

Chapter 1

Sunday, July first, 1962: Nineteen year old Ray Holland found himself perched on the backseat of another cab. This one was painted the more traditional yellow but its well worn interior reminded him of the taxi that had delivered him to Fort MacArthur as a raw recruit over a year ago. Had it been that long already? Nearly fifteen months he reminded himself. Things were different now though. He was a full-fledged MP. He was school trained with a year of MP duty under his belt. He was also recently promoted. What more could he want? This was what he had asked for and he was getting what the army promised, wasn't he? *Yes*, he thought, *and way more*.

"That's it, soldier. The Oakland Army Terminal."

Pale green buildings could be seen behind a high chain link fence. Above and beyond them were several large gray navy ships sitting quietly alongside the closest pier. Ray didn't want to get on any ship and he damn sure didn't want to go to Alaska. Potential trouble, potential big trouble, was waiting up there in the large form of King Richard. The good news was that he might see Jan, but he knew he wouldn't see one without the other. Then again, Alaska was a big state and they didn't know he was coming. Maybe he could hide for two years. Or spend it trying to find her.

"I'll let you off here at the gate. They won't let us drive inside the fence. Good luck to you young man. I appreciate what you're doing for our country. Have a good time in Alaska and the rest of your life."

"I appreciate the ride. Thanks."

Ray watched the car drive off and took a deep breath. He hoisted the sixty-pound duffel bag onto his right shoulder and carried his black overnight bag with his left hand. Approaching the civilian guard at the gate, he showed him his military ID and a copy of his orders. The man directed him to the first floor of the closest building.

"Where it says Personnel, on the door? You report in there."

Ray waited at the counter in the office while the army clerk, who took his orders, sat typing out some papers. He glanced up at Ray.

"You're headed to Alaska on the USS MANN. It was supposed to sail this coming Wednesday morning but it lost a hull plate in a storm, coming over from Korea." Ray did not like what he was hearing. "It's getting repaired and should be ready to sail on Friday. Hang loose till then. You might get some time off to visit San Francisco. Okay, here's a meal card for while you're here. You are assigned upstairs in Building 385, across the street. You're in Group Four. Remember that. Listen for instructions over the PA. Go over there and find a bunk. Oh, I see you're an MP. You might want to find some other MPs to hang out with. Anyway, don't leave your stuff unsecured. Things have been known to disappear. There are no lockers so I hope you got a padlock for your duffel bag. Good luck."

It dawned on Ray, as he climbed the stairs, that he was an MP without any authority, to say nothing about an armband, a club or a gun. He was an MP in transit and for some GIs, possibly fair game. He reminded himself to be careful as he pushed open the double doors to the transient barracks. A hum of noise: talking, laughing and music greeted him. At least forty bunks, maybe two-thirds occupied. A few glances were cast his way but he was just one more GI headed to Alaska. He moved slowly down the main

aisle glancing left and right.

“Another fucking MP looking lost.”

“Yeah, just what we need.”

Holland glared to his right at a group of GI's playing cards. They were all watching him. One of them, a large guy, sat looking up at Ray. Even though he had short cropped blonde hair, he looked like a Panda bear and he was grinning a goofy smile. A smile that was friendly and unfriendly at the same time. Ray felt himself tense up. He did not want trouble with this guy. He glanced at the bear's collar insignia. Crossed pistols. A quick look at the others revealed that they were all wearing crossed pistols. It was an MP card game. Ray smiled.

“This Group Four?”

“Welcome aboard, GI,” said the Panda, standing up and offering his hand. “My name is Gruman.”

“I'm Ray Holland. Glad to meet you.”

“Call me Grumpy. This here's Bantz.” He pointed to the guy on his right. “That's Fairchild sitting next to him. I can't remember the asshole sitting across from me.”

“Blanchet,” said the guy. “I'd prefer that to asshole.”

The GI sitting in front of Holland, looked back over his shoulder.

“And I'm Simpson. The anti-social bastard sitting on the bunk pretending he knows how to write is Fishturd.”

“That's Fisher, jerk,” said the wiry guy on the bunk. He stared at the laughing Simpson for a moment and then looked at Ray. “You can call me fishbait. Where were you stationed?”

“Fort MacArthur, California.”

“Where's that?”

“Los Angeles. Where are you guys from?”

