

Back Office

Six Mountains

By Lewis Balentine

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Notes:

This "Introduction" document only has the table of contents and the beginning chapter of the novel.

The [complete novel](#) is available at

[Amazon.Com](#)

as a **Kindle book**

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The Start of It.

Akeem looked across the small box canyon to the top of the cliff at the end. As he assumed his post at midnight he had searched the sky for a sign of the moon but it was absent. The man he relieved had hurried off to the warmth of the few fires far below. It was a deep dark night of the kind where any light that existed sank in to bottomless empty shadows. He was on inside perimeter guard. There were two others. There was one opposite him across the canyon and one at the top of the cliff at the end. Most nights he could see them moving about. Being able to see them helped to relieve the loneliness of the silent duty. He looked down near the bottom of the cliff. There was a narrow ledge that angled down the canyon floor. There were two more guards there on either side of a small cave. They stood in the shadows of tall, deep, narrow crevices in the rock face. A little light filtered up from the fires. He could barely see the outline of their native robes as it contrasted with the darker color of the mountain. He looked back up at the top. Ah, now he could see that guard as well. Akeem thought the guard had probably gone to relieve himself. It was not a good thought. He now needed the same sort of relief. He picked up his AK-47 to look around for an appropriate spot with a rock that would provide some semblance of privacy.



Figure 1: AK-47

At the top of the cliff in question the guard stood with his own AK-47 rifle held in his arms. His face was smeared with splotches of dark drab makeup. A uniform peaked out the light colored robe that he now wore over it. Near his feet was an unmoving form that had been hastily covered with a multi shaded cloth that blended into the shadows of the mountain terrain. Six more men lay on the ground close to the edge of the cliff. Their splotchy uniforms closely mimicked the shades of the cliff. Each man was equipped with a two way radio and ear buds but they were maintaining radio silence. Behind the guard two teams of two men each were finishing their work. They had drilled 2cm diameter holes meters deep into the top of the cliff with silent acoustically insulated drills. The holes were angled toward the face of the cliff. They were deep enough that they estimated there was less than a two meters of rock between the bottom of the hole and the air. They had poured in a yellow liquid that dissolved a large cavity at the bottom. All the men had been careful to stay upwind from the clear, obnoxious, toxic fumes emitted from the holes. Then they filled the cavity with another liquid from the opposite side of the chemical spectrum. A long narrow container of the first liquid now hung just above the second liquid by a thin monofilament thread. The tread passed through a narrow paper tube at the top of the hole. It was anchored in place to a stick driven into shallow 6mm hole a full 15 meters away. Sticking out of the top of the holes were strong metal rods with round eyes at the top. The men had forced a fast setting epoxy paste down into the holes around the rods and small tubes. The paste both sealed the holes and

anchored the rods. They had a total of six holes in line a meter apart. Behind the rods were two battery powered winches equipped with capstans. They were tying the ends of strong climbing ropes to the rods. Then they tied the ends of the threads to the base of the rods just above the epoxy leaving the middle wrapped looped around the stick. Earlier they had made similar holes near the top of narrow crevices to either side. Each one of the ropes ran through a climbing rig of one of the men at the face of the cliff and then to a large coil on the ground behind them.

One of the men at the front was close enough to the edge to peer over it through light gathering binoculars that were supplemented with a passive infrared system that allowed him to see heat signatures. He could detect no movement as he panned the device across the camp below. He checked the two guards further up the canyon. Unknown to those guards there were two of his men hidden behind them watching their every move. There were more men behind the outer perimeter guards. He returned his attention to the guards below on the ledge. It was supposed to be a simple operation but the presence of so many guards made it more complicated. He had two men silently working their way down each crevice. Each man had carried 30 Kg of the high yield explosive along with two radio controlled detonators. When they got halfway down they were to force the packets of plastic explosive deep into the crevice. It was important for them to get the material as deep and tight as possible before inserting the detonators. They had several push sticks on lanyards to assist the process. Those would be left wedged into the crevice as well. The lanyards would be removed of course. The captain glanced at the remote control lying next to him. Two recessed LEDs (light emitting diode) had a dim green glow. He was waiting for number three and four. When they finally came on he returned to watching the guard on the right below.

In that crevice a NCO (non-commissioned officer) was making his way carefully down uncoiling his rope as he went. A night vision system was attached to his helmet. The helmet was wrapped with dark soft foam in case he hit his head on the rock walls. The idea was to be totally silent. He could not afford to knock any rocks loose to warn the guard below. He got to a point about 5 meters above the guard. The guard had moved to the back of the crevice to answer the call of nature. The Sargent unstrapped a black combat knife from his chest and waited until the man finished his business. Some proprieties just had to be observed. Then he quickly dropped behind him. He placed one hand over his mouth and silently drew him back into the crevice where he released his soul to its next life. He donned the man's robe and turban. He stepped forward to ledge to look up at the top of the cliff. Then he stepped back into the face of the crevice to wait. Meanwhile the rope behind him was being pulled back up to the top of the cliff.

