

Hell Island

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Extract

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PROLOGUE

THE LAST MAN STANDING

TERRIFIED, WOUNDED AND OUT of ammo, Lieutenant Rick 'Razor' Haynes staggered down the aircraft carrier's tight passage. Blood poured from a gunshot wound to his left thigh. His face was badly scratched.

He panted, gasping for breath. He was the last one left, the last member of his entire Marine force still alive.

He could hear the enemy behind him.

Grunting, growling.

Stalking him, hunting him down.

The enemy *knew* they had him; knew he was out of ammunition, out of contact with base and out of comrades in arms.

The passageway was hardly wide enough for his shoulders. Situated one level below the flight deck, it gave access to the senior officers' quarters on this aircraft carrier. It had grey steel

walls studded with rivets – the kind you find on a warship.

In agony, Haynes arrived at a thick steel door leading from the passage and tumbled through it, landing in a room. He reached up and pulled the heavy steel door shut behind him and locked it.

A second later, the great steel door shuddered violently, pounded from the other side.

His face covered in sweat, Haynes breathed deeply, glad of the brief rest.

He was still shocked from seeing what the enemy force had done to his teammates.

No soldier deserved to die in such a gruesome manner. It was beyond ruthless what they'd done to his men.

Yet the way they had overcome his force of 600 United States Marines had been brilliant.

At one point during his escape from the upper deck of the ship, Haynes had figured he would end his own life before they caught him. Now, without any bullets, he couldn't even do that.

A grunt disturbed him.

It seemed to come from the darkness on the far side of the room.

Haynes looked up just as a shape came rushing out of the darkness. It was dark, hairy and man-sized. And it was screaming like a chimpanzee gone insane. Only this was no chimpanzee.

It slammed into Haynes, ramming him back against the door. His head hit the steel door hard. The blow stunned him but did not knock him out.

As he slumped to the floor he saw the creature pull out a shiny, long-bladed knife, Haynes wished it *had* knocked him out, because then he wouldn't have to know what it did to him next . . .

The death scream of Razor Haynes rang out from the aircraft carrier.

It would not be heard by a single friendly soul.

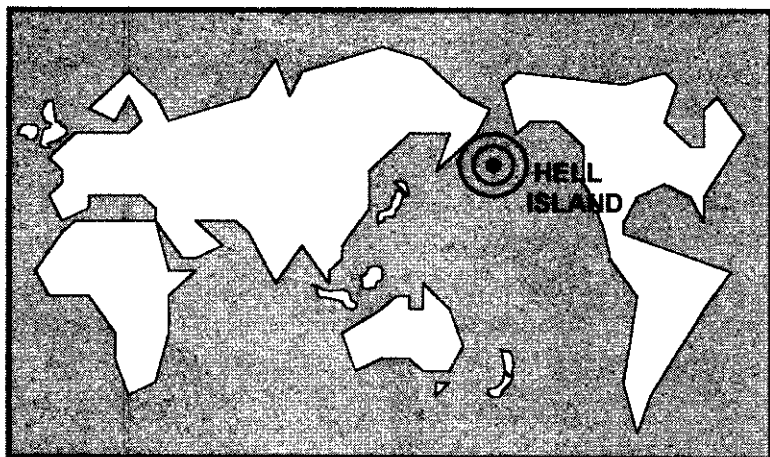
For this carrier was 1,000 miles from anywhere. It was docked at an island that lay 500 miles from its nearest neighbour.

It had once been known as Grant Island, but strangely it no longer appeared on any maps. It had been used in the Second World War by the Japanese as an airfield..

In 1943, after extremely bloody fighting, it had been captured by the American Marines from the Japanese. Because the fighting had been so fierce, the Marines had given it a nickname.

They'd called it Hell Island.

