

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Bad Morning, America*

“Good Morning, America. This morning we will not include our regular features. Today we have a special program with special reports because this is not a ‘Good Morning,’ this is, once again, a ‘Bad Morning’.”

Colonel Jake Strutter and his wife, Angie, sat in the bright, light breakfast corner sipping coffee and watching *Good Morning America*.

“We cannot give you accurate statistics to measure the total calamity of ‘The Epidemic.’ The death toll continues to climb. As of last night it was approaching twenty-five thousand; there is no let-up in sight.

All of the experts are confounded. It is safe to say that they are confused, baffled, bewildered. There seems to be no discernible pattern.

Perfectly healthy people just drop dead in the middle of whatever they’re doing. ‘The Epidemic’ has no limits. It affects men, women, children, young, old, rich, poor, sickly, and healthy alike.

Our program today will bring you several special reports. From Washington, we will hear the Head of the National Institutes for Health, Doctor Walter Calvert. Doctor Forest Taft, Chief of the Atlanta Centers for Disease Control, will tell us what his teams in Atlanta are doing. We will have special bulletins from our reporters in several capitals of the world. Our reporters are standing by in Moscow, Tel Aviv, Buenos Aires, Tokyo, Canberra, New Delhi, Lagos, and . . .” The *Good Morning America* man stammered and shook. He clutched at the papers in front of him sending them sprawling across the tabletop and onto the floor. His head fell, hit the table, bounced once, and lay there still.

“Oh! Turn it off! Turn it off! It’s just too terrible!” The tears rolled down Angie’s cheeks.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Blue Blaze*

‘At six in the morning,’ Jake thought, ‘you can’t even see those little dust devils. But they’re there, rising out of the cold, dry pre-dawn Nevada desert. They’re there, scurrying away from the balding tires of the old blue bus chunking up the hill.’

‘Blue Blaze.’ They called her.

“A terrible name,” Jake murmured, “sounds like something you’d call an old hunting dog you loved too much – or a horrible alcoholic concoction someone invented for a ‘Special Occasion’.”

Jake remembered the ‘Special Occasion.’ Maybe it was thirteen years ago, maybe fifteen. ‘When’ was losing him, but the ‘Special Occasion’ never would.

Angie and Jake had asked their really special friends on Base Echo to come over for Sunday afternoon. Base Echo was a lonely place to begin with. But everyone there was in the same fix. A hundred plus miles from nowhere in southwestern New Mexico, Base Echo was a big, long concrete

runway with big concrete hangars, and big machine shops, and big fuel storage tanks, and big aluminum airplanes, and big, really big bombs, and little, tiny, crummy house trailers.

Angie and Jake and their three kids and a dog and a cat lived in one of those crummy house trailers. Two narrow cracked strips of concrete with a collection of forlorn weeds between them constituted a driveway that led from the macadam road to an add-on carport that sported a roof, made of cheap green sheets of rippled plastic. There were other add-ons: an add-on tool shed was attached to the backside of the house trailer, an add-on bedroom was hooked onto one end, an add-on slab of concrete served as a front door step, and two add-on 'swamp boxes' on the roof substituted for real air conditioning. Jake didn't know if the add-ons were someone's idea of home improvements, but the whole thing looked like a house of cards with everything tilting precariously against the aluminum and plywood house trailer.

His house trailer had a little sign telling everyone who drove by that this was his place, for the last year or so. Whenever Jake stared at the little white metal sign with the neat black letters, *MAJ. J. E. STRUTTER*, he thought, 'rust.' The brown streaks seemed to drip down the sides of the little white sign. 'Rust in this desert?' Jake wondered. 'No, it

couldn't be rust, its just more desert dust baked into the white paint by the desert sun.

Jake's mind registered, 'So, here I am with Angie, three kids, a dog, and a cat in a crummy house trailer with add-on improvements. But all of my friends here live in crummy house trailers too. That makes it a little easier, but still substandard by any American standard.'

So, to get rid of the lousy weekends and the 'nowhere-to-go, nothing-to-do' syndrome, they all entertained each other. The 'Special Occasion' was Angie and Jake's turn to call everyone together to forget for a while the place where their country and their careers had put them.

It was almost the time of the year for Christmas. But it wasn't and wouldn't be a white one. It would be a dull, pervasive, all-penetrating, dun-colored, dusty, brown Christmas. You could wipe the brown off of your face. You could find it in the creases of your forehead at the end of the day and under your fingernails at any time. You could see it in the neck and cuffs of your shirts. You could notice it on Angie's 'things' that she was always washing and hanging out to dry in hopes that the sun would drive the brown away.

