

✪ A FALCON NOVEL ✪

FALCON DOWN

C. H. COBB

DOORWAY



P R E S S

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Acknowledgments

It never ceases to amaze me that (a) my wife not only allows me to spend the vast quantities of time necessary to write a book, but (b) she actually expects them to do well on the market. The first demonstrates grace, the second faith. I'd put the second in the category of "miracle." We shall see. In any case I am indebted to Doris, and it is a debt I have been happily paying since 1978.

Another amazing person involved in the creation of this book is my sister Elizabeth. She's my editor extraordinaire. Elizabeth is one of those truly gifted people who doesn't realize it. She patiently and carefully edited *Falcon Down*, corrected my attempts at Russian (the Internet is wonderful, but not always reliable for translation), and provided me a terrific resource for understanding Russian culture. My writing, and this book, is much improved because of her input.

Lou, my big brother, is the reason I am writing. His encouragement has convinced me that I can spin a tale others might be interested in hearing. He read the manuscript numerous times in its various incarnations and made multiple helpful suggestions as to story structure, pacing, and consistency.

Thanks also to Mike Hohler, who gave me an Army Ranger's perspective of chapter one, and provided many helpful suggestions.

Any errors of fact or grammar that remain are mine.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Dedication

In memory of Cdr. Lewis Milner Cobb, USN (Ret.)

In every generation there are those men and women who simply do what needs to be done, even at great risk to themselves. My dad was one of those men. He was pursuing an engineering degree at Georgia Tech when World War II reprogrammed his future. Dad joined the Navy and became a fighter pilot, flying Grumman Hellcats off the pitching decks of carriers in the Pacific. He married mom in August, 1945, expecting to return to the Pacific for his third tour after their honeymoon, but by the time their honeymoon was over the war had ended. He stayed in the Navy, eventually retiring as a commander in 1966. From there he went into the Episcopal ministry, still serving people, but in a different way.

He died a couple of years ago. He was faithful to his wife, his family, and his country: a good man, with a life well-lived. He was a great father. This one's for you, dad.

Cast of Characters

- Anatoly Geredin: General of the Army, head of the KGB.
- Boris Toporov: Co-director of Sidima Timber Cooperative, brother of Galina Toporova.
- Galina Toporova: Co-director of Sidima Timber Cooperative, sister of Boris Toporov.
- Jacob Kelly (aka. Jake, Falcon, Yakov Sokolov, Sergei Primakov): Major, USAF. Test Pilot for Project *Hydra*.
- James Franks: General, USAF. Head of Project *Hydra* at Edwards AFB.
- John Smith: Major, USAF Special Operations. Combat Control Team leader. True identity unknown.
- Nikolai Pavlovich Chernikov: Colonel/Major General GRU, Commandant Prison 87, director of Project *Krasnyy Voskhod*.
- Oswald Simmons (aka. Oz): Scientist working on integrated circuit miniaturization.
- Roman Romanovich Nikitin: Major, GRU. Aide to General Chernikov.
- Sam Bergman: CIA Counter-intelligence analyst, Soviet Department.
- Sevastyan Zavrazhny: Founder of Sidima Timber Cooperative. Former Soviet navy corpsman.
- Valeriy Ivanovich Patrikeyev: Lieutenant General, head of the Ninth Directorate of the GRU.
- William Jensen: Professor of Political Science, Georgetown University.

Chapter 1

Tuesday, April 15, 1986: 0015 local
Tripoli, Libya

The chill night air was thick with a sense of foreboding danger; but Major John “Smitty” Smith couldn’t tell whether it was intuition or imagination. He didn’t linger on the question, as he watched Lieutenant Gordon Blake using hand signals to deploy four of his combat control team (CCT) operatives around the base of the old water tower. They disappeared into the gloom, taking up positions to establish perimeter security. A dog began barking somewhere nearby. Every member of the team froze in position. The sound of a slamming door was followed by a furious shout in Arabic, then the door slamming again. The dog gave one last defiant bark and grew quiet.

Smith motioned to Blake, *follow me*. The two men ran lightly from the thicket where they had been hiding to the tiny pump house at the bottom of the tower, and melted into the shadows. The major scrutinized his surroundings one final time then slung his weapon over his back and began climbing the rusty ladder, followed by the lieutenant. When they reached the top both men lay on the flat roof, facing their target.

Major Smith was just minutes from calling down fire from heaven, only it wasn’t the wrath of God but the retribution of an angry civilized world, and it wasn’t going to be brimstone but 8000 pounds of laser-guided high explosives. Ten days earlier a nightclub in West Berlin had been bombed by terrorists, and all available intelligence pointed to the Libyans. The President of the United States had come to the decision that just *carrying* a big stick was not making an adequate impression on the world’s troublemakers. He was going to swing that

stick, and hard.