“Me and Bantz are from Fort Meade, Maryland,” said Gruman. “We used to complain a lot but that place is looking better everyday. Fairchild was at Fort Carson, Colorado, so he's used to the snow. Blanchet and Simpson are right out of Fort Gordon. Fishbait, where were you before they let you out of jail?”

“Funny, Grumpy.” Fisher looked at Holland. “I was stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia.”

“Isn't airborne school there?”

“Crazy fuckers. They tell them they're the toughest guys in the army and then the MPs have to keep them in line. Lots of fights down there.”

“I would have loved that,” said the Panda. “But meanwhile, it looks like we're all headed to the frozen north. Your orders say where your assignment is, Holland?”

“Fort Richardson. You?”

“We're all headed to the same place then. Garrison duty. Strength in numbers.” Gruman eyed Holland's Specialist chevrons. “Looks like you're the ranking man. How long you been in the army anyway? How old are you?”

“I'm nineteen. Been in a little over a year.”

“How the fuck did you get to be a Spec four?”

“I was in a small detachment. Rank came down and there was no one else to give it to.”

Grumpy shook his head.

“Christ, you’re the youngest too. It’ll be another year before we old guys make it, I bet.”

Ray looked around the big room.

“Are we the only MPs here?”

“So far. Grab the bunk on the other side of Fishbait. We’re sticking together. Watching each other’s stuff.”

“Any trouble from the other GIs?”

The Panda continued to grin.

“I wish. HEY WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?” A soldier across the aisle went right back to his book. Gruman smiled. “No trouble at all. Too bad cuz I could use a little action.”

“Shuffle and deal, big man. Who’s in?” asked Bantz.

Ray hauled his duffel bag over to the bunk next to Fisher who had stopped writing and was looking at Ray’s SP/4 insignia.

“You got lucky with that rank. I bet the extra money’s nice. Say, ain’t you kinda short to be in the MPs?”

“I’ll tell you about it sometime.”

Simpson looked over from the card game.

“Say, Holland, did you go through MP school earlier this year?”

Ray nodded slowly.

“Were you in Echo Company?”

Ray continued to nod his head.

Simpson stood up.

“Jesus Christ, it’s the runt. I want to shake your hand, buddy.”

Ray rolled his eyes and kept silent. Gruman stopped shuffling the cards.

“What the fuck are you talking about, Simpson?”

“Holland is a legend at MP school, Grumpy.”

Ray raised his hands and shrugged his shoulders.

“I don’t think so, man.”

“Come on, Blanchie, back me up on this. You remember, don’t you?”

Blanchet nodded.

“We all heard about a short guy going through school about five or six months ago. Remember when they changed the height requirement last year? Nobody under five foot nine was allowed in after that. We heard that they made it tough on you but that you beat the bastards. Soldier of the cycle, right?”

All eyes were on Holland.

“Well, the thing is, I was already in the MPs.”

“You see, I was right. It’s him! You kicked some big asses down there, Holland. We heard all about you.”

Gruman watched Holland from the bunk.

“That true, little guy?” He got that grin on his face again.

“I think maybe the story got just a little exaggerated, guys. I did graduate from Echo Company in March but I didn’t do anything special.”

“We heard you knocked that redheaded asshole’s teeth out in the judo pits and ripped his ear off.”

Grumpy raised his blonde eyebrows.

“No shit?”

“A big load of shit. I only tore his ear a little bit and that was an accident. He was about to throw me right out of the judo pit. I’d have grabbed his dick if it was handy. I was just trying to survive.”

“I know a guy who was there and he said that it looked like you knocked his two front teeth out.”

“You think I’m nuts? He has false teeth. It was only his dentures that came out in the scuffle. He had his teeth knocked out by a trainee way before my time down there.”

Gruman nodded.

“He was missing those teeth when I went through school a year ago, so I know you didn’t do it. I heard a rumor that it was some guy from Long Island.”

“His name is Steele,” said Ray. “He was stationed at Fort MacArthur when I was there. A very tough guy. And I wasn’t soldier of the cycle. I was just glad to get through.”

“What about the chin-up bars? We heard they had a special stool for you to stand on, so you could reach them.”

“Man, where do these stories come from? You actually heard all this?”

“You’re famous, Holland.”

“The fact is, I couldn’t reach the chin-up bars, so they made me do pushups instead. I never heard about any of this other stuff. I just went back to California when school ended. Sorry to disappoint you.”

Gruman began dealing the cards.

“I appreciate your honesty, man.”

“Of course, I did go toe to toe one night with Sergeant Sanders?”

