, the town of Dawsonville was fighting a losing battle against the conversion from rural to urban living that the other three had already lost. The rolling hills and heavily wooded lands north of the Chattahoochee River once were home to many horse ranches. Both humble and wildly expensive ranches, with their hay fields, large barns, riding paddocks, and corrals, once spread their flowing green fields over hundreds of rolling stream-filled acres. As the city of Atlanta grew, the natural sprawl reached northward to the green, open spaces of the northern suburbs. The steady pace of development was kicked into high gear with the announcement that Atlanta would be the home of the 1996 Summer Olympic Games, and by 1992, the number of horse farms remaining in Alpharetta could be counted on a single hand. One by one, mile by mile, the developers gobbled up the ranches and replaced them with

communities of crowded condos, town homes, and single-family communities; houses replaced barns, schools replaced farms, and strip malls of dry cleaners, beauty shops, pizza parlors and video stores soon were as common as the beautiful ranches used to be.

The Dawsonville area remained one of the last outposts safe from the sprawl. Whether it was the distance from Atlanta or the presence of an occasional chicken farm that discouraged developers, the area seemed immune, if only temporarily, to the frenzy that was gobbling up land. It was here in 1990, that David Lytle, having moved to Georgia, ended his search for a home with enough land ‘that he didn’t know he had neighbors.’ After two months of searching, he found his place; a small two-bedroom home on eight acres of land just south of the Dawson Forest Wildlife Management Area. This was a state-protected area of nearly nine hundred acres. Best of all, there were twelve miles of hiking trails, which for David meant solitary running trails.

It was a magnificent fall morning. As David ran down the trail, just barely lit by the rising morning sun, he re-adjusted his baseball cap, a plain black one with the letters LNMB embroidered on the back bottom edge. He looked into the sun, felt its warmth on his face, and thought of his youth.

David was six feet tall, broad shoulders, smart, tough, and above all he was in-shape; or at least that’s what he thought when, right out of high school, he joined the Army. He was an athlete, a basketball player, baseball shortstop, and in the best shape of his life, and he quickly found the Army definition of ‘in-shape’ was not the same as his. Their definition did not include the ability to play basketball, but it did include the ability to run.

Every morning at 0530 hours, in the pitch black before the beginning of the scorching summer’s day at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, David and a hundred boys of Alpha Company, Fourth Platoon, 1st Training Brigade would begin their day with a brisk five mile run under the watchful eye of Staff Sergeant Stanley Bender, who David thought was just about the toughest, most accomplished NCO in the entire Army. David could handle all the pushups and sit-ups but he hated the running. Every day he managed to get through it by sheer will. Six weeks later, he graduated from Boot Camp and off he went to Airborne Training. Here they proceeded to run him to death with five-mile runs twice daily, every morning and evening. By the end of it, he hated running even more than before,

if that was possible.

After Airborne training, he looked forward to joining a real outfit, to get away from the ‘chicken-shit’ running and get down to serious soldering. Unfortunately, for David, Staff Sergeant Stanley Bender had the same idea about leaving the training of recruits behind and when David reported to Fort Benning, he also reported to Bender’s Infantry Platoon. As he had wanted, David was learning all about real infantry tactics and techniques, but Bender’s passion for running the troops was damn near killing him. Soon he began to hate the idea of just waking up, as he knew running long miles in heavy boots awaited him.

Despite his absolute hatred of running, he volunteered for Special Forces training where he knew ten miles runs were the order of the day. But he wanted to be part of what he thought was the best unit in the world, and he was willing to do it just to be part of the team. He applied, was accepted, and got his orders to report in six months.

When the orders came into the company, Bender got them and sent for David. David received the word that Bender wanted to see him, reported immediately to Bender’s office, and knocked on his door.

A strong, masculine voice from inside the room loudly called, “Enter,” and David opened the door and stepped inside quickly.

Bender looked at David who was standing at attention in front of his desk. “The response to your request for Special Forces Training came today.” Bender paused just a moment to let Lytle sweat about the answer. “You’re in.” Bender extended a handful of papers to David, “Your orders, Lytle.”

Without thinking of the protocol, the excited young Specialist shouted, “Out frickin’ standing!” Then realizing how he had spoken in front of the senior sergeant, he immediately apologized.

Bender smiled at David, “No need to apologize soldier; it *is* out frickin standing.” He motioned for David to sit in the chair next to his desk. “Lytle, you’re an outstanding soldier; smart, intuitive, and a born leader. That’s why we endorsed your request for SF training.” He leaned forward to David and softly spoke, “But you’re not going to make it through.”

