

PEGASUS CHRONICLES



Wings, Lessons of Flight



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Book One – Wings, Lessons of Flight

By DC Storm

THE PEGASUS CHRONICLES.

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CHAPTER 1 -- THE BEGINNING

The sun was already shining through Mike's window when his clock radio clicked on; it began playing county rock from the local radio station in Roseville.

After the music had stopped, the deejay broke in, "Today is going to be clear and very warm again. The high today is going to be about eighty-seven and the winds will be gusty from the Northeast, due to that stubborn high-pressure system sitting over Northeastern Nevada. So--all of you people here in Roseville, we're going to be having aircraft passing overhead again from McClellan. So--on that little note, if you can call it little. We'll just dedicate the next number to all of those people over at McClellan. Especially to all those Air Force Personal who will be flying over our heads today."

"Swell--that's all we need, some more noisy jets," Mike muttered with sarcasm, as he reached over and pushed the snooze button, and the radio went quiet, and then he rolled over and pulled a blanket over his head to block out the sun.

Now it didn't take too long before it began to get very warm under that blanket, so Mike tried to find a cool spot, but no matter what he did it still was getting uncomfortably hot; then about that time the first of many jets from McClellan, passed overhead.

"MIKE, GET UP! BREAKFAST IS ABOUT READY," His mother hollered from the kitchen, "DAD, BRIAN AND JEFF ARE ALREADY HERE AND WAITING ON YOU! HOW COME YOU'RE ALWAYS THE LAST ONE UP IN THE MORNING?"

"Swell--everybody and everything is against me this morning. The radio, sun, Mom and those goddamn jets," Mike cussing to himself, "I just might as well get up."

Then Mike got up and went down the hall to the bathroom, to take a shower and brush his teeth; after he had finished, he came back to his room.

Mike smiled and said to himself, "When you're last you can always get to the bathroom without waiting."

He then put his clothes on and heads for the kitchen, as he could already smell the toast and coffee, and he could also hear his Dad talking with Brian and Jeff, something about the jets over at McClellan; Jeff was also

talking about getting his Commercial Pilot's license.

As Mike was walking in, Jeff was telling his Dad, "I just need another forty hours before I can take my check ride."

Colonel Henry Troff replied with a smile nodding, "Yes, and I hear you're doing great. You should be ready by midsummer, like the first part of July for that check ride."

Mike sat down at his place at the table and bemoaned, "Is that all you guys can talk about--flying? Don't you know it's the last week of school and the entire summer is ahead?"

Mike filled his bowl with dry cereal, added two spoons of sugar, poured some milk on it and began to eat.

Henry a bit agitated, eyed Mike and said pointedly, "You know how your Mother and I feel about flying. Look at your two Brothers. Brian has a commercial with an instrument rating, Jeff is working on his and your Mother has a private. Now it's time for you to start thinking about ground school and flight lessons. Mike--at fifteen you're now old enough, and it's about time you learn to fly."

"Dad!" Mike said shockingly, "I have plans for this summer," then looking disappointedly at his father, he groaned, "I thought I was through with school until fall. Now you want me to go back to school! No way--I'm not going to summer school to learn to fly. I've got plan's for this summer and it doesn't include learning how to fly! Anyway--the rest of you can fly, so why do I have to? Four Pilots in our family is enough, you don't need another."

"You know how your Dad and I, have always wanted our entire family to fly," said Maria, as she walked over to Henry with a fresh pot of hot coffee.

"Your Mother and I want you to get a Private Pilot license. So, you will be taking flight lessons this summer," Henry firmly told him, his mind made up.

"But!"

"No buts--do I make myself clear?" His Father harshly declares.

"Mom--what time is it?" Mike asked, now trying to change the subject, "The Bus should be here any minute."

"It's about seven forty," Maria replied looking at the clock, "plenty of time yet, so finish your breakfast."

Mike feeling trapped, continues to eat his cereal in silence; several minutes later, he hears the School Bus approach and declares, "I hear the Bus coming. I've gotta' go--see you all later," and then he gets up and goes out to catch the School Bus.

"I don't think, Mike wants to learn to fly," Jeff remarking.

"I think he'll take the flight lessons," Henry firmly declared feeling sure, he's made his point, "I've made it pretty clear to him what I expect, and he'll come around--maybe you could have a little talk with him."