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One day Jake had gone with Angie to take Mark to school for Mark's first day in the first grade. There were lots of new kids there -- always were -- at least one third of them were new every year. Jake had remembered their sneakers -- red ones from Germany, green ones from Japan, blue ones from England -- the little girls had pink ones from Guam and Okinawa. There were white ones from Washington, D.C. and striped ones from San Francisco.

That last trip to the school had been in late summer. He had gone with Angie and Mark to Mark's school again for a kid's Halloween costume party. Jake couldn't remember the kids he had seen two months earlier, maybe because of the costumes or maybe because they all looked alike anyway, but he could remember their sneakers -- now they all wore dusty brown ones.

But -- the 'Special Occasion' -- Ah! That was a day they would all remember. It was Sunday afternoon in late December, and they had all gotten together to watch the 'Great Game.' It was the last one before the playoffs, and Angie thought everyone would love watching the Cowboys and Indians. "After all," Angie had observed, "isn't that what the whole history of our country is all about?"

Outside the kids squealed and squirmed and laughed

and shouted in the dust. The little ones had nerf footballs. The medium sized ones had miniature rubber footballs with two white stripes and big black letters that proclaimed *NFL OFFICIAL*. A few of the larger ones had real sized footballs, but they were made with imitation leather – not the real stuff. All the kids were there – girls and boys – those who knew the differences and those who didn't. They all wore dusty brown sneakers.

Inside, the volume on the TV was turned to full max. Whoever turned it up was probably deaf or probably just didn't want to be in a place that was quiet enough to allow thinking. After all, this was a party with friends, and thinking just didn't seem to fit in.

The party was nominally successful at the start. Marcie Wells was screaming and trying to lead everyone in a cheer she had been smashingly successful with fifteen years ago in high school. Her husband, Newton, was in the kitchen demonstrating to five young Lieutenants how to pop two beer caps off the necks of two bottles at the same time. Big Bill, who had played two seasons of front-line college football, before his collarbone had been snapped, stared at the tube, totally lost in the game. Big Bill would be able to tell everyone each play, in sequence, three weeks after the game.

Big Bill's wife, Millie, was anxiously watching the kids in the front yard – her forehead a little too tight, her lips a little too thin, her knuckles a little too white – hoping that nothing evil would befall her only child, Jerome.

Then, from the nominally successful, the party seemed to change as if someone suddenly slammed it into fifth gear overdrive. The TV was a huge unrelenting magnet that not only drew but also magnetized. Hank and Linda and Max and Priscilla left the California dip, cauliflower chunks, and carrot sticks. Chuck and Sue grabbed a handful of tortilla chips and the plastic tub of French onion dip. The kitchen emptied into the room that was called 'living' only because it was the only place in the crummy house trailer where you could do anything but cook, sleep, or sit and contemplate.

There they were, all eighteen of them, jammed into a 10x13-square foot room. "Well designed," observed Jake. "Just big enough to fit in a cheap 8x10 carpet without covering up the hot air vents in the floor. I'll bet the guy who built these trailers also runs a cheap carpet store on the side."

Big Bill got their attention. "Two plus minutes left and the Skins are up by eighteen. Hallelujah, the Cowboys just scored!"

Necks craned to watch the Redskins as they took a knee

and safely refused to run the kick-off back out of the end zone.

Howard Cosell sagely predicted, "Three straight conservative runs into the center, then a punt and the clock is running!"

Howard was partly right. But on second and nine from the twenty-one Harvey Martin hit the halfback, purposely high, with a soaring crunch that jarred the bones of all of Jake's friends. It also jarred the ball, which, after a crazy dance and a few quirts and pawing by a few bandaged-wrapped fists, ended up under a blue and white shirt.

Jake and Angie were too busy celebrating to observe the chaos in their 10x13-square foot living room. Marcie's screaming went up even one more octave, if that were possible. Even Millie moved away from the window. She was so excited that she never saw how Jerome managed to skin up two knees and one elbow.

Two plays later, after a broken pass, Roger scooted around right tackle for the four-yard touchdown. Rafel booted another point onto the scoreboard. Even Howard had to wait for the noise at Texas Stadium to die down before he summed it up: "And there you are, Ladies and Gentlemen, 21 to 25 and forty-three seconds on the clock before the bars in Washington explode!"