David was taken back, “Like hell. I’ll make it.”

“No you won’t.” Bender shook his head from side to side as he stood. “You won’t make the runs. They are ten miles and you can have two of them a day.”

David was indignant with the sergeant, “I’ve never fallen out of a run and I never will.” David stood and matched the sergeant’s stance.

“No, you haven’t. You make it on guts alone most of the time and that’s what tough guys do.” He stared at David with an intense, cold, piercing look, “But tough just isn’t good enough for SF. If you are going to make it you need to change.”

David didn’t have a clue what Bender was talking about and stood there unable to answer.

The sergeant sat back down at his desk, picked up a pen as if to start to work, then looked up to David. “Specialist Lytle meet me at the track tonight at twenty-hundred hours.” He looked back to his work and without looking up at David, “And wear PT clothes and sneakers—no combat boots. Understood?”

“Affirmative.” There was no response from Bender; so after thirty seconds of standing there in silence, David left the office without another word.

All afternoon David sweated the idea of having to run around that damn track. How he hated the endless, meaningless, foot pounding trips around the endless oval. It wasn’t bad enough he had to run five miles every morning, now Bender was going to make him run at night too. He didn’t want to do it, but he knew Bender had the power, and if he wanted to go to SF training, he had to let Bender run him to death.

At exactly 1955 hours, Bender walked onto the track where David had been waiting.

“Evening, Sergeant Bender,” David greeted the NCO as warmly as he could, under the circumstances.

“Evening, Specialist Lytle. You ready to learn how to run tonight?”

“Affirmative,” David responded with his typical proper military manner. Then almost as if he had no control over his mouth, he added, “And how many laps are you going to *learn* me tonight?”

“None.” Bender said as he stretched.

“Say again.” David asked.

“I said, ‘None.’” Bender looked at the oval, “I hated that frickin track.” Bender stopped his stretching. “Lytle, I am sure you would run any distance the SF boys tell you to. And unless your heart exploded, I suspect you will find a way to drag your ass across whatever finish line they draw.”

David silently agreed.

“But that won’t get you through. You can’t fear getting up each morning knowing you are going to have to do something you absolutely hate. You can’t be the soldier you need to be with that attitude. It wears you out.” Bender pointed his finger at David in anticipation of David countering his argument. “I can read you like a field manual, Lytle. You excel in every training event we throw at you. You’re involved, engaged, and the others see your attitude and they follow. The mornings are another matter. Every morning you show up, like a robot; no enthusiasm, nothing positive. When you run, I look at your face; it’s like you are zoned out or in some evil trance. What are you thinking about when you run?”

“I’m thinking about just making the next lap; that’s all.”

“That’s it?”

“Affirmative.”

“You just stare at the back of the man in front of you.”

“Affirmative.”

“You absolutely hate it, don’t you?”

“Affirmative.”

“Understood.” The running track was next to a large forested training area, and fifty yards from the far end of the track there was a dirt trail that led back into the woods. Bender pointed to the trail, “We’ll start there.”

The two men started jogging towards the trail then entered it. Soon Bender had a rhythm and he was more gliding than running, while Lytle was doing the airborne shuffle and already struggling.

“How far are we going?” David asked.

“I don’t have any idea. Just depends on the evening, the mood

and what your body is telling you.”

“Well, my body is telling me it hates what I am doing to it.”

“Then stop.”

“Say again.” David didn’t know how to respond. He wasn’t a quitter and wouldn’t give Bender the satisfaction to see him fall out.

Bender stopped running and looked at Lytle. “You aren’t getting it. This isn’t punishment; it’s an outlet—if you let it. You keep thinking of this as torture, and if you do, your attitude will suffer. When you are running, you’re only thinking; when will it end? When I’m running I’m thinking of the upcoming day’s activities, or this beautiful forest I’m running through, or if I’m really lucky it’s about some lovely lady.”

Bender motioned ahead and they started running again. Two minutes later Bender asked, “What are you thinking about?”

David had been constructing imaginary finish lines and then staring at them as he ran forward in an effort to keep up, but when the sergeant asked he replied, “The weather.”

Two minutes later Bender asked again, “What are you thinking about now?”

This time David was actually thinking about the weather. Tomorrow was Saturday and he had a date with a young female specialist from the finance company. The newspaper said it was going to rain tomorrow and he was thinking about what they were going to do.

Every two minutes or so Bender would ask the same question, and David would tell him whatever he was thinking about at the time. Fifteen minutes into the run Bender stopped. “This is far enough for now. I’m going on. I’ll pick you up on my return.”