Grumpys eyes widened.

“Not ‘the’ Sergeant Sanders. The big guy?”

“Well, they were all kind of big to me but yeah, I got tired of him calling me runt.”

“What happened?”

“I punched the shit out of his knees on my way to the floor.”

Everyone around the table cracked up, the panda included.

“You almost had me, kid. I think we’re all going to need a sense of humor in Alaska. All right, who’s in the game?”

Ray started to open his overnight bag on the nearby empty bunk.

“Good one, Holland,” said Fisher, who still hadn’t started writing. “What do you think about going to Alaska by troopship?”

“I am not too thrilled with the prospect. Not happy at all. Did you hear about the hull plate?”

“Yeah, that shit didn’t sound too good. I wish they wouldn’t tell us stuff like that. I did hear some other scuttlebutt though. I was bullshitting with the clerk over in the office yesterday. It seems like they’ve been sending a troopship to Alaska every July for many moons. It’s supposed to be a big deal. I heard that they’re gonna meet us with a band and everything up there. Want to hear the clincher though? This is the last year that they are making the trip. Yep, you heard right. From August on, all replacements are going to fly up. Ain’t that a bitch?”

Ray just shook his head, wishing he could go up in August.

“Why are they stopping now, if it’s like a tradition?”

“Cuz the ship can hold about four thousand troops and there’re only about three hundred of us making the trip. It’s a waste of taxpayer money to keep doing it this way.”

Ray frowned, realizing that somebody had cut his leave in half because they needed passengers for this last trip. Fisher seemed to read his mind.

“I guess that means that we won’t be crammed in like sardines. Maybe it won’t be so bad.”

“Maybe.”

On July Fourth, after breakfast, Fisher found Holland on his bunk.

“Hey, guess what? I just heard we can get a day pass to go into San Francisco-only today though. Then we’re restricted to the base till we sail. Wanna go?”

Ray sat up and reached for his duffel bag.

“Anybody else going?”

“Anybody that wants to. Blanchet and a couple of guys are going to stay back and watch everybody’s stuff. We can catch a bus by the gate in about an hour.”

“I don’t have any civvies.”

“No problem. Better to be in a uniform anyway. It’s the Fourth of July. You get all kinds of discounts if you’re in the military.”

Ray watched the bay and the bridges from his seat on the bus taking them to Fisherman’s Wharf. Forgetting the troopship for a moment, his journey suddenly became exciting. He was a GI on leave in San Francisco, California. It was a sunny summer day and he knew his khaki uniform looked good on him.

Fishbait had a tourist map of the city unfolded on his lap.

“You ever been here before?”

Ray nodded.

“I went to high school in Los Angeles. I had an aunt and uncle and cousin who lived here for a while. Than my uncle got a job in Los Angeles and I drove up here with him to help them move back to LA about two years ago, but I never got to see any of this though. Pretty amazing.”

“Well, unless you got something special you want to see, I think we ought to check out the wharf, ride the cable car downtown and then catch a bus out to Golden Gate Park. They got a museum and observatory out there.”

“Sounds good to me.” Ray watched the blue water below. “What bridge is this anyway?”

“This is supposed to be the Oakland Bay Bridge. That’s Treasure Island just ahead, and...oh man, do you see it? That’s got to be the Golden Gate Bridge. Jesus, it’s huge.” The bridge loomed through the last of the morning fog to the west of them, maybe ten miles away. “I hear we sail under it when we leave. That ought to be something. And see that island there? Alcatraz, old buddy. It makes the stockade at Fort Benning look like peanuts. Did you have a stockade at Fort MacArthur?”

“Small one. They sent everyone who was going to do more than a week up to Fort Ord. That’s the big training base in California. That’s where I did my basic.”

“Where’s Fort Ord? This is my first time west of the Mississippi.”

“Maybe an hour or so south of here. Near Monterey. No fun.”

“I bet it beats Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. Look at this weather.”

“I went through in May, a year ago and it was pretty cold at times.”

“Not like New Jersey.”

“Okay, you win that one but the training was still the shits.”

Fishbait looked at Holland.

“Isn’t it funny how those eight weeks seemed to last forever, and now it seems like it happened so quick?”

Ray nodded. “Kind of like the USS Mann. I’m not looking forward to the time at sea, Fish.”

“Shit, Holland, this is the chance of a lifetime. When will you ever get to go to sea in your life? You’re among friends and the navy has the best chow. We’re going to the great state of Alaska and it’s all free. These are the good old days, man. It’s the time of our lives.”