Dandy Dan thought an on-side kick was in order. So did

Big Bill.

As Rafel steadied the football on the tee, Big Bill roared, “Yeah! Yeah! Look at all those sticky fingers lining up! Yeah! Yeah!”

In unison, the eighteen chaos makers hushed and the 10x13-square foot room sounded like a morgue during non-visiting hours. Even Marcie held her breath.

It was a short, lovely, high-bouncing, side-twisting, tumbling, twelve-yard kick. The titans clashed and grabbed and hit and spit and chewed and clawed. The seconds of suspense hung on forever as the stripe-shirted Supreme Court unscrambled the spaghetti-pile of arms and legs. Marcie couldn’t hold it any longer and it began to come out at just the right instant.

Her siren scream just proved the stripe-shirted signal. And, Howard was hardly heard above the uproar in Major J. E. Strutter’s crummy house trailer. “Ladies and Gentlemen, we give it to you again! C-B-S Sunday Afternoon Special! Cowboys – 21, Redskins – 25, Timekeepers – 39 seconds! First and ten and the Cowboys have forty-six yards between them and Home Team advantage in the play-offs. What do you think, Dandy?”

“Don’t turn off the lights yet, Howard!”

Texas stadium roared; the aisles were filled with would-be early leavers who froze on the steps where they were. No one else left early that evening.

Jake's friends yelled. Marcie screamed. Millie screamed, her forehead relaxed, her lips a little fuller, and her knuckles redder from her hand clapping.

Outside, Jerome whimpered as he tried to get the brown dirt out of his scraped knees.

Three passes later (one complete, one incomplete, one complete) the Cowboys had first and ten on the twenty-eight. And there were twelve seconds left for an easy field goal. But what good was a field goal when the score was 21 to 25?

It was Roger's finest moment out of years and years of finest moments. The long, perfectly spiraling ball seemed suspended in the clear air of Texas Stadium. As the ball arched downward toward the end zone, Drew Pearson streaked from the nowhere to the everywhere and folded it so quickly and carefully into his arms.

Pandemonium! Marcie jumped, screamed, and looked for a place to do cartwheels. She would have swung from the chandeliers, but there weren't any in the crummy house trailer. Big Bill floored three Captains as he exploded upward from the Turkish ottoman like a volcano lifting a whole mountain.

Angie hugged Jake – hard. Jake hugged Angie – hard. “This is really a ‘Special Occasion!’” He yelled into Angie’s ear. He had to yell.

Everyone was screaming and no one was listening. The crummy house trailer shook and rocked on its cinderblock supports as all eighteen friends jumped, shouted, embraced, and congratulated each other.

Newton finally did it. He invented the ‘Blue Blaze’ on that ‘Special Occasion.’

Somehow, while rummaging around the squeezed-up kitchen looking for a beer bottle opener, he found Angie’s secret cache. Eight months earlier, on a fluke visit to a little dry-rot Mexican border town, Angie had found a bottle of something blue and vile looking, and she spent 100 Pesos on it just so she could say that she had gotten a souvenir on her ‘vacation.’ It had been hiding ever since, in the back of the cupboard, behind the canned sauerkraut.

Newton found it and announced, “We’re all gonna celebrate the VICTORY with a Cowboy ‘Blue Blaze!’” Then he jolted around the 10x13-square foot room, bumping into whooping, hollering Cowboy fans.

The vile looking Mexican blue stuff went into whatever anyone had. Blue vodka tonic! Blue 7-Up! Blue bourbon

and melted ice! Blue beer! Blue gin! “Blue! Blue! Blue! A Cowboy ‘Blue Blaze’ for everyone!” Everyone laughed and drank the vile colored elixir of exaltation, “To the victorious Cowboys.” That was a real ‘Special Occasion.’ That was a real ‘Blue Blaze.’

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The old bus that creaked to a stop in front of him, in the cold Nevada desert, wasn't a real ‘Blue Blaze’ although they called it that. The driver pulled the handle that opened the narrow door that had been designed to admit elementary school kids, and Colonel Jake E. Strutter, United States Air Force, age 51, climbed on board.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *The Hole*

“They’re all here,” Jake mumbled. “They always are. Every tenth morning I’ve climbed onto old ‘Blue Blaze,’ and they’re here. Thirty-six and a half times a year I’ve looked down the narrow aisle of this short blue bus, and I’ve seen the same faces in the early morning light.”