The USAF combat control team was about six kilometers south of the perimeter fence surrounding the Tripoli International Airport, a facility that was shared with the Libyan Air Force. *They're just about to regret that decision to colocate*, the major thought to himself. He could see the rotating beacon on the airport control tower from where he lay. Two hours earlier the final civilian flight for the evening had landed, and the night had grown quiet. The only sounds were the creaks and groans of the steel in the old water tower as it adjusted to the cooling evening temperatures. A moist chill was blowing off the nearby Mediterranean, but Smith ignored the cold. The pleasant scent of nearby citrus groves wafted on the breeze, mixed with the salty aroma of the sea.

Three hundred meters west of him was the compound that served as the Libyan headquarters for *Fatah*. An intelligence intercept had indicated that the leaders of the organization from Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and Yemen were to be in-residence this week. Planning had already been underway for the retaliatory bombing of Libya, known as *Operation El Dorado Canyon*, when the CIA Deputy Director of Operations (DDO) had suggested that as long as they were going to break things and kill people, they might as well take the opportunity to degrade Abu Nidal's *Fatah* terrorist organization. It was a unique opportunity to even the score, and the President had jumped at the chance.

"I see three possible entrances, Smitty. There's what looks to be a recessed underground entrance just beyond that deuce and a half, to the left of it. To the left another 40 meters are some vents on some sort of revetment, with what looks like another entrance. And there is the very obvious one, beyond and to the right of the truck. That's all," whispered Blake, as he studied the target through night vision binoculars. Somehow Blake had earned the nickname, "Fat Boy," or more often, "FB." He was squat, built like a tank, rock-hard, and did not carry an ounce of fat on his short, broad-shouldered frame, despite his nickname.

"Yep. I agree, FB." The major topped out at a lanky six

feet two inches. Like the rest of the team, his face and exposed skin were blackened. Between the darkness of the night and their battle dress uniforms, the operators were virtually invisible.

Major Smith flipped the switch on the secure satellite uplink, and said quietly, "Goldilocks is green." He checked his watch, and began setting up the tripod for his laser designator. "Showtime in five minutes, Blake. Let's get the stage lighting set up."

Operationally, Major Smith knew this mission was a nightmare: insufficient planning based on inadequate intelligence, and no training. The CIA had the proper address for the headquarters complex, but had not been able to discern the floor plan, so to speak. The DDO's plan was simple: insert a CCT with laser designators, start the air raid, and let the boots on the ground watch which hole the rats disappeared down. Light it up with laser designators, send in the F-111 Aardvarks with their GBU-10 Paveway bombs, and, poof! One layer of terrorist leadership incinerated. The extraction plan was equally simple. Since the US was going to be delivering a rather obvious message, if the covert extraction went sour just go in fast, hard, and hot with a few elements of an Army Ranger unit attached to the Carrier Strike Group presently floating off the coast, and rescue the combat control team with overwhelming force. Simple for everyone except the members of the CCT, who felt like they were strapped to the front bumper of a New York cab in rush hour.

Fourteen inbound F-111s swept over the coast at 100 feet. The first flight divided into three sections, popped up, and began hammering their targets. The Libyan air defenses responded immediately, and surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites around Tripoli began lighting up the intruders. As soon as the Libyan targeting radars began to paint the incoming aircraft, a flight of Navy A-7s unleashed a volley of high-speed anti-ra-

diation (HARM) missiles. Each rocket followed the enemy's radar beam directly to the installation and blew it to pieces, destroying the eyes of the air defense network.

Air raid sirens screamed at military installations all around Tripoli. Within minutes, the combat control team could hear and feel the detonation of bombs cratering the runways on the nearby airport. Smith and Blake ignored the distraction of the attack, and concentrated on their target. The door on the enlisted barracks was flung open, and a stream of men began sprinting for the right-most bunker entrance. Immediately after, a line of running men emerged from the officers' quarters, headed for the entrance farthest on the left.

"Bingo," muttered Smith, as he focused his laser designator on a vent pipe of the left-most air raid shelter.

"Sure wish we had enough stuff to take 'em all out, sir," whispered Blake, as he locked his laser onto the same target. The Paveways would pick up the sparkle of the lasers reflecting off the target and drop right on it, so long as the F-111 strike team released the weapons in the proper trajectory window.

"Me too, FB. But cut off the head and the snake can't strike. We've got this opportunity, let's make double sure we cut off the head." He keyed the satellite link once more and spoke into the mic, "Goldilocks says the fox is Alpha-Whiskey-Romeo."

The encrypted signal was received by a geostationary satellite locked in orbit 22,236 miles above the equator, then retransmitted from satellite to satellite, until it was beamed down to Langley and routed to Washington. After a 500-millisecond delay, Smith's voice came over the speakers in the Situation Room below the West Wing of the White House. All heads turned to look at the President.