"Well, I can try," Jeff sighing, "but I don't think it'll do any good. He just doesn't want to learn to fly."

"Yes, but talk to him anyway, maybe take him up a couple of times. Show him how much fun it is. Who knows, maybe then he'll want to learn to fly," Henry suggesting, hoping a little persuasion from his Brother might help, "we'll never know until we at least try."

"Good luck," says Brian with a bit of skepticism, "all our little Brother ever thinks about is motorcycles and that dumb computer in his room. He spends most of his time staring at that video monitor, and if he keeps that up, he'll never pass his flight physical, because his eyes are going to be shot. That's if he doesn't kill himself on that dirt bike first."

"Yesterday, Mike told me he can sell some of his computer programs to a software company in Sacramento," Jeff piping up about what he had heard from Mike the other day, "he said his teacher in computer class, liked one of his programs that he wrote, and had sent a copy of it to a Mister Richard Chutka at a software company in Sacramento. Mike told me, Mister Chutka had then called him and said he would like to talk to him about buying his program," Henry and Maria looked at each other.

"Did he say how much he was going to get from this software company for his program?" Henry asked surprised.

"I don't know," Jeff replied shrugging, "but those software companies pay top dollar for good programs. If they buy it, he'll make enough to put himself through college."

"Yes that's true," Henry acknowledges, "but we'll just have to wait and see what happens. That's probably what he meant when he said he had plans for this summer."

Henry looks at the clock, "well--I've also got to be going. I have to be at a staff meeting at o-nine-hundred."

Then Brian breaks in, "Dad--you got a minute?"

“Yes, but make it fast,” Henry responds sharply while looking at his watch.

“I’ve--got something I like to say,” Brian nervously stammers, “I’ve been waiting for the right moment.”

“Well--what is it?” Henry impatiently asks, “I’ve got to be going and I don’t want to be late for that staff meeting. You know I’ve got eleven miles to drive to McClellan.”

Brian takes a deep breath and then he blurts out, “Mom--Dad--I’ve joined the Marines.”

Henry and Maria stare at Brian in utter surprise, and then at each other; Jeff choked on a glass of milk he was drinking.

Henry looking stunned said, “Brian--your Mother and I had hoped you’d enter the Air Force Academy, just like your Grandfather and your two

“Dad--please here me out,” Brian trying to explain, “last week an Officer from Miramar was at the High School. He told us they were looking for men for their flight-training program, but only men with high grade point averages--like mine. He told me if I passed my physical, then I could qualify for the school.”

Brian takes another deep breath and lays the rest on them, “so--last Thursday, I went and had my physical and passed with flying colors, and then I signed up. He also told me, I would be a Commissioned Officer, a second lieutenant when I graduate from the Flight School.”

“Where did you take your physical?” Henry asks with a shocked expression on his face.

“At Miramar,” Brian explaining, “I flew there and back last Thursday, and that’s where I also signed up. They told me, I’ll be notified by mail as to when and where to report. They also told me, it wouldn’t be until after I graduate from High School next week. God--I was hoping you all would approve. Mike was very supportive of my decision. Dad--this is my chance to fly F30’s without having to go to college first, anyway, I can always go later.”

“Mike knew!” Henry exclaimed with surprise, “why--he never said a word.”

“Well--I guess it has to be all right now,” Henry sighing with a bit of concern, “but you should’ve talked it over with your Mother and me before taking such a big step

“I know Dad, but I was afraid you wouldn’t approved. It’s now history and I’m in the Marines, and soon to be a Marine Pilot--I hope....”

Jeff held his hand out to Brian. “Congratulations. God--I can’t believe this, my Brother is going to be a Marine! Boy--I can’t wait until I tell all the guys at school.”

“Hold on a minute,” Brian trying to rein in Jeff, “I’m not a Marine just yet, so don’t start spreading any stories around.”

“I guess we might as well get used to having a Marine in the family,” Henry acknowledging with pride, then he shakes his Son’s hand and tells him, “I know you’ve got what it takes to make it through boot camp and flight school. Well Maria,” Henry looking over to his wife, and then with a big smile he tells her, “looks like we’re going to have another Fighter Pilot in the family.”

