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C HAPTER THREE

Before construction of the CIA's Langley Virginia Headquarters facility in 1960, it was housed on E Street in Washington D.C., a few blocks to the west of the State Department and east of the Potomac River. Tucked behind non-descript federal office buildings, the rectangular facility encircled a central yard and rose upwards from its northern pedestrian entrance. Visitors and staff passed through its unlocked gate ascending approximately twenty-four cement steps with four evenly spaced landings. The stairs were bordered on either side by six-inch raised cement edges intermittently pierced by upward-rising rounded metal supports connecting to rounded metal hand railings. Entrance to the facility was accomplished through two side-by-side glass-centered metal-framed doors with the front facade of the facility adorned with multiple evenly spaced Greek Ionic columns rising two stories supporting the over-hanging roofline. Inside, CIA senior management was still reeling from Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's "We Will Bury You" pronouncement when the 04 October 1957 news headline announced the successful Soviet space launch and operation of their Sputnik satellite.

"I can hear...that *damned communist beep*, coming from that *damned communist* piece of space junk...and I *don't* like it," exclaimed Donner Bly, the CIA's Chief of Special Actions Group. He was at the head of his conference room table, standing behind his black leather high-back chair, his hands holding its top, as he addressed the Group's upper management. One hand intermittently emphasized his message by slapping the leather top.

"What's wrong with our scientists...that we can't even beat a country of illiterate farmers into space?"

Donner Bly rose six foot four and cast a long shadow. By 1957, at age 43, he was the youngest CIA Group Chief and its most ambitious. His CIA file listed his eyes as blue, however his staff, and certainly anyone who dared cross him, would describe them as deep black. The rumor amongst subordinates was that looking directly into his eyes would result in being instantly turned to stone. "Medusa" was but one of his nicknames. His hair, equally black as his eyes, was cut razor short when he was operational, but grew a bit longer during his time in management and was held in complete control by application of Vitalis hair tonic. His starched white shirt was the backdrop to a thin black tie secured by a U.S. flag clip and his black suit was without wrinkle. He was clean and crisp and ordered. His face rarely required a shave and he considered that a benefit towards his time management. When he moved, he did so with purpose. As he walked, he did so to maximize efficiency. The cut of his pressed trousers

sliced the air like a knife cuts flesh, and his subordinates, as well as his associates, stood clear when he traversed the space between where he was and where he was going to be. He hid it well, but over fifteen years earlier his leg had been impaled by a well-placed Nazi bayonet while serving as a covert operative within the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), leaving him with an intermittently recurring painful reminder which he refused to outwardly acknowledge, fearing being viewed as weak.

“*Dammit....illiterate farmers...how could they beat us into outer space?*” His staff wondered if his questions were rhetorical or if an answer was actually expected. Before anyone could react Bly blurted, “They don’t even have flush toilets. We are in the ring with some bad mother-fuckers and we take punch after punch after punch. Won’t be long until we’re down for the count. I told Patton to keep going to Moscow. But *no*. ‘They’re our allies,’ said Ike. ‘They’re our friends. Stop at Berlin.’ General Donovan knew at that time, but he couldn’t do *shit*. Well our *friends* not only give us the finger from East Berlin, threaten us with nuclear missiles, but now they threaten us from outer space. *Communists*, fucking beeping us the finger from outer space. *Dammit.*”

His staff was silent, their eyes followed their now pacing leader like prey watches a hungry lion. They experienced Bly’s rants on a variety of occasions on a variety of topics and learned not to interrupt. Except for a few changes in personnel, the Special Actions Group had been under the control of Donner Bly since 1950; originally formed under the OSS, the CIA’s predecessor. They cut their teeth by blowing up Nazi rail lines, gathering intelligence, slicing throats when required, and generally conducting miscellaneous covert activity. When the OSS was dissolved and the CIA was chartered in 1947, Donner Bly was an up and comer. No reason for him not to be. He risked his life in the service of his country and personally worked under OSS Director General William J. Donovan. A previous Bly rant in December 1950 went on for thirty minutes and somehow managed to link Columbus’ journey to America, William Wallace’s Scottish resistance of England, his mother, the signing of the Magna Carta, Pontius Pilate, the weakness of Woodrow Wilson, his first date, Roman Emperor Claudius, and other topics all ending with how U.S. policy towards communism was as soft as the scrambled eggs he received in a downtown D.C. diner that morning. Select staff members marked the anniversary on subsequent yearly calendars with “Rant Ceremonies” held with trusted coworkers at a local watering hole. That rant also included how Bly wished the U.S. had nuked North Korea and China after the battle at the Chosin Reservoir. Bly ended with “Leaving Communists in place *anywhere* was only postponing the inevitable fight.”

Bly dismissed his full staff and sequestered his closest advisors, Associate Chiefs Marty Beemer, Devon Bronstein, and Gerson Lawler.

“Alright. I’ve been thinking about this for a while. We need an ace in the hole against these communists, a sure thing. I don’t think they’ll actually do it...I just...I just don’t think they have the resolve.” He was now sitting in his chair at the head of the conference table, elbow firmly planted against its

polished surface, hand cupping his chin, and his eyes appearing to drift off, deep in thought.

