

Another Ambush

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"There was not a rock for twenty mile, there was not a clump of tree,
But covered a man of my own men with his rifle cocked on his knee.
If I had raised my bridle-hand, as I have held it low,
The little jackals that flee so fast were feasting all in a row:
If I had bowed my head on my breast, as I have held it high,
The kite that whistles above us now were gorged till she could not fly."
— Rudyard Kipling, Ballad of East and West, 1889

Upsetting News

Ken Wilcox emitted a series of curse words. He paused for breath and looked again at the images on his laptop screen. He picked up his beer bottle for a swig. It was 10 pm in Denver, and he was allowing himself one beer. It helped calm his stomach and it went okay with the upsetting news. All those death camps. Terrible.

Looking at the photo of his late wife Carlotta, Ken narrowed his eyes slightly. Three years earlier, a Denver police officer had stopped her car. Finding the attractive married woman by herself, the officer had summoned back up. Days later, Ken had found the wreck of his family car and the remains of his wife's body. His ensuing investigation had revealed that the gang in blue had raped his wife, then cut her throat. They had carefully set fire to the family sedan in a vacant lot in a bad part of town. Her body they had further mutilated and left, naked and dismembered, next to the car. In their arrogance, they had made no effort to conceal their movements from the local homeless people.

Since then, Ken and his friend Tormund with whom he had served overseas had made a special project out of the Denver police department. Officers patrolling alone on foot, horse, or in a squad car were their targets. Learning their routes was simple, because their communications were easily monitored. Within six weeks of that August day when Ken had found his wife's body, the Denver police stopped sending out officers by themselves.

Ken got up and went to the window overlooking the parking lot below his apartment. He raised the Venetian blinds. The potted geranium that his wife had loved was on the window sill. Ken took it and set it on the coffee table nearby. Then he returned to the room he used as his home office.

About half an hour later, the phone rang. It was Tormund.

Tormund asked, "When?"

Ken said, "Tomorrow night, 11 pm."

Then Tormund asked, "Where?"

Ken said, "Those abandoned warehouses on Downing, near the remains of that brewery. You know the place?"

Tormund said, "I'll be there."

The line went dead, as Ken knew it would. The two of them had long since developed a system for working together. Few words meant less information to be interpreted by whatever agencies were still monitoring every call. Tormund could see Ken's apartment from his home a block away. The flower pot and the blinds being up at night signalled the call to action.

Ken went back to his front room and let the blinds back down. He carefully put the geranium back on the window sill.

All those dead bodies from the photos taken by the rescue teams that had swarmed into death camps, slave camps, and torture sites all over the country were in his mind as Ken lay resting in bed that night. He had seen death before, and dealt his share of it. There had been times when getting information in a hurry meant doing to captured enemy soldiers what had to be done. Seeing the same things done to civilians was upsetting. Thinking about how the same system had encouraged Denver police to be a criminal gang was upsetting enough, knowing that it was epidemic had Ken seething.

Just after midnight, he rolled out of bed, went out to the kitchen, and drew a sleeping tablet from his pantry. About ten minutes later, back in bed, he fell sound asleep.

The Call

Johnny Jones didn't like his new partner. Glenn Jewell was a bully, and not very bright, which was typical of the police officers Jones knew. But Jewell was very fat. Jones liked to stay slender, and worked out two hours every morning to keep fit. Jewell took every opportunity to eat. If he exercised it was on the way to or from the patrol car they were assigned.

Having seniority meant that Jones got to drive. Letting Jewell drive would have been worse. It was bad enough watching him stuffing his face with candy or crackers. There was always a small sea of litter at Jewell's feet. Wrappers, crumbs, bits of this or that. Wadded napkins. The man was a slob.

"Eighteen twenty foxtrot. Meet the man, meet the man, 6300 block Downing. Dead bodies. Respond code three," came the voice from dispatch. The time on the dashboard clock showed 01:26.

Even though it was voice activated, Jones turned his head toward his shoulder-mounted microphone. He said, "Eighteen twenty responding."