FIRST ASSAULT

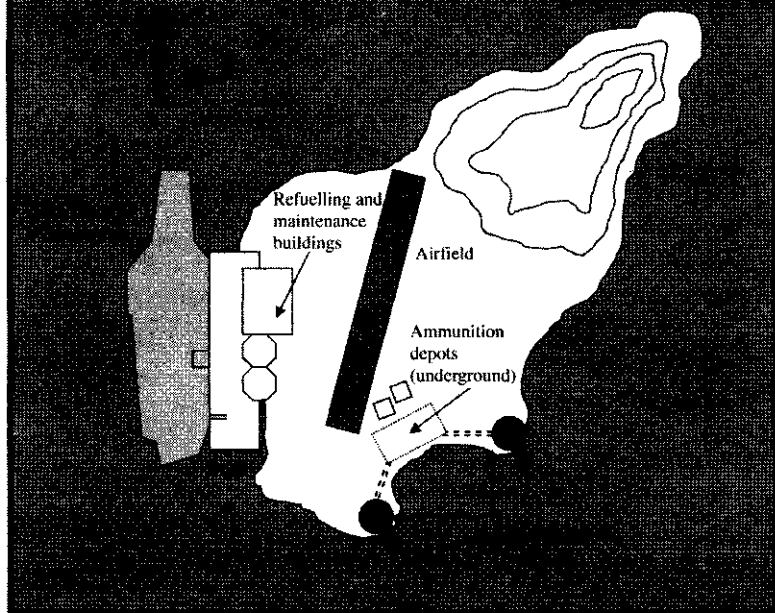


HELL ISLAND

1500 HOURS

1 AUGUST 2005

HELL ISLAND



AIRSPACE OVER THE PACIFIC OCEAN

1500 HOURS, 1 AUGUST 2005

THE AIRCRAFT SHOT ACROSS the sky at near supersonic speed.

It was a cargo plane, used to transport US special forces units.

According to current maps it was flying over empty ocean. But suddenly the ramp at the rear of the plane rumbled open. Dozens of men jumped off it into the sky behind the plane.

The group of forty paratroopers fell to earth. They wore high-altitude jumpsuits – full-face breathing masks and black bodysuits. They angled their bodies down as they fell, pointing into the wind like human spears.

It was a classic high-altitude, low-opening (HALO) drop. You jumped from 37,000 feet, and fell fast and hard. Then you opened your parachute dangerously close to the ground, right at your drop zone.

The strange thing about these paratroopers

was that they were clearly falling in four separate groups. That's because they were actually separate teams.

Crack teams. The best of the best from every corner of the US armed forces.

One unit from the 82nd Airborne Division, brilliant attack troops.

One team of elite Navy SEALs, the best assassins in the world.

One Delta team, always very secretive.

And last of all, one team of force reconnaissance Marines, the very best Marines in the Corps.

They fell like bullets into a thick band of cloud.

After nearly a full minute they came through the cloud into the middle of a massive ocean storm. The rain pounded their facemasks. In the ocean beneath the dark clouds, giant waves rolled and crashed.

Through the rain, their target came into view. It was the tiny island that did not appear on maps any more, an island with an aircraft carrier parked alongside it.

It was Hell.

*

Leading the Marine team was Captain Shane M. Schofield, nicknamed 'Scarecrow'.

Behind his mask, Schofield had a rugged face, black hair and blue eyes. Slicing down across those eyes were two ugly scars, one for each eye. The scars were wounds from a mission that had gone wrong. They were also the reason for his nickname. Once on the ground he'd hide those eyes behind a pair of silver reflecting sunglasses – the kind that wrapped around.

Schofield was a quiet and thoughtful man who had a special reputation in the Marine Corps because of the special missions he had been involved in. The Marine Corps (like any group of human beings) is filled with gossip and rumour. Someone always knew someone who had been there, or who had seen the medical report, or who had cleaned up the mess afterwards. There were many rumours about Schofield and some of them were simply too outrageous to be true.

One: he had been involved in a huge multi-force battle in Antarctica. It had been a bloody and brutal struggle with two of America's allies, France and Britain.

Two: he'd saved the American president's life

when there had been an attempted military coup. It was said that during the fighting the Scarecrow (a former pilot) had actually flown a space shuttle, destroyed it, and then come *back* and rescued the president from certain death.

Of course, nobody could say if this were true. Even so it didn't stop Schofield's new unit talking about it.

One thing about Shane Schofield *was* known to be true: this was his first mission after four months on stress leave. On this occasion someone really *had* seen the medical report, and now all his men on this mission knew about it.