At the rear end, the bumpiest place on old ‘Blue Blaze,’ slumped Staff Sergeant ‘Lucky’ Donnegle. He always took the same seat and showed the same profile. The Irishman’s face was almost hidden as his chin sank into the turned-up collar of his blue overcoat. But still, in the faint rose glow of the February Nevada sunrise, you could still identify Staff Sergeant Lucky. Even in the pale, weak light, Lucky’s nose showed a little redder than the rest of his face -- also a little redder than the other faces on old ‘Blue Blaze.’ Staff Sergeant would slump all the way to ‘The Hole.’

“No sense wasting energy on the Nevada desert,” he had once said.

Besides, Lucky knew that, after five days in ‘The Hole,’ his

nose would be the same color as the rest of his soft, pale -- now splotched with brown spots -- Irish complexion. Everyone else knew that his nose would calm down. Luck o' the Irish.

Mid-way back on the bus sat Philip T. Baron -- bright-eyed -- wide-awake. He saw the dirty little brown dust devils. He saw the reddish-orange in the eastern sky. Lieutenant Baron didn't miss a thing. He even smelled the sickly sweet burnt oil on the manifold of old 'Blue Blaze.' Baron was a whiz.

Three years out of the Academy at Colorado Springs, he was already five years ahead of his classmates. He hadn't spent two years in flight school nor was he in the process of spending three more years in a fighter squadron somewhere in the middle of Europe.

Philip was too bad and too good for that. He was too bad because his eyes had dulled to 20/250 during four years grinding at the books at the Air Academy. He was too good because he knew more about his computer than the manufacturer knew. He considered it his own CCC -- Command and Control Computer; he called it 'Cecelicia,' and he loved her. The rest of the world that knew about it called it 'Whim-ex Four' -- WWMCCS IV -- World Wide Military Command and Control System IV. Nobody loved 'Whim-ex Four,' except Philip Baron.

Across the aisle from Lieutenant P. T. Baron, lost in the sun-coming-up twilight zone, sat Petty Officer Carlos Mancha. Carlos didn't say too much, but when he did speak everyone had learned to listen. He had been born somewhere just a little north of Brownsville, Texas. His mother, Coressa, had walked north from the Rio Grande so that her baby would be born on U.S. soil – an American citizen. Coressa couldn't speak a word of English, but Carlos grew up and learned 'gridiron' football and how to make his way and what he had to do.

Petty Officer Carlos Mancha didn't have much tact with fancy words or discombobulated arguments. He just knew what he knew was true, and that was what he was best at.

Thomas Jefferies, his white teeth shining in the now yellow morning light, was always there. He just made sure that he wasn't in the way, and he always sat in the front row seats on old 'Blue Blaze.' Private Jefferies had made Corporal twice, but each time he had been promoted there had followed a run-in with the Military Police patrols in El Paso. The military police sent him back to his unit and the Captain took away his Corporal stripes. Thomas Jefferies smiled and got by.

Thomas Jefferies probably would have been as happy as a hog-in-slop if he never made Corporal again. But that would

have been too hard for the Army to do -- in the Army it had to be 'up or out.' Thomas Jefferies didn't want to go up and he didn't want to go out. Thomas Jefferies just wanted to get by.

Thomas's next bunk neighbor in the barracks sat behind him. He was a Godsend as an image interpreter. He could stare at a picture of the President and tell you exactly how many hairs were on his chiny-chin-chin.

Lance Corporal Danielle Palatine came from near Newark -- from a three-story walk-up in a run-down part of run-down Perth Amboy. When he was old enough to steal some shoes, he did, and he took a walk and never went back. Some say he walked all the way to San Diego where a judge told him to go to jail or to the Marines. The Marines needed a few good men, and Danielle got a free trip to Guantanamo. There, he fought his way through the barracks until his Company Commander solved the problem and found a home for Danielle in an outfit headed for China Beach, Vietnam.

In Vietnam, he cold-cocked four shore patrolmen, personally slit the throats of three Viet Cong sappers who were crawling nude through the night under the concertina wire in front of his perimeter bunker, got the clap from a young teenager and gave it to six young innocent Vietnamese (five girls and one boy), threw hand grenades into North

Vietnamese tanks in Quang Tri, took two bullets - one went through his right thigh and one creased his left cheek --, ravaged a nice little twenty-six year old wife of a Communist village chief, sent three Sea-Bees to sick bay out of the 'Number 10 Bar' in Danang, received two bronze stars and an equal number of purple hearts, and finished his tour in Vietnam as Pvt-1 Danielle Palatine, USMC.