The dispatcher immediately began droning again, "Sixteen twenty-seven hotel, meet eighteen-twenty foxtrot at 6300 Downing. Seventeen forty-four x-ray, rendezvous at 6300 Downing." Acknowledgements came through as Jones flipped on lights and sirens while accelerating.

Three squad cars would converge on the scene. Wanting to be first to arrive, Jones kept accelerating, darting and weaving wildly. Using the oncoming lane, cutting off other drivers, in one instance causing another car to skid out of control, but that was a civilian, a nobody. Getting there first would make Jones incident commander. That tiny extra bit of power would be his tonight. Maybe with good results

he'd be able to work his way off the night shift.

As Jones turned onto Downing he could see up ahead a group of flood lights set up at a construction site near the old abandoned brewery. Jewell had called up the local compliance map on their squad car's laptop computer and it showed no authorised construction in the area. Seeing that he was first on the scene, Jones slowed, flipped off his siren, and radioed to dispatch.

He said, "Eighteen twenty foxtrot approaching 6300 Downing. Traffic cones and flood lights, appears to be unauthorised construction."

Dispatch replied, "Eighteen twenty on scene. Sergeant Jones is incident commander. Inbound units approach with caution." At the words naming him incident commander, Jones smiled. He slowed further and stopped just past the intersection with 64th Street, his headlights pointing South. There, set off by the traffic cones and illuminated by the flood lights were the dead bodies mentioned by dispatch. There was a city-marked portable generator trailer providing the power for the flood lights.

Jones turned his head toward his shoulder mic and said, "Downing incident command. Looks like a pile of bodies, dispatch. No sign of the caller. What did the man say when he called this in?"

Dispatch came back after a few seconds, "It was a text to our anonymous tip line sent from a phone registered to Henry Hill, 6600 Washington Street."

Jewell keyed in that address, and was switching from map view to satellite, but Jones had no doubt what was there. "Dispatch, that address is a vacant lot. That name sounds familiar though."

Ahead in the distance, turning from the east onto Downing from 62nd Street and killing its siren came another patrol car. Moments later a third car approached from the West, also along 62nd Street, stopping in the intersection to fully block traffic. Both newcomers had their lights on but their sirens off.

Jones knew that Henry Milgram and Marie Stewart were in car 1627H and Pedro Gonzalez and Juan Alvarez were in 1744X. As they arrived on scene, the others radioed to notify both dispatch and Jones of their presence.

Jones pulled his car to parallel 64th Street so it would fully block Downing from the north as Pedro had done with his squad car at 62nd. Jones thought for a few moments and said, "Well, let's meet in the middle, see what's there." His words were carried by his voice-activated radio to the others and back to dispatch. Jones grabbed his helmet from the bracket under his seat and opened his door.

He and Jewell got out of their car to walk toward the lights. Jones was strapping on his helmet. Jewell had left his behind. The other four officers approached along both sides of the street from the far end of the scene. Soon all six were standing within the perimeter of the lighted area, listening to the generator thump, and looking at the pile of naked bodies.

Enjoying his command privileges, Jones started with criticism directed at everyone. He said, "I see you're all still leaving your helmets in your cars. Even Jewell here."

Then, seeing that Milgram and Stewart were starting back toward their car, Jones said, "Stop. Don't worry about it this time. Gonzalez, you and Milgram start turning over bodies, see if we can find any

identification."

Gonzalez and Milgram exchanged a look that indicated their view of Jones as any kind of leader. Then Milgram shrugged and moved toward the pile of bodies. Gonzalez grimaced and joined him. Gonzalez grabbed the shoulders of the top body in the stack while Milgram took the ankles. They shifted the naked body a few feet and turned it face up. Recognition was immediate.

On the chest of the body was a tattoo that said, "We get up early to beat the protesters." Below it was a police baton and a combat boot.

Milgram said, "It's Willie Brown. Cold as ice."

Stewart let out a sudden breath and dropped to the ground. A moment later, Alvarez did as well. Jewell grunted but stayed up.