The captain had observed the first guard replaced and turned to watch as the second joined his comrade in the afterlife. Then he carefully scanned the camp below. There was no sign of anything amiss or anyone awake. He handed the binoculars to the man with the AK-47 so he could keep watch. Then he donned his own night vision gear and tapped the shoulders of the men on either side of him. They tossed the coiled ropes over the edge. They rapidly repelled down to face of the cliff. As they landed on the ledge they released the ropes and unfolded short carbines that had been strapped to their chests. They maneuvered to the opening of the cave as they added long suppressors to the barrels. There were supposed to be three rooms cut into the sides of the cave. It was the third room that was their target. They entered the cave in sets of two. A soft glow came from each of the rooms. The first two men passed the opening for the first room and stopped. One stood flat against the wall looking around the corner. The other knelt just behind him. The next two men took similar positions on the near side of the opening. One a signal from the man standing on the near side the two kneeling men silently dashed into the room to deal with whomever they found. Those who were sleeping inside never woke up. The

remaining four men moved to the next room to repeat the procedure. That left the captain and his lieutenant to deal with the last room. The captain noticed a gentle flow of air through the cave. That meant there was another entrance or airshaft somewhere further back in the cave. They would have to place a small charge to be sure it was sealed off.

Inside the room a bearded old man was sitting in front of a laptop computer. He had earlier that day received a hand carried memory card with a data file on it. The courier had also given him a number that corresponded to a page in the magazine on the table in front of him. That page had a crossword puzzle printed on it. He had spent most of the night solving the puzzle. He could have looked at the answers in back but that would have been cheating. In this remote location he had lots of time to be filled. Now he was entering the letters of the words into a program on the computer. He thought he saw a ghostly shadow pass between himself and the magazine. It could be death visiting to pay its respects for his latest contributions to their mutual cause. Or perhaps it was one of the many martyrs whose ghosts visited him on the long nights disturbing his well-deserved rest. What was their problem? Were they not happy with the rewards of the blessed afterlife? He turned around to face the ghost but instead he saw two strangely dressed men standing in the opening to his room with weapons pointed at him. The shadow had surely been death come have him join the martyrs. He would have the answer to his question this day. He whipped around to face the computer fumbling for a red small button attached to its side.

In the doorway both men made a snap shot with their carbines. The two nearly silent puffs directed expanding nose bullets toward their target. They hit what they were aiming at. The bearded man's face exploded over the top of the computer. His fingers never reached their goal. The two men rushed to the table where he had been sitting. The captain pulled the man's body back into the chair and leaned it back to lie on the floor. It was pointless but he checked for pulse in the man's neck. The idea had been to take him alive but dead would have to serve. He returned to the doorway to block anyone from entering the room. Two of the men came down the cave. The remaining two men were in the others rooms searching for anything of possible intelligence value. He directed these to go further back in the cave and set a timed charge to bring down the roof. Then he kneeled down to set a small charge in the opening to this room. The men in the other two rooms would do the same thing as they left the rooms.

In the meantime the lieutenant had taken out a small but a very bright LEB flash light to examine the laptop. He noted the additional red button on the side. He could guess what its purpose was. That is why the bearded man was dead. He shined the light under and around the edge of the computer. Then he removed some items from his back pack. He unfolded a square frame about 10 cm in height that he placed on the end of the table. In this he laid a rectangle of ballistic weave [Kevlar](#). Next he sat three 2.5 cm foam cubes on top of the cloth in the frame. A sheet of thin bright orange plastic was laid over the top of the frame. He used a strip of plastic with a roll of tape to form a safety cover around the red switch. He used the tape to secure it to the laptop and seal the edges. He placed two containers of liquid next the square frame having removed their caps in the process. After reviewing the preparation he spoke to the captain, "Ready." The captain picked up the explosive charge that he was working on before stepping just outside of the room. The lieutenant closed the open program selecting the option to save the current work. Then he entered a command to shut down the computer. He closed the lid and unplugged the power supply. He gingerly picked up the machine to center it in the frame on top of the three cubes. After sealing the computer in the orange plastic he emptied the containers into the bottom of the frame. Then he folded the ballistic fabric over the top and sealed the center seam with the tape. He did the same thing for both ends. The empty containers were capped as he returned them to his bag. He returned everything else that he had removed. Inside the Kevlar fabric the liquids were

combining to form protective foam around the computer. He spoke to the captain again, "Done." It would take a few minutes for the foam to cure. The lieutenant began searching the table and the rest of the room for other items of interest. The captain finished his work on the explosive charge. Then he went down the cave to check on the other men. The lieutenant had found six memory cards in the desk that he placed in the back pack. Nothing else of interest was in the room. He slid the now solid block of foam into the back pack. As an afterthought he included the magazine as well. He sealed the backpack and closed the lock to which he did not have the combination. Then he left the room to proceed to the head of the cave. The men from the other two rooms were waiting there with similar backpacks. The captain along with the last two men soon joined them.