“Your Father and I are very proud of you Brian,” Maria tells him, and then glances at clock on the wall and exclaims, “Just look at the time! You and Jeff best be off to school, before you’re late for your first class, and then you won’t graduate and the Marines won’t take you.”

“Yeah, sure Mom,” Brian says with a grin, “C’mon Jeff let’s go or you won’t make it to the twelfth grade next year,” then both Brian and Jeff got up, walked out of the house and drove to school in Brian’s car.

“Well Hon--I’ve really must go,” Henry told her with a sigh, “we’ll talk about it some more tonight. I especially want to talk to Mike some more.”

Henry gave Maria a peck on the cheek and said, “Goodbye dear, I’ll see you later,” and then he walks out to his car, gets in and drives off to McClellan.

It was ten minutes to four when Brian and Jeff came home from school.

Maria was in the kitchen making dinner when Jeff and Brian walked into the kitchen, with Jeff asking, “Mom--what’s for dinner and when can we eat?”

“Oh something special--you know--to celebrate your Brother’s graduation and his entering the Marine Corps,” she replied, giving the boys a wink, “it won’t be ready until your Father and Mike gets home.”

“Jeff--all you can think of is your stomach--always eating,” Brian criticizing.

“But I’m hungry,” Jeff huffily retorted, and hearing the School Bus

coming up the street, he adds, “the School Bus is here, Mike’s home. Now if Dad isn’t going to be late, we can eat.”

The School Bus pulls up in front of the house and stops; Mike gets off and walks into the house, and then into the kitchen.

“Hi Brian—Jeff, --Mom, --what’s for dinner I’m starved?” Mike asks, and goes over and looks over her shoulder to see what’s she was cooking on the stove; both Brian and Jeff then start laughing.

“What’s so funny?” Mike asked, looking puzzled.

Brian stopped laughing and said, “Never mind, let’s go change clothes.”

Maria tells Mike, as he walks out of the kitchen, heading to his room to change his clothes, “Don’t you go out, because your Father wants to have another talk with you when he gets home.”

“Now, what does he want,” Mike thought, “maybe it’s some more about flight school?”

“WHAT DOES HE WANT TO TALK TO ME ABOUT?” Mike loudly asked on the way to his room, and then added, “I’M NOT GOING OUT, I’LL BE IN MY ROOM ON MY COMPUTER.”

“I DON’T KNOW, HE DIDN’T SAY WHEN HE LEFT THIS MORNING,” Maria call’s back, “HE JUST SAID, THAT HE WANTED TO TALK WITH YOU SOME MORE.”

“It must be about flying,” Mike thinking again, “God--I don’t wanta’ learn to fly right now! I’ve got other plans for this summer and it doesn’t include flight school.”

After Jeff had changed out of his school clothes, he heads to Mike’s room.

When he arrives at Mike’s door he asks, “Can I come in? What is it that you’re working on?”

Mike looks back over his shoulder at Jeff standing in the doorway and said, as he returned to his keyboard, “Sure, come in. I’m just putting the finishing touches on this program for Mister Chutka from ComSoft. Yeah--finished--it’s done.”

Jeff asks, as he comes in and sits down on Mike’s bed, which was next to the computer set up, “What does the program do?”

“Since when did you get interested in computers?” Mike asked, gazing at Jeff.

“Oh—I’m not,” said Jeff shrugging, “I was just curious as to what you’re working on. Is it a secret?”

“No--it’s no secret,” Mike replied, and then explains, “It’s a navigation program. It works with a GPS to plot latitude, longitude and mean distance between any two points on earth. It also has a built in time-speed algorithm as well.”

“Awesome!” Jeff exclaimed, “No wonder Mister Chutka from Com-Soft is interested. Have you heard from him lately?”

Mike looks up from the monitor and starts talking to the wall as if Jeff was standing in front of him, “Yes, as a matter-of-fact, he called me at school today and ask if he could come here to see me.”

“Well--don’t leave me in suspense, tell me--when is he coming?” Jeff asks in an excited tone of voice.

Now, all the while Jeff is talking, Mike is worrying about how he’s going to break the news to his Dad, and then talking to himself aloud he says, “How am I going to tell Dad--he doesn’t have any idea of what’s been going on?”