“You really believe that?”

“Not a word, even if it’s true. I’m just trying to get through these next few years.”

Ray laughed. “You almost had me, Fisher. San Francisco’s fun but Alaska ain’t what I had in mind for my overseas duty. I was thinking more along the lines of Germany.”

“Yeah, me too. Did you ever see Elvis in “GI Blues?”

Ray nodded again, remembering the movie that had helped convince him to join the army and, of course, the legs on Juliet Prowse.

“Did you think Juliet Prowse was going to be waiting for you in Frankfurt or something like that?”

“Maybe not Juliet Prowse, but Juliet somebody.”

“I thought I was going to get to fuck a bunch of frauleins. I get the feeling there ain’t no Juliets in Alaska.”

Ray thought about Jan and shook his head.

“I heard there was a woman behind every tree up there, except there are no trees.”

“I think it’s just the opposite, Holland- lots of trees and no women. I think that’s what pisses me off most about going to Alaska. My girlfriend’s happy though.”

“You got a girlfriend, Fish?”

“Yeah, we’re practically engaged. How about you?”

“No girlfriend. I ...fucked up and she....well...that’s why I wish I was going...someplace else.”

“Where is she? California?”

“I’d, ah, rather not talk about it.”

“Okay, Ray. Say, I heard a joke about Alaska. Wanna hear it? Okay, did you hear about the skinny guy who went to Alaska? He came back a husky fucker.”

Ray laughed but then got serious.

“Not funny, man.”

“You’re right, buddy. Let’s think about the day ahead of us. We better look at as many women as possible while we can. You think they got any whores in Alaska?”

“I hope they’re better than the ones in Georgia.”

“I just hope to God they got some up there. Oh sweet Jesus, check out the shorts walking down the sidewalk.”

Ray looked, but it wasn't Jan. Not even close, but he kept looking.

"Man alive, Holland, is this is a steep hill or what?"

They had managed to board a cable car and were holding on tightly to the overhead straps, looking back toward Fisherman's Wharf and the growing view of the bay.

"Some city, eh?"

"Yeah, eh? Being a Canadian. I would have thought you would like the idea of going to a climate that is kind of like home."

"I love Canada, Fish, but I really liked living in California. I like homegrown heat. You can have the snow."

"San Francisco is great. I might come back here to live someday."

Ray watched the subtle change in atmosphere as the cable car rumbled through Chinatown. There were signs in Chinese and more people and more color and the smell of cooking food wafting through the air.

"Oh man, we gotta try some Chinese food while we're here."

Ray slowly shook his head from side to side and smiled.

"No thanks, I'll pass."

"You don't like Chinese food?"

An Asian man sitting on the bench seat in front of them glanced up from his newspaper. Ray looked away.

"I, ah, never had any. I'm kind of a fussy eater. I'm a meat and potatoes kind of guy. I like things plain." Chinese food had a lot of vegetables in it and Ray had no interest in vegetables or fish.

"You might like Alaska after all. It can't be too exotic up there."

"I'm okay with army chow, usually. It's onions that kill me."

"You like hamburgers?"

"Plain."

"You mean like no pickles or relish?"

"No nothing. Bun and meat."

"Oh Christ, you got to be kidding. No mustard?"

"Nothing. I can't eat it."

"Are all Canadians like you?"

"I don't think there's anybody like me, Fish. I'm too stubborn or something. My folks tried to make me to eat vegetables. I couldn't get them down unless I swallowed them whole with milk."

"Man, you're hopeless. Maybe we can find you a hot dog in the park."

"If it's plain."

Ray decided to sit outside in the sun while Fisher bought a ticket to see the star show at the observatory in Golden Gate Park.

"You sure you don't want to come inside? I love astronomy. Should be a good show."

"No, I'd rather stay out here and enjoy the sun. I might take a walk and find that

hot dog. I'll meet you here in one hour."

Holland walked, envious of the couples that strolled hand in hand. It made him want nothing more than to find Jan, apologize and make up. Pushing that thought out of his mind, he bought a foot long hot dog and ordered it plain, despite the strange look he got from the vendor.

"It ain't the same with nothing on it, soldier."

"Thanks anyway, sir. This is how I like them."

"Your wife is going to have it easy cooking for you."