“Resolve?” asked Marty Beemer.

Beemer had known Bly since 1943 after working multiple OSS missions in tandem and together entering Berlin on the heels of the Soviet Army. Their mission at that time was to shadow the search for Hitler. Unfortunately, they were too late arriving at Hitler’s bunker, getting there hours after the Soviets carted off what remained of a burned out Fuhrer. Their personal joke had been “Is the Fuhrer tired? No, not tired...just a little *burned out*.” Beemer always admired Bly’s cool-headed decision-making ability in both planning and execution but noticed instances of *extreme* enthusiasm followed by *extreme* activities. Marty Beemer never questioned Bly’s capabilities but sometimes questioned his level of sanity.

Bly now hated communism as much as he previously hated Nazi’s and exorcised that hate in fervent mission execution through the end of the war. He was brutal and thorough, endowed with an ability to remain distant from his actions. Although during the war Bly disliked and distrusted the Soviets, he, like many at first, saw them as allies against Hitler. He now hated them, the Soviet imperialistic intentions and expansion, their suppression of freedom, and their threat towards the U.S. If Bly applied his genius, determination, and skills, Beemer thought, God help the Soviets or any nation or group attempting to extinguish the American spirit, or oppose Donner Bly. Marty Beemer’s concern about Bly’s mental state remained an internal mental note and that was all. Although the CIA’s mission was to watch for external threats, each employee knew to keep an eye open towards internal anomalies. Beemer updated his mental file, closed the cabinet, and focused on his Chief’s latest tasking.

“Resolve from whom...and to do what?” he asked.

“Resolve to turn the keys Marty...resolve to *turn* the keys.”

Bly’s right arm rose from the table, thrust forward, and his closed hand gave a quick twist. “For Air Force officers to actually turn the launch control keys and send a nuclear-tipped missile into the heart of the Soviet Union. I don’t doubt those indoctrinated soldiers in the Soviet Union would launch, more out of fear than duty. Yes sir. They’d launch alright. Either by order or by mistake; human, procedural, or mechanical. But would *we*?”

Bly’s right fingers tapped the table in sequence and as he leaned forward his left arm and palm continued to support his chin.

“We train our personnel to follow orders and all officers chosen for those positions in nuclear missile silo’s are psychologically evaluated,” offered Devon Bronstein. A psychiatrist, Bronstein volunteered during the war for OSS duty not only out of patriotism but also as a Jew in response to Hitler’s “Final Solution.” “They’re tested, Donner. They’ve run actual mock scenarios where orders are received to launch *and they launch*.”

“Not all the time,” Bly retorted. “Not *all* the time. I’ve seen the same reports.”

“OK, OK. A small percentage do not. But those officers are immediately replaced.”

“Can you guarantee one hundred percent compliance?”

“Very few things can be one hundred percent guaranteed, but the tests show.....”

“Then I want our people in there.”

“You want our people, *our* people, in missile installations? In launch silos?” Bronstein looked directly at Beemer, his face eliciting unreturned support.

Gerson Lawler had been a proponent of placing CIA personnel in as many *foreign* locations as possible but had to remind his Chief of something. He chopped his hand like a hatchet against the table emphasizing his caution.

“Remember Donner, our charter legally forbids CIA from operating domestically. Or had you forgotten?”

Lawler was a Harvard educated lawyer from a long line of Harvard educated lawyers and Bly never let him forget it. As a Columbia graduate, Bly had a known disdain for most graduates of, as Bly pronounced it, “*Hahvad*”. In Bly’s assessment Gerson Lawler’s redeeming quality was that he was one of the few, if not the only, lawyer Bly knew with a firm grasp of legal concepts along with the ability to shoot and hit a target at a thousand yards, make explosives out of miscellaneous household chemicals, and fly multiple aircraft. Gerson’s grandfather had actually boxed Theodore Roosevelt when they both attended that place.....*Hahvad*. Bly always enjoyed reminding Gerson that his grandfather had been soundly punched in the face by the then future president.

“Gerson, wasn’t your grandfather punched in the face by President Theodore Roosevelt?”

Gerson rolled his eyes having heard the line hundreds of times, usually in the most serious of situations. His standard and expected response was always “No, Teddy wasn’t *yet* the president” and he again offered it.

“Gerson, look at it from a legal perspective. Yes, we are forbidden from *operating* by the charter. *Operating* refers to collecting intelligence on US citizens. If we placed a staff officer in a Woolworth’s Five & Dime store and all they did was work the cash register, have we done anything illegal? Wait, I’ll answer that. The answer is NO.”

“Then, why did you ask?” posed Lawler.

“Lawyer Lawler”, another annoying Bly catch phrase, “I just wanted to make sure *someone* I knew concurred and would be in the cell next to me in case I *am* wrong.”

“You’re *never* wrong Chief,” offered Lawler with a slight smile towards his colleagues.

“Yes, you are *never* wrong,” added Beemer.

Good answer, thought Bly. *Never wrong*.