“Oh yes he does,” Jeff replies, looking at Mike and smiling, “I told him this morning. By the way, Dad still wants you to learn to fly. He asked me if I could take you up sometime. He thinks maybe if you went flying, you might like it.”

“Great--I’m glad you told him. Now I don’t have to explain to him about Mister Chutka coming here at two o’clock on Saturday,” Mike declares with relief looking at Jeff; the part about going flying, hadn’t sunk in yet, but when it did, “What do you mean--go flying!” Mike exclaims.

“I thought maybe we could,” Jeff says faintly, while looking at the floor, “actuality--Dad’s idea isn’t all that bad, as we’ve never been up together,” and then he looks at Mike and smiles.

“Maybe Brian could also come along, so how about it Mike? Just the three of us up there in a plane flying around, think how much fun it will be. We should do it before Brian has to go into the Marines.”

“How did you find out about Brian?” Mike asked, looking at Jeff, and then he added, “Besides--I’m not interested in going flying.”

“Brian told us this morning, just after you left for school,” Jeff nonchalantly replied.

“What do you mean you don’t want to go flying,” Jeff retorts, as Mike’s remark sinks in, “that program you had just finished writing—

maybe--we could test it out on a cross-country.”

Now, Mike was sitting there looking at Jeff, when suddenly.

“What! Mister Chutka is coming here Saturday!” Jeff exclaims, after remembering what Mike had just said a moment ago, “We had better tell Mom and Dad right now!”

“Yeah--just keep your shirt on,” Mike barks back, “I’ll tell Dad tonight, he wants to talk to me anyway.”

“So, that’s what Dad wants to talk to me about,” Mike thinking to himself, “I’m sure glad Jeff had told Dad, about Mister Chutka, but how am I going to explain to Dad, Mister Chutka will be coming here Saturday afternoon, to see the navigation program?”

“I’ve gotta’ go, I think Dad’s home,” Jeff declared looking at the window, “I just heard his car pull up.”

Jeff gets off of Mike’s bed and walks out of the room thinking to himself, “I bet if I can get Mike to test his program on a cross-country, I’ll get him up in a plane and then he’ll eat it up, just wait until I tell Dad and Brian.”

Colonel Troff came into the house and loudly called, “I’M HOME, WHERE IS EVERYBODY?” He lowers his voice and announces, “Maria, you’ll never guess what happen today. What smell’s so good and where’s Mike? I hope, he didn’t go out, because I want to have a talk with him.”

“Dinner is just about ready dear,” Maria announced, as she walked into the room to greet him, “so--why don’t you go and change. Mike is in his room. If you’re going to talk with him before dinner, then make it short.”

“No--it can wait until after dinner. I’ll go and let the boy’s know that dinner is about ready.”

Henry went into the bathroom to clean up, and then he went to his bedroom to change out of his uniform.

On his way to the dining room, he stopped by Brian’s room and informed him dinner is ready; he did the same at Jeff’s room, and when he arrived at Mike’s room, he also informed him dinner is ready, and then he told Mike that he wanted to have a talk with him right after dinner.

When everyone was seated at the table, Henry said grace; when he finished, everyone started to eat dinner.

Jeff looked at Mike and grinned, and then he started the conversation at the table, “Dad--that little matter we talked about this morning involving you-know-who, I think I’ve figured out a way to get that you-know-who into the air,” Mike just made a face at him.

“Now boys, don’t start making trouble at the table,” Maria scolding, “Mike--quit making faces at Jeff, that’s Kids stuff, you’re supposed to be grown up. You know next month, you’re going to be sixteen. Mike--shame on you!”

Mike said nothing and looking at his plate he continued to eat.

Henry looking at his three Sons announced with a hint of excitement, “I got some very exciting news. There’s a new aircraft being built. I don’t know too much right now, because everything is hushed up, but I can tell you this much, she’s going to be hot. There’s a prototype being tested right now at Edwards. They’re saying it’s waiting on some new navigation system. The hardware is already installed, but they’re waiting on some navigation software from ComSoft.”

Mike choked on a piece of bread he was eating.

“Mike--are you all right?” Henry asked with concern, “You should eat more slowly.”

“Yes Dad,” Mike responds coughing, and then he looks at Jeff.

Now both boys were bug eyed, because they just couldn’t believe what they’ve just heard.

“Are you sure about the software?” Jeff inquires looking at his Father.