Ray finished the dog as he walked around the side of the observatory, away from the crowds. He thought about what the man said. A wife. Ray Holland with a wife. Ray Holland with Jan. Jan Holland. He had her in the palm of his hand. She was right there and she loved him, but not anymore. He walked down a hill, around the low shrubbery and found a little-used pathway. Further along he saw a bench and decided to sit and soak up the sun. Another soldier in khaki, a private, was sitting at the other end of the bench by himself, rubbing the knuckles of his right hand in his left. Ray sat down quietly and closed his eyes, thinking of Jan and ignored the man who sat about six feet away from him.

"Goddamnit," he heard him mutter a few seconds later.

Ray took a look at the guy but was unable to see his lapel insignia from the side. The young man appeared to be unhappy and somewhat nervous.

"Excuse me?"

"Oh, sorry. I was just thinking out loud. I'll be quiet."

"You okay?"

"No, as a matter of fact, I'm not. I just punched some guy and I'm thinking about going AWOL."

"You're going AWOL because you punched somebody? Was it an officer?"

"Nope. Some guy kept asking me for money. Some civilian. Wouldn't take no for an answer. Took a swing at me and I let him have it. Jawbones are harder than you think." He flexed his fingers.

"Your hand okay?"

"Yeah, I mean, it's sore but I don't think it's broken or anything like that. Just skinned a little."

"What happened to the guy?"

"He ran off, swearing. He'll have a sore jaw but he's okay. He just caught me in a bad mood."

"You stationed here in San Francisco?"

"At the Presidio? Shit, I wish I was. I wouldn't be thinking about running away. I'm in transit, headed to Alaska. I just don't know if I want to go."

"I can understand that. I'm headed there myself and I'm not too thrilled with the idea, but going AWOL sounds worse to me."

"Where you going, in Alaska?"

"Fort Richardson."

"Me too. Sounds like a shitty place doesn't it?"

"Sounds cold and no fun, but I signed an agreement with Uncle Sam and I aim to live up to my end of it. Besides, going AWOL really isn't an option for me."

"Why not?"

“Because I’m in the MPs and I heard what happens to an MP who goes AWOL and gets caught.”

“What happens?”

“Well, MPs don’t have many friends to begin with, just other MPs. Going AWOL is like an insult to the whole MP Corps, so they treat you worse if you get caught. You end up with no friends and in a prison like, say, Leavenworth, you’d be all by yourself.”

“I didn’t know you were in the MPs. You seem too small. You like the MPs?”

“I love the MPs. They are the best. We stick together. That’s what makes us special. And my size hasn’t stopped me yet.”

“Sorry, Specialist, I didn’t mean anything by it. Actually, I’m in the MPs myself. I just finished up at Fort Gordon and after all that shit, they’re shipping my ass to Alaska. It just doesn’t seem fair.”

Ray leaned forward and looked at the man’s lapel.

“I couldn’t see your brass. Jesus, you’re an MP and you’re gonna go AWOL? How old are you?”

“I’m twenty-one. I figured that if I joined I might get to see the world. What a crock.”

“Alaska may be the shits, man, but it beats the hell out of prison.”

“What do you think it’s really like up there?”

“To be honest, I don’t have much of an idea. I’m thinking it must be wild, cold and not much fun. I guess I’m preparing myself for the worst. I remember seeing Bob Hope doing those winter shows a few years back.”

The man laughed bitterly.

“That’s why I don’t want to go and waste two years of my life. Do you really think Alaska is that bad?”

“It might not be, but I just don’t want to get my hopes up.”

“Well that does it. You made my mind up for me. I ain’t going.”

“Hey, man, don’t blame me for what you’re about to do. You’re wrong and you know it. You might get away for a while but you’re putting your ass in a big sling. Don’t be stupid.”

“Hey, I ain’t stupid and fuck you, I don’t need your advice.”

Standing up, Ray shook his head.

“Good luck, buddy. I hope you change your mind.”

“You gonna turn me in?”

“You haven’t done anything yet, besides I don’t even know your name.”

Angry and sad, Ray walked away wanting to put his mind on other matters. The guy was a loser. Well, maybe he was okay but AWOL is a federal crime. It was such a stupid thing to do.

He hadn’t walked very far when five guys in their mid-twenties, dressed in raggedy civilian clothes, trotted past him. One was holding his jaw.

“HE’S UP THIS WAY SOMEWHERE. THERE HE IS ALL BY HIMSELF. LET’S GET HIM!”

Ray turned and watched the five men move up to the bench. Feeling uneasy he began walking back toward them. One guy with a slight paunch stepped forward. The GI on the bench got up.