“I can keep up,” David stubbornly replied.

“I suspect you can, but I don’t want you to. I have some thinking to do.” With that, Bender continued down the dirt trail and disappeared into the forest. David stood there expecting Bender to return in just a few minutes. When it got to ten, David sat down on the trail and just rested. His mind drifted from subject to subject and he didn’t hear Bender call him when he finally arrived back twenty minutes later.

David was amazed how this big man had run and didn't look tired.

"How far do you run?" David finally asked.

"I don't have a distance. I do a time. Depending how I feel I start out with a number and run out half the time. If I am tired at that point, I turn towards home or if I feel great I just continue." He took a few more casual, effortless strides and continued, "I don't do it for the exercise David, I do it for the peace. There are no phones to answer, no idiot Second Lieutenants I have to baby-sit, no deadlines to meet, and no reports to write. I can be alone with whatever thoughts I have or whoever I wish I was with." Bender smiled a devilish smile, "Or one I had been with."

David knew exactly what he meant, and as he ran, his thoughts turned to tomorrow and to young Specialist Rebecca Kasten from the Finance Company, who had finally agreed to go out with him after he had asked her no less than eight times without success.

Before he knew it they were back at beginning of the trail.

"Unless the company has some night training scheduled I run Fridays and Tuesdays. I'll see you next Tuesday, same time."

"Roger that," David replied as they both then went there separate ways.

Tuesday came and David ran with Bender for eighteen minutes before he told David to wait. That Friday it was nineteen. After two months of running together David asked Bender, "Do you want to wait here? I can pick you up on my way back."

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The rewards of his new method were clear; for the first time in his life, he liked running, and in fact now loved running. More than just being in better shape David looked forward to his twice-weekly run; this sixty minutes became a time of thinking, relaxing, and even dreaming.

With his newly developed skill, David excelled at Special Forces Training and after graduating tops in this class, he began a ten-year career in what the military called 'black ops.' Between

missions, he would return to his running regiment. But now it wasn't for physical training, it was for his mental health. It enabled him to forget; to forget the mission, the politics that caused it, and the death that resulted from it. For ten years he fought undeclared wars in the jungles of unnamed countries, and assassinated 'enemies of the state' as ordered by higher command. Each time leaving without notice for days or weeks at a time and then returning to tell friends nothing except he was on an unannounced training mission.

The special ops life was difficult. The hard work, the constant training, and the nature of the duty, made it mentally trying on the individual, but it made it impossible for the development of any sort of stable love life. Despite the challenges of the life style, he was a soldier, one of the best. He was content with his life, until he left a squad of his men behind in a jungle, the name of which did not appear in any U.S. Army history book.

He had taken three teams by chopper into the jungle. Then, after a day of traversing the dense growth on foot, they set up on the edge of the forest less than fifty yards from the target. The target was a group of local drug leaders who were to meet in a jungle fortress for one day to discuss territory ownership and set prices for their illegal drugs. It would be a textbook operation. They came in by stealth, having been totally undetected and now waited motionless just yards from the target. When they were sure the targets had all arrived, Team Alpha, which had a position just inside the edge of the forest and just southwest of the target, would take out the exterior guards with silenced rifles. Team Charlie would enter the building and eliminate the occupants, while Team Bravo provided cover.

When Charlie completed the assault, they would return under the cover of Team Alpha and then Alpha and Charlie would retreat through the jungle under cover of Team Bravo if necessary. Team Bravo had taken a position on the southeast side in the edge of the forest and would provide cover on the flank. If Alpha and Charlie met resistance as they pulled back Bravo could cover. If Bravo met resistance when they pulled back, Alpha and Charlie would be in a position to support. There had been one concern about the plan. Upon departure, the covering force, Team Bravo, had to cross thirty yards of open terrain to return to the jungle and that concerned David and Team Bravo's leader Heit Lang. But G2 said the 'hostile' force numbered ten or less so the risk was acceptable.

The initial assault went by the book. Alpha took out the guards

with silenced weapons; only four slightly audible pops ended the lives of the two guards at the front door and the two who were smoking at the rear entrance. Team Charlie entered the building and with deadly efficiency eliminated all eight drug bosses and their eight personal guards. Only one guard got off any rounds at all and they missed their target.

Team Charlie returned through Team Alpha's lines and set up their firing position to cover team Alpha's withdraw. Then teams Charlie and Alpha would cover for exposed Team Bravo.