They also knew the cause of his stress.

During his last mission, Schofield's ability to cope had been tested to the limit. Loved ones close to him had been captured and killed. It was even said that at one point on that mission he had tried to kill himself.

All of which meant that the other members of his team were slightly less than confident in their leader.

Was he up to this mission? Was he a time-bomb waiting to explode? Was he a basket case

who would lose it at the first sign of trouble?

They were about to find out.

As he shot downward through the sky, Schofield thought about their mission briefing earlier that day.

Their target was Hell Island.

Actually, the target was the ageing aircraft carrier parked at Hell Island, the USS *George Washington*.

The *George Washington* had been heading home on its last official journey. It was going to be decommissioned. Because of this, it only had a skeleton crew aboard and was accompanied by only two escort boats.

But soon after the *George Washington* had arrived at the isolated island to pick up some special cargo, a fierce tsunami had struck from the north.

All contact with the ship, its two escorts and the island's communications centre had been lost.

However, a North Korean nuclear submarine had been spotted in the area a day earlier, coming out of the Bering Sea. Its position was unknown, but its presence was suspicious.

What were the North Koreans doing in the area? What did they want with the *George Washington*?

Schofield and the other teams were being sent in to find out what was going on and report back. Schofield was very troubled by something other than the mission: why were there other special forces units on this mission? Why were the Marines here with the 82nd, the SEALs and Delta?

Normally you never mixed and matched special forces units. They all had different approaches to mission situations, and could easily trip over each other. It just wasn't done.

To Schofield this smelled a lot like an exercise.

Except for one thing.

They were all carrying live ammo.

The Pacific Ocean stretched away below them in every direction. Somewhere in the middle of it all was the small dot of land known as Hell Island.

The *George Washington* lay at the western end of Hell Island. On the island itself, not far from the carrier, were some big gun positions facing

south and east. At the north-eastern tip of the island was a hill that looked like a small volcano.

A voice came through Schofield's earpiece. *'All team leaders, this is Delta Six. We're going for the eastern end of the island and we'll work our way back to the boat. Your target is the flight deck: Airborne, the bow; SEALs, mid-section; Marines, aft.'*

Just like we were told in the briefing, Schofield thought.

This was typical of Delta. They were great soldiers but, boy, were they born show-offs. No matter who they were working with, they always acted like they were in charge. That was true today, even though they were working with three of the best special forces units in the world.

'Roger that, Delta Leader,' came the SEAL leader's voice.

'Copy, Delta Six,' came the Airborne response. Schofield didn't reply.

The Delta leader said, *'Marine Six? Scarecrow? You copy?'*

Schofield sighed. 'I was at the mission briefing, too, Delta Six. And, last I noticed, I

don't have any short-term memory problems. I know the mission plan.'

'Cut the attitude, Scarecrow,' the Delta leader said. His name was Hugh Gordon, so naturally his call-sign was 'Flash'. *'We're all on the same team here.'*

'What? *Your* team?' Schofield said. 'How about this: how about you don't break radio silence until you've got something important to say? Scarecrow, out.'

Schofield wasn't just being difficult when he told the Delta leader to keep quiet. It was more important than that. Even a coded radio signal could be caught these days so, if you transmitted, you had to assume someone was listening.

And they probably were. France, Syria, Iran and North Korea, countries not known for their friendship towards America, had built new radio decoders. These were designed to pinpoint the location of a particular type of American military radio. And guess what? Schofield and the other teams were using these particular radios on this mission.

Schofield switched to his team's private channel. 'Marines. Switch off your radios.'

Listening mode only. Go to short-wave UHF channel if you want to talk to me.'

A few of his Marines thought about it before obeying, but obey they did. They flicked off their radios.

The four groups of parachutists fell towards the deck of the *George Washington*. A thousand feet above it, they pulled on their ripcords and their chutes opened. Now their falls slowed and they floated toward the carrier. While the other three teams touched down lightly on the flight deck of the giant ship, the Delta team landed on the eastern side of the island. It was a perfect landing with all of them arriving in their assigned positions, guns up.

They had just arrived in Hell.