Jones, turning toward Jewell felt an impact on the side of his helmet. He dropped to the ground, deliberately lowering his profile. He'd spent time in Syria before getting his job with the Denver police. Drawing his pistol with his right hand, Jones turned on his left side to assess the situation. Milgram was three feet away, shuddering in his death throes with a huge wound in his neck spilling his blood.

Lifting his head slightly, Jones confirmed that Gonzalez and Jewell were both down as well. Then Jones scrambled toward the pile of bodies as a sort of defensive position. He still had no idea what was going on, but he knew procedure.

"Dispatch," he called, "Downing incident command, my team is down. Send backup."

Silence. Looking at the radio mounted on his belt, Jones could see the flashing red light. Some sort of malfunction. Thinking for a moment, Jones aimed at the nearest flood light and shot it. It made a satisfying spray of glass and a few sparks, then went dark. He didn't have a good shot at the other lights from his position, so he shifted posture and crawled a few feet forward.

Overwhelming pain came from his right femur. It was shattered by a bullet. The suppressed rifle that fired it made too little noise to be heard over the sound of the generator that still powered the remaining floodlights. Whoever had killed his team was above him. The knowledge would benefit Jones very little, though. As he rolled over to return fire, his gun hand took a shot as well.

This penultimate shot came from close range from a suppressed 9mm pistol. Ken Wilcox walked into the circle of light. Jones knew fear.

Wilcox spoke, "Johnny Jones. Madcap. Been looking forward to our meeting for a few months. Ever since we found out you were selling guns and ammo to the Red Rangers through your brother Joe. Didja hear? He got convicted in Paradox. Got himself shot."

Jones stared at his attacker. In a querulous voice, barely held together against the pain, Jones asked, "What ...what do you want?"

Wilcox smiled. Raising his pistol he replied, "Revenge." With that one word he shot the incident commander in the face.

Going Home

Tormund and Ken retrieved the sidearms of the officers, along with their wallets. These went into a large duffle, out of which Tormund took another duffle. Then the two of them stripped the bodies with the ease of much practice. Clothing and body armour went into the duffle bags.

Leaving the bodies, the two of them quickly hauled the duffles to the incident commander's patrol car. Standard procedure following the radio blackout they had arranged with a frequency jammer would have backup squad cars rolling toward the scene, possibly "code one" without lights and sirens. There was usually about a five minute interval while dispatch tested their own systems and tried to raise any of the responding cars, followed by some unknown interval before a more distant group of cars could be vectored to the scene.

Even so they moved quickly. Using keys left in the ignition by Jones, Ken opened the trunk. He lifted out some of the equipment stored there, then hefted the two duffle bags and hurried them over to his car, parked on the street nearby. Tormund had slung his rifle and retrieved the squad car's laptop which the late officer Jewell had neglected to secure. Checking the trunk, Tormund grabbed the remaining gear and joined Ken at his car.

They put the captured items into the trunk of Ken's Taurus sedan. While Ken closed the trunk and started his car, Tormund went back with a paraffin and lint fire starter in a small brown paper sack. Setting this on the driver seat, Tormund lit the paper sack with his pocket lighter and headed back to Ken's car.

The two of them drove around the block on Washington to get to the other patrol cars. By the time their trunks were emptied and their laptops were in the back seat, it was time to go. All three patrol cars were on fire as they drove away. They didn't have far to go.

The area they were in was mostly abandoned warehouses near an old rail line. Washington street took them past a spaghetti bowl of a freeway interchange where I-76, I-270, and I-25 came together. About 16 blocks from the scene of their recent ambush were subdivisions on both sides. Turning onto one of these lesser streets, then another, and still a third, they came past a series of homes with attached garages.

The two of them drove into one of these that had its garage door open. A shiny Toyota pickup truck was parked in the three-car garage, leaving plenty of room for Ken's Taurus. Tormund used the remote to start the garage door down behind them. Ken killed the engine and lights. Opening their car doors at nearly the same moment, the dome light stayed off, having been disabled early in their career. The two men opened the trunk and the back doors of the sedan.

Tormund grinned at his friend. "You think any of their crap is tagged?"