Henry, buttering a piece of bread replies, “Positive--I was told, the software was being developed privately and can be expected at anytime,” both Mike and Jeff are now totally stunned.

Jeff whispers to Mike, “It can’t be!”

“Yeah, I know,” Mike whispered back, “it sounds like my program, but it can’t be!”

Then they both chorused whispering, “Mister Chutka!”

They looked at each other for moment, and then they both chorused whispering, “Naaa,” shaking their heads.

Henry looking at both Jeff and Mike, asks, “What’s going on? What are you two whispering about? Now you know that’s rude. If you know a secret, then you should let the rest of us in on it.”

“It isn’t anything Dad,” Mike quickly replied.

“Dad--this new aircraft, when will it be delivered, and to which branch of service?” Brian asks showing a bit of excitement.

Henry taking a bite from the piece of buttered bread and after eating it he says, “I don’t know for sure yet, but it sounds like every branch will get some. The Army will have highest priority, they it seems, will get the majority,” the boy’s now look at each other in utter amazement.

“The Army!” Brian exclaimed, “I don’t understand the reason for their high priority. You know they don’t have all that much for aviation, and how about the Marine Corps, aren’t they getting any?”

“Yes, the Marines will more than likely get some,” Henry answering, “as for how many of the new aircraft they’ll get, I really don’t know? What I do know is, the Army’s receiving the majority, and for what reason, I don’t yet have a clue.”

“When will they be delivered?” Brian asks, hoping he will get a chance to learn how to fly one.

“As far as I can tell about any delivery date, I can only assume it will depend on when the software will be ready,” his Father telling him.

Mike chokes again, and Jeff’s face is now starting to turn pale.

Henry is now more than a little concerned as he inquires, “Mike, are you sure you’re Ok?”

“Yeah Dad, I’m fine,” Mike replied, his face also starting to turn a pale shade of red.

“Dad--do you know what they’ll call this new Aircraft?” Brian asks his eyes aglow.

“What I’ve heard is, it’s now being referred to as ‘Excalibur’,” Henry responding, “you know--like King Arthur’s magical sword, and from what I hear just as deadly. We’ll probably refer to it as simply the ‘EXR’, or in the case of the first ones, the ‘EXR1’.”

“When can we see one?” Brian asked, with a tint of excitement in his voice.

“I don’t know--again like I said before, it depends on the software. Maybe by end of this summer or maybe next summer, I just don’t know, we’ll just have to wait.”

Brian couldn’t hold his excitement in any longer, and as for Jeff and Mike, they just sat there eating and wondering, could the software, Dad spoke of, be Mike’s; if in fact it was, then that explains the Saturday

meeting with Mister Chutka.

If Mister Chutka is coming to buy Mike's program for the new Airplane, Mike will now have a hard time getting out of going to flight school, and he'll have to take the flight lessons after all; there goes his summer plans.

When everyone had finished dinner, they got up from the table and headed for the den, except Mike, he headed to his bedroom.

"Now don't you go running off, because I want to have that talk with you later," Henry told Mike, as he was walking to his bedroom.

"Sure Dad, I'll be in my room."

Henry picked up the paper and walked over and sat down in his recliner to read.

Maria had almost finished cleaning the table, when Henry commented to her, "The paper say's things are starting to heat up in the Middle East again. The way I'm hearing the news on the Base. There just might be another Major War, and probably within the next two or three years."

Maria stopped what she was doing in the kitchen, walked into the living room, over to where Henry sat reading and said to him, "Henry, I sure hope that you're wrong, because our Sons will be in it. Brian is already signed up in the Marine Corps and Jeff has only one year of High School left. Then he'll probably follow his Brother and go into the Military as well, and then there's Mike, I just don't know what he'll do. For if it is like you say, that within three years there's a war, then Mike will also be of age."

"Don't worry about our boys," Henry tells her, still looking at the paper, "we've raised them right, and they'll make us proud when the time comes. I just know Brian is going to become a very good Marine Fighter Pilot. He loves flying and he's got the knowledge and the skills, and the same goes for Jeff. I'm sure he'll also end up in aviation somehow, maybe in the Marines. Although--I would like to see him as a Fighter Pilot, in the Air Force."

"What about Mike?" Maria asked, "I'm so unsure