“Did you punch my partner, asshole?”

“Well, I didn’t know he was your partner, but yeah, I punched the guy holding his jaw.”

“Who the fuck do you think you are?”

“I’m a soldier. I was minding my own business. He swung first.”

“He just wanted a little money. Some pocket change. Is that too much for veterans to ask for? It’s the Fourth of July. You owe us something.”

“I told him no. He didn’t like the answer and he started it.”

“Maybe me and the boys will finish it.”

Ray walked past the group and stood next to the GI and held up one hand.

“Wait a minute.”

The guy with the paunch was missing a front tooth.

“Keep out of this shrimp, before you get hurt.”

“I’d like to stay out of it but me and this guy are in the same outfit.”

“You don’t have to do this,” said the GI.

“We stick together,” Ray replied, his now angry eyes on the five men.

“And what outfit would that be, sonny?”

“Well, sir, if you were in the service, you’d know. What branch were you in anyway?”

“Army, you little shithead.”

“And you don’t know what our brass means?” He pointed to his lapel.

The man squinted and then shrugged.

“Let’s see now. They look like flintlocks, so I’d say you two faggots must be in the, oh I don’t know, revolutionary army?” The other four men started laughing.

“You don’t know cuz you haven’t been in the service. Not the army anyway. It doesn’t matter. Five to one ain’t fair.”

“Fuck fair. Empty your pockets. Give us your wallets and we’ll let you go.”

Ray removed his hat and set it on the bench.

“Like I said, we stick together.”

“Last chance, girls.”

Ray felt his anger growing.

“Fuck you, you chickenshit coward.”

“GET’EM,” yelled the leader and he kicked at the soldier next to Ray.

The man beside him stepped toward Holland and fainted with a roundhouse right, which got Ray’s full attention. He ducked and realized that the man’s left boot was headed toward his face. He leaned his head away and grabbed the man’s leg and pushed him off balance back into the two standing behind him. The man with the missing tooth was wrestling with the other MP. The guy holding his jaw was looking past Holland.

“HEY BILLY, I THINK THE CAVALRY’S COMING.”

“HOW MANY?” panted the man who was trying to force the other soldier back into the bench.

“ONE....”

“WELL SHIT, THERE’S STILL FIVE OF US...”

“....BIG.....MUTHAFUCKER.”

Ray turned to see Grumpy lumbering down through the shrubs and received a glancing blow on the side of the head from one of the men before they all began running back the way they had come. The punch knocked him into the bench but he stood up

immediately, holding his ear and checked the GI next to him who was also trying to shake out the pain in his right hand.

“You okay, man?”

“My right hand hurts. I might have broke that asshole’s nose, at least I hope I did. How about you?”

“My head’s ringing a bit but I’m okay.”

“WELL COME ON, LET’S GO AFTER THOSE PRICKS.” Gruman stopped when he saw Holland holding his ear. “Shit, you need the medics?”

“I’m okay, Gruman. I just don’t feel like chasing them.”

“GODDAMMIT!!” he yelled after the men who disappeared into the trees fifty yards away. He looked at Holland.

“I can’t run for shit. That’s why they made me a defensive lineman. Sorry I couldn’t get here quicker. I saw most of it from up the hill. You sure you’re okay?”

Holland nodded and sat down on the bench. The other GI sat down and stuck out his hand toward Ray.

“I didn’t get your name. Mine’s Jim Langstrom.”

“I’m Ray Holland. This panda bear is Gruman. I don’t even know your first name.”

“Just call me Grumpy. Fuck, I wish I could run faster. Those chickenshits. We should move on. A few people up the hill were also watching the fun. Somebody might have called the cops. Whadayasay?”

“I’m supposed to meet Fishbait up by the observatory pretty soon. I’m ready to head back to the barracks though. How about you, Langstrom? Have you decided where you’re going?”

“Yes, I have. Like you said, we stick together. I won’t ever forget what you did, man. If you’ll show me how to get to the Oakland Army Terminal, I’ve got a date with a troopship headed to Alaska. I guess it does beat staying here.”

Grumpy rubbed his hands together.

“Fort Richardson?”

Langstrom nodded. Gruman laughed out loud and threw a punch at Holland that stopped an inch from his nose and was already on its way back before he could flinch.

“Boys, we are gonna kick ass in the land of the midnight sun.”

Ray’s head was still ringing as they headed up the path.