Just as Alpha began its evac, it all went to hell. Alerted by the one guard's errant shots, a contingent of nearly one hundred of the local drug leader's militia came screaming up the hill from the north side and attacked with an undisciplined but violent assault. Teams Charlie and Bravo mowed the unexpected attackers down in an effective and deadly crossfire.

All was still within the parameters of the plan until Bravo attempted to evac back towards Alpha and Charlie. Alpha and Charlie kept the militia down in the north enabling Bravo to begin the evac, but twenty yards into the open zone, Bravo began to take fire from a new militia force behind them. Alpha and Charlie could not engage this new threat as Bravo team was between them and the militia. Bravo immediately took two dead and one wounded and had to return to their original position.

Teams Alpha and Charlie held the militia on the north but could not engage those to the east without hitting Team Bravo in the process. Team Bravo was trapped and despite inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy force, David knew the situation was untenable and when darkness came, they would be overrun. He called for immediate evac by chopper but command would not send the rescue team because they did not want U.S. forces seen in the area. All of David's men were in commando uniform and without any forms of ID; they were expendable and as far as any outside government would know, they were mercenaries hired by a rival cartel.

Of the five men in Team Bravo, two were dead, two were wounded severely but still fighting, with Heit the only uninjured man. After another ten minutes of heavy fighting Heit had been hit in both legs and his escape was no longer possible. Teams Alpha and Charlie also had problems. Their ammo was nearly exhausted and

they had three casualties, one severe.

Knowing the hopelessness of the situation Heit volunteered to stay behind and hold off the militia while David took the surviving members of the teams out through the jungle to the scheduled evac point. David said nothing on the long flight back. When the chopper finally landed he found, and then almost killed, the officer who had refused to order air evac. It was David's last mission, and five days later he was a civilian.

Now, ten years after having left his men behind, and twenty-one years after he ran down that dirt trail and found a new peace through running alone in nature, he was still running. He loved his morning runs, but they were less frequent now. His knees were no longer what they used to be, allowing him just three runs a week. He stood watching the sun rise higher in the sky, he felt the warmth of the sun on his face and he thought it felt good to be alive. He took off down the trail, finished his run, returned to his house, then did a hundred pushups, and worked fifteen minutes on the heavy bag that he had installed in the unused second bedroom.

He showered, shaved, dressed then went outside to the back porch with his coffee and notes. Once outside he put the cup and notes on the table and then, as he did every day for the last ten years, turned towards the south where he left his friends behind and quietly and privately saluted.

Monday, 0715 hours October 9, 1994, Stateville Correctional Center Joliet, Illinois

Ream had severe arthritis in his lower spine, and in that instant when he felt the sharp pain, he thought he was experiencing another all-to-familiar episode. Three years in a jail cell, an isolation cell to boot, had taken its toll on him. The day he entered the cell he was perfectly healthy; a strong, in-shape, strikingly rugged looking man who looked and acted more like a man in his later fifties than the seventy-five he was a meticulously manicured and dressed man who prided himself on taking care of his physical form. As such he had all the health money could buy, including a complete workout center in his home and a personal trainer to ensure he maximized his use of it.

Over the last three years he was allowed out of his cell just one-hour per day. The most exercise he could squeeze in was walking in a secured inside garden, which was the size of a basketball court. Today was a special day; he was going into Chicago and would be out of the cell all day. Standing in an unfamiliar corridor in the General Population area with prisoners he had never seen before, he awaited processing for his trip into the city.

When he felt a second more intense pain, he reached around his back and felt a warm liquid on his hand. He then felt something hard in his back. He reached around to feel the source of his pain. There was blood flowing from where it apparently had entered and he instantly knew he had been stabbed. His seventy-five year old body, already weakened by age and four years of prison-induced inactivity, quickly succumbed to the loss of blood and he slumped to the floor. Sitting in a pool of his own blood he could barely focus on the activity around him; he saw people moving but it made no sense to him. The pain he had so suddenly felt was gone, but then so was any feeling at all. He heard nothing. He couldn't hear the sounds of the prisoners around him as they jockeyed to get into a position where they could say they saw absolutely nothing. He didn't hear the sounds of the guards' shoes as they ran towards him. He couldn't hear the prison horn that now was blasting the alert. He did not hear or even see the guard, who had a grip on his shirt and was shaking him in a vain attempt to keep him conscience. But he could hear the sound of his own breathing and heartbeat, and he knew he was dead.

Just before the last of the earthly air he was to breath escaped from his lungs, he managed to form two words, "Das Ende."