Not knowing what to do with him and knowing that Guantanamo would be the wrong thing to do a second time, the Marine Corps sent Private Palatine to school to learn how to stare at aerial photographs. Everyone was surprised, including Danielle. He thought his eyes were only good for seeing switchblades at night. They found his eyes were good for measuring the length and chord of the propeller of a Russian nuclear submarine in dry dock from a photograph taken at an altitude of over one hundred fifty miles. Danielle became an Image Interpreter and was sent to the Nevada desert where there were very few people to mess up.

Jake silently took roll call while 'Blue Blaze' was grinding into gear for the downhill run. "All present and accounted for, including Lieutenant Colonel Mario Carey. Oh, Lucius isn't here, of course. He'll get to 'The Hole' in his own staff car." He sighed and eased down next to Mario.

“Jake, you don’t look so good.”

“Neither do you, Mario.”

“Jake, I never look good right before I go into ‘The Hole.’ You know that. I get feisty every time I leave Ann. I guess she’s gotten used to it, but I haven’t. Guess I’ll never get used to it. It’s not ‘The Hole.’ I don’t mind that, even though it’s not like I’m going on a trip to some exotic place. Like, in five days I could get to Bali and back. I don’t know, its not where I’m going, it’s where I’m leaving. I hate leaving Ann and the kids even if I’m only just going to ‘The Hole’.”

“Oh, come on, Mario, you’ve been doing it for more than a year now.”

“Yeah, I know, but, Jake, it seems to be getting worse, not better.”

“Well, look at it this way. It’s a three year hitch and you’re almost half way through.”

“That’s easy for you to say, Jake. You are going to be gone in three and a half more months.”

“Yeah.”

“What are you gonna do? Where are you gonna go? I mean, three and a half months is just around the corner, Jake!”

Jake thought, ‘What am I going to do? Where am I going to go? Angie asked me last night, or maybe it was early this

morning. What is Jake E. Strutter, USAF retired, age 51, going to do? I'll finish thirty years of service in July -- what then? I didn't answer Angie last night -- or this morning -- Where am I going to go?' Then he spoke out loud, "What'd you say, Mario?"

"Oh nothing, just thought you'd like to talk about what you're gonna do. Jake, you look a little tired this morning and I thought I'd cheer you up. Just think! In three and a half months you'll be free! You'll be 'Mister Jake Strutter,' 'freedom-rider,' headed anywhere you want to go, doing anything you want to do. No more sign-out books. No more 'leave addresses.' *Una paloma blanca*. Anything you want to do, Jake, you can do it, and you can do it wherever you want to do it!"

Jake wasn't cheered. He sank a little deeper into the hard blue vinyl bus seats and scowled at the bright yellow-white sun.

Mario was right. He'd be able to go anywhere -- do anything. But Jake didn't know where and he didn't know what. Jake was confused and didn't want to admit it.

"Hell, I have never been confused like this before. For almost thirty years I've known where I was and where I was going and the 'why' to both of those.

In the beginning it had been good -- damned good -- like a huge, high, white blooming flower. Flight school, wings, F-something, special training at Lackland and Scott. New missions in France and Turkey and England. High technology, electronics, avionics, nucleonics. I had mastered them all. Angie had been great! She had flushed with pride at the new shiny wings when they had been pinned on. She had glowed the day I won the fighter pilot gunnery award for the squadron at Ramstein. She had smiled when our first child arrived unexpectedly during her visit to Ankara.

When had the honeymoon ended? Everything had been great! I was on top -- the best of the best! Everyone knew I had 'the right stuff.'

Sure, it had been a hard road, but the road always led toward higher things. There had been years of training and years of flying and years of Command and Control. The flying years were the greatest. After Europe, came the Far East -- a year out of Tan Son Nhut and another out of Chu Lai.

Those had been great years. They had been 'personally' great; they had been 'professionally' great. But they had not been 'family' great. During those years the kids grew up. I missed that. I know now that I missed more than I had realized when I was missing it.

And, Angie? How many years had she smiled tightly; changed dirty, stinking, ripe smelling diapers; wiped up lumpy vomit; watched the measles and mumps come and go; sat up nights with fevers and bumps; cried and laughed when Krissy told her a little boy had tried to lick her on the cheek; and worried over a broken leg, a crushed thumb, and a dart some smart-ass kid had thrown into Robin's breast? Angie had done all of that and more while I had been thudding around the world, glorying in Mach 1 or 2 or some such number.