"Do it," he ordered without hesitation.

His Chief of Staff, Ralph Kepplehof, was standing behind the President with a puzzled look on his face. He motioned to one of the officers present, and whispered, "General, what does 'Alpha-Whiskey-Romeo' mean?"

The man chuckled, and then replied quietly, "It's a bit of

black humor, Ralph. It means that the tangos have entered 'Allah's Waiting Room'. We're about to usher them into his presence, if you get my drift."

One minute later four more Aardvarks crossed over the Libyan coast. Two of the aircraft were armed with HARM missiles and electronic counter-measures. The other two were each carrying a pair of GBU-10 2000-pound Paveway laser-guided bombs. The first two F-111s popped up and drew the attention of the remaining Libyan air defense systems. The second two entered into the flight profile that would enable them to put their bombs on target.

As soon as the F-111 flight leader heard the Paveway's laser acquisition tone in his headphones, he released the bombs then transmitted, "The package is delivered, Goldilocks."

Smitty alerted his team, and each dropped to a prone position, covering their heads. A few seconds later, four tons of bunker-busting ordnance sent fourteen men to an appointment that did *not* include seventy-two virgins.

Smith and Baker dismantled their equipment, and then clambered down from the top of the water tower. Flitting through the darkened fields and orchards like shadows, the team headed north for the airport security fence. The air raid sirens continued to wail into the night but the bombs had stopped falling. Portions of the skyline to the north were illuminated from fires caused by strikes on other targets. The smell of acrid smoke and cordite lay heavy on the night air.

Ironically, the primary extraction point deemed safest was at the airport. The south apron of the main north-south runway was farthest from the terminal and the airport security forces and had been designated as the landing zone. As mission planners had predicted, the Libyans had extinguished the runway and taxiway lights as soon as the air raid began. The darkness worked to the team's advantage and they arrived at the extraction point without incident.

"Goldilocks is at grandma's house," Major Smith informed the mission controllers. His small team secured the LZ and set up an infrared beacon. At this point things began to unravel.

An armed Libyan patrol dispatched to evaluate the damage to the runways was approaching rapidly.

“Hey, boss, we got visitors. Two armored personnel carriers approaching from the north. Both vehicles have a weapon mounted.” Blake paused, studying the approaching vehicles through his night vision binoculars. “Looks like they’re both fifty-cals.”

“Okay, listen up!” Smith said into his whisper mic, addressing the whole team, “Stay out of sight and hold your fire. Maybe they’ll go right by without seeing us.”

The six members of the CCT hunkered down. Equipped only with light weaponry, they had nothing that might take out an armored personnel carrier (APC), much less two of them. The major contacted the controllers to let them know the landing zone was compromised. Too late! He heard the incoming Pave-Low chopper just as he keyed the mic.

The MH-53J came in fast and low, its door gunner concentrating fire on one of the APCs, setting the vehicle on fire. But the second APC was scoring hits with armor-piercing rounds and the helicopter began to fly erratically. The door gun was silenced. The chopper smacked roughly onto the tarmac and the combat control team sprang from their hiding places and raced toward it, screaming the running password, “*GRANDMOTHER, GRANDMOTHER, GRANDMOTHER!*” As they ran they sprayed the second APC with small arms fire, suppressing its gunner and causing him to duck into the vehicle for cover.

As they raced up the ramp into the chopper, Major Smith shouted forward to the cockpit, “GO, GO, GO!” But there was no response. The inside of the helicopter was spattered in blood. Both door gunners were hit hard, the flight engineer was dead, and Smith dreaded what the situation might be in the cockpit. Assessing the situation instantly, he barked out commands. “Santini,” he shouted, addressing one of his team members, “as soon as we lay down suppressing fire, get on the door gun and destroy that vehicle! Atkins, Morris, see to these wounded! Lieutenant, check on the cockpit. Jonesy, grab your rifle and follow me.”

Smith rammed a fresh magazine into his CAR-15 rifle, lay down on the ramp and began peppering the gunner on the APC to give Santini a chance to set up. Jones laid down suppressing fire on the troops that had disembarked from the first APC. Soon the chopper's door gun was chewing pieces out of the second Libyan vehicle and it too finally caught fire.

"Jones, go forward and support Santini. You! What's your name?"

"Reed, sir, crew chief," replied the only uninjured airman from the chopper's crew.

"Well, Sergeant Reed, raise this ramp and get us buttoned up. I'm going forward to the flight deck."

"Major?" Lieutenant Blake called from the cockpit, speaking into his whisper mic. "We're hosed. Gotta go to plan B. Pilot and copilot both bought it. Without a stick jockey, this crate isn't going anywhere."