Ken shook his head. "No," he said, "most likely not. We'll run the scanner over it, see if anything pings, but they still aren't very up to date here. Just as well."

About twenty minutes later, the two were seated at a table in the dining area of the home. All exterior windows had black-out curtains. Tormund was dismantling the laptops and Ken was boxing the weapons and ammo. Over on the stove, a pot of water was set to boil. They continued to work at their separate tasks.

Tormund compressed the contents of the three hard drives and sent them to the rebel alliance on an encrypted channel. Ken had everything ready to go in Tormund's truck positioned by the door. The two men prepared combat rations with the hot water. Then they got cold beverages out of the refrigerator and sat across from each other at a folding table.

They wouldn't move from their current location for at least 24 hours, by which time the crime scene they had just left would be cleared by the Denver crime scene investigators. Depending on the situation outside, shown to them on strategically placed cameras, they would wait as long as necessary. The cameras were small but powerful, and wired back to their location by way of the storm sewers. No radio signals were wanted from the cameras, of course, as that would lead a clever enemy to the cameras and possibly further.

It had taken a week to prepare their current hideout, which was one of twenty known only to the two men and dotted around the Denver area. Of course, they knew their territory well, and had detailed knowledge of the police department's communications - unencrypted radio - and procedures.

Most of these were homes of disappeared persons who would not be needing them ever again. Denver's police force was vicious and thorough. But the county's ability to keep its seized properties in inventory was limited due to corruption. A bit of extortion with one of the chief clerks had resulted in a bonanza of empty homes registered to the county in its tax records, but completely missing from its inventory of properties to be liquidated through sale to the public. The county government very kindly paid to keep the lights and utilities turned on, also through oversights in accounting arranged by their favourite clerk.

The rest of the houses they used from time to time were available to them because of fellow veterans who were happy to help. For those locations, Tormund and Ken never brought any work with them from the scenes of their operations. They were simply guests in the home of a friend, and would stay overnight to make sure the coast was clear before returning to their apartment complex in the suburbs.

"Never ceases to amaze me how little they bother to upgrade security. It's like they aren't even trying," Tormund said, munching on the lamb and vegetable main from his ration.

Ken grunted. He focused for a few minutes on his food. Taking a swig from his sports energy drink, he shook his head. "They think of people as expendable. You know that. When they run out of cops, they recruit more."

Tormund nodded. The two men completed their meal in agreeable silence.

Then the two of them set to work on the wallets. From the driver licences they created a list of addresses. These they checked against some offline map software. Over the following week they would conduct surveillance at each home. That was made easy by having the keys taken from the clothes stripped from their enemies.

The two men operated by certain rules. They didn't make war on the dead, so once the bodies were stripped, they were either taken to a refrigerated warehouse for future use or left. Ken was unwilling to mutilate any body because his wife Carlotta's body had been found that way.

Family members were left alone, unless they were known to be police or other law enforcement.

Sometimes during funerals for the fallen officers, sometimes during other times when the entire family was away from the home, in some cases weeks later, in a few cases months later, the homes of the ambushed police were raided. Ken and Tormund would get any data stored on home systems or memory sticks, collect any obvious valuables, look for hidden caches, and load up the van they had for the purpose with weapons, ammo, food, and anything of interest. Typically the van would be parked in the garage of the home if it had one, and the raid would take place during daylight. Occasionally they used early morning hours on a Saturday or Sunday when neighbours would be sleeping in if they had to work without cover of a garage.

The police existed by taxing and intimidating the public, hurting whomever they encountered. Since taxation is theft, all the funds received by public servants were stolen. Finding all their victims and returning the property to its rightful owners would be laborious. Meanwhile, there was a war on.

After the revelations of the death camps, the two men added an additional step. Every home of every police officer from that day onward was torched. Simple techniques involving electricity or natural gas, or both, were used to make sure the home fires started burning a few minutes after they left.

The death camps represented the betrayal of the American people. It was time to burn the system of oppression to the ground.

[End part thirty, continues in part thirty-one]

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