The flying years were the very best. My squadron, the one I commanded, was the very, very best. Men-machines, the smell of burning kerosene, the roar and the positive G's when the afterburners blazed in, the highs when we excelled and the lows when we 'dropped one' -- those years were as good as they get. But those years were, for some reason, always far from home. A year here, a year there, never a year at home.

In between, there had always been 'C-and-C,' Command and Control. Three years in a concrete bunker at Camp Scott on the Island of Oahu in Hawaii; one year in a large place at Nakhon Phaom; three more in Cheyenne Mountain; and now, two in 'The Hole' in Nevada. Yes, the years have been good to me. During those years I learned the muscles and the nerves. I learned the muscles by flying the hottest aircraft in

the whole world. I learned the nerves in concrete reinforced communication centers that talk to the whole world.

But, compared to pulling 7-G turns, command and control is tame. There are no wingmen to look out for me or for me to look out for. But in C-and-C I can spend some time at home with Angie and the kids. Maybe the hours and days are lousy. Maybe I'll be in 'The Hole' for five days. But I'll also be home for five days. Trouble is, now the kids are grown up and aren't at home any more."

When had the honeymoon ended? When had that huge, high, white, blooming flower begun to droop and turn brown around the edges? Jake knew exactly when. In July he had arrived as a student at the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama. That had been way back when George Wallace, in a wheelchair, had been Governor. Only the best were selected to attend the Air War College -- the best of the best. Jake had been one of them, and Angie had been quiet and proud.

All of the new student class had been assembled in the big auditorium. Jake had looked around. Big Bill was there, God bless 'em for that. Other guys he hadn't seen since flying cadet days were there. General Donaldhow, head of the faculty, walked on stage. No fanfares, no trumpets, no roll of

drums, just a quiet, nice general coming to talk to the best of the best.

“Gentlemen, the United States Air Force thanks you for joining us for a year of academic inquiry. You are the next generation of leaders of our Air Force. We want you to be the best-informed leaders we can possibly have. We will do everything to make this happen.

You have all been selected from among the best. We have the best fighter pilots, the best bomber operators, the best navigators, and the best communicators in the world here today. Look around you -- you know them by reputation and by sight. They are the members of your class.

When you graduate from the Air War College a year from now, our nation will have a new and demanding challenge for you. Up until now we have asked you to be the best practitioners of aerial combat the world has ever known. You have done that in the most sophisticated aerial platforms ever invented.

When you graduate, you will move beyond what you have done so far. Most of you will never fly again. You have been chosen to become the new leaders and managers of military aviation. I congratulate you.” The General moved off stage.

“Never fly again! Never fly again!” Jake reeled under this

new truth. "All my life has been flying. And now, never fly again!"

That had been the moment the honeymoon had ended. Richard and Mary, their bridge playing friends, never recovered. Oh, Richard managed to get along all right for ten more years, but his heart hadn't been in it. Richard knew, that first day at the Air War College, that things would never be the same.

Jake admitted to himself that he had known too, but his experiences in Command and Control had given him assignments he couldn't turn down.

Jake, if anything, was totally honest with himself. He surveyed his memory and recalled, "That night, after the General's speech, I was a little brusque with Angie. I didn't want to tell Angie that I would never fly again! Angie was so proud that I had been chosen to attend the Air War College. But my mind wouldn't let it go, 'Most of you will never fly again'."

He lay in bed that night, hot and flushed. He sweated more than normal and thought he might have picked up a bug somewhere. But he rolled over and went to sleep although he knew Angie wanted to play 'Give and Get.'

"Well, the General had told the truth. I really haven't flown

much since I left the Air War College. Oh, an hour here and an hour there but nothing like having a wingman three feet off the tip tank. Since then, they have used my 'expertise' in Command and Control. Christ,' Jake thought, 'the only thing I'm current in now is a telephone. Command and Control has taken me a long way. All the way to 'Blue Blaze' in the Nevada desert.' He asked, "Mario, what did you say?"

"Oh, I thought you were catching a few winks, Jake. What I said was, Whatcha gonna do?"

'Blue Blaze' squeaked and shuttered and stopped.

The bus driver turned and spoke. "Here you are folks, your home away from home for five days. Welcome to 'The Hole'."