"I'll see what I can do, Blake. Get everybody settled back here, then come back to the cockpit. I'll be needing you."

"Unless you can raise the dead or fly, boss, not much you *can* do," Blake muttered.

The firefight had slowed down, as most of the attackers were dead or injured. Smith knew that Libyan reinforcements would show up soon so he moved quickly to the flight deck. A grisly scene confronted him: both pilot and copilot were dead and blood was everywhere. He muscled the bodies out of the cockpit, sat down in the left-hand seat and buckled in. The instruments seemed to be intact but the radio was dead. Scanning the gauges, the major increased power and lifted the craft off the ground. Ignoring the shouts of surprise and fear coming from the back, he verified that the helicopter was responding properly to the flight controls, then throttled up to cruise power. Soon they were racing over the ground headed for the coast.

Blake came into the cockpit soon after and squirmed into the right-hand seat. "Who taught you how to fly, Smitty?" he asked nervously.

"My momma, Fat Boy. Now shut up and listen! The radio is shot to pieces. Get on my satellite link, explain our comm

situation. We need an escort back to the carrier. Let ‘em know we’re bringing casualties. Don’t mention anything about the pilots or what I’m doing. Nothing! Got it?”

Four hours later the combat control team was on an Air Force transport bound for Fort Bragg, outside of Fayetteville, North Carolina. Gordon Blake put a mug of hot coffee in John Smith’s hands and then strapped himself into the webbing seat next to him. The rest of the men were snoozing back toward the tail.

“You don’t have any kids, do you, Major?” Blake said. It was more of an observation than a question.

“No, Lieutenant, I don’t. I’m not married. But I’m curious; why are you asking?”

“Well, sir, you chose the passwords and unit names for this mission, didn’t you?”

Smitty nodded.

“You butchered a couple of fairy tales, sir. You confused *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* with *Little Red Riding Hood*. Any self-respecting four year-old would have taken you to task, sir.” Blake laughed. “My daughter would be highly offended that you confused her favorite bedtime stories.”

“Just tell her it was for operational security.”

“Oh, yeah. Right.” Blake looked at the crude webbing seats across from them, and grunted. “Once, just once, I wish they’d fly us first class,” he grouched. Smith smiled but didn’t respond, so Blake continued, “You’ve been holding out on us, boss. When did you learn to fly? When you set that big Pave Low on the deck of that carrier I got the distinct impression you’d done it many times before.”

Major Smith nodded, “I guess we all have our secrets, Gordon.”

Blake stared at him thoughtfully for a moment before responding, “Maybe some more than others. Major, you’ve deployed with my team three times. You’ve clearly been trained

for special-ops. General Reynolds tells me that you're attached to some weapons development project at the Pentagon. Well, okay, I can buy that: all three deployments have involved airstrikes with Paveways. Maybe you're doing some sort of work with the laser designators, or another part of the guidance package. Except for one big problem."

"What's that, Lieutenant?"

"After our last mission I wanted to send you a case of Corona; you really pulled our butts out of the soup when the insertion got so screwed up. So I called a buddy of mine at the Pentagon, asked him where I should ship the beer." Blake paused and slurped his steaming coffee.

"And?" Smith asked, knowing what was coming.

"He'd never heard of you. In fact, no one at Fort Fumble knows anything about you. So I got to thinkin' . . ."

"C'mon, Fat Boy," Smith interrupted, trying to redirect the conversation, "You know what they say about that!"

"No, sir. Enlighten me," the lieutenant responded.

"You don't get paid to think, soldier!" Smith rasped, with mock harshness.

"Oh, right," Blake replied sarcastically, "Ours is not to wonder why, ours is just to do and die."

"There you go."

Unsatisfied, Blake continued. "Are you really a major in the Air Force, sir?"

Smith laughed, "Yes, Gordon, that I really am."

"Why are they sending a field grade officer on these missions, sir?" When Smitty did not respond, Blake tried again, "Is your name really John Smith?"

Smith just smiled, but still didn't answer.

"Well, who are you, Major?"

"Gordon, I need you to do a couple things. First, make sure nobody talks about the fact that I flew the chopper. It wasn't supposed to happen and I don't want to lose my day job. Remember the story: *the pilot was gravely wounded, but managed to fly it back to the ship, dying just after he set it down. The man deserves a medal.* Make sure the other men have the same story. Got it?"

“Yes, sir, if you say so.”

“Second, don’t be asking questions about me. Unpleasant people might start knocking on your door and I don’t want that to happen. We’re both on the same team, playing for the good guys. That’s all you need to know. And you don’t need to tell anyone what you might suspect. If all goes well, maybe in a couple of years I can tell you where to ship the beer.”