The captain stepped out of the cave to signal the two guards who dumped their robes as they headed for the cave. One rope remained hanging on either side of the opening. He signaled the lieutenant forward out of the cave. They attached the ropes to their climbing harnesses and then momentarily pressed a button on the radio packs attached to their web belts. The ropes began to ascend the cliff. At the top of the cliff they released the end of the ropes. The four men operating the two winches tossed the coiled ends back over the edge. The captain and the lieutenant picked up the ends of the other six ropes and headed for a pre-arranged point behind the cliff face. Meanwhile the two men below with backpacks started their journey to the top. When they arrived at the meeting point the captain sent them and the lieutenant on ahead to the next rendezvous point. The next two men to the top took a station next to the battery packs for the winches. Last up were the two guards. They held onto the ends of the ropes as the winch crews disconnected the devices from their power and separated the capstans. Each man picked up his load and headed off to join the captain. That left the guard who counted to sixty as he scanned the camp. He dropped his robe as he knelt to remove the cloth from the bundle on the ground. He then ran to the small stick. He pulled it from its hole releasing the monofilament threads as before hurrying off to join the rest at the rendezvous point.

At the end of the ropes the captain sent the men with the winches and batteries on the on ahead to the next rendezvous. Each of the remaining four men held the ends of two ropes. Down at the bottom of the holes the containers dropped into the liquid where they collapsed. The two liquids began to mix. The liquids did not behave well together and began to create great quantities of hot gases in protest. These rushed up the holes to escape the turmoil via the tiny tubes. The tubes quickly clogged with the remains of the monofilament lines that had several knotted wads along their length. Having nowhere else to go the gas made its presence known to the rock walls of the holes and cavity. The rock having little tensile strength could not restrain the protest. They began to crack at its thinnest points at the bottom of the cavities. As the gas worked into this new space the crack propagated up the length the holes and between them. Soon a large section of the cliff broke loose. Gravity ultimately took control of the chaos. The huge rock began to tumble down the face of the canyon cliff. It took anything in its path with it. The men began pulling on the ropes to retrieve the telltale rods. The captain waited until the dim of the avalanche had reached a sufficient crescendo to trigger the detonators in the crevices. The ground began to rumble as the men gathered up the ropes to head for the next rendezvous. . It would be another hour before the timed charges in the cave went off but by then it would be under a huge pile of rocks. If anyone heard anything then it would just make them more cautious

The captain keyed his radio, "AC1224 on approach for runway zero two seven." He then keyed the microphone 5 times. He waited 3 seconds before repeating the verbal message. That would be their only radio transmission. Their radios were tuned to a VHF (very high frequency) channel used by civilian aircraft for PCL ([Pilot Controlled Lighting](#)) landings at the closest private airport. The signal should not carry anywhere near that far but radio waves were known to do strange things when bouncing around

the mountainous terrain. The concept was that if the signal was picked up locally then it would be regarded as a stray signal from an aircraft in flight. The aircraft number in the message happened to belong to a flight school at the small airport that did not normally operate at night. It instructed the outlying men to head for the rendezvous point. There were different numbers for other instructions including to switch to a more secure encrypted channel. They had several hours before first light. The captain wanted to be far away and well hidden before that time. They would wait until late the next night to cross the border.

Akeem had rushed forward at the first sounds of the avalanche. Such things had been known to happen in these mountains but it was a very rare occurrence. As he looked down into the canyon he could see some of the men had been disturbed from their rest. They were moving about the camp shaking the others awake as they shouted warnings and pointed up at the cliff. A few were running for the mouth of the canyon. Some others scrambled for the few paths up the inside walls but most just headed for the safety of the end walls on either side of the camp. Akin looked at the rocks as they seemed to move in slow motion down the canyon wall. It was not a big rock slide but there was a huge cloud of dust in its wake. Most all of the men would make it into the clear. It would leave a very big mess that would require weeks to clear away. Many things would probably be damaged in the small camp. The cave on the ledge was high enough to escape the danger as long as no one foolishly stepped out until the event was over. He was glad that most of the food and water was stored in the back of the cave. Then he felt the earth beneath his feet shake. The noise increased to a level that it hurt his ears and the dust cloud rushed to spread out through the rest of the canyon. The first rock had only been a warning sign. It was followed by the entire cliff face separating from the mountain. The massive stones began to crumble into the end of the canyon below. Many of the men below would be crushed as the unforgiving rock buried the camp. He headed down the narrow trail to the canyon floor. With the dark and the dust it would take over an hour if not longer to reach his destination. He did not believe that there was anything he or the other survivors could do. It was however their duty to try. All the food and water supplies would be under the rocks. The few survivors would have nothing save what they carried on their persons. They could at least report the disaster and request help from their brothers in the sacred struggle. Someone must have committed a great offence for such a thing to be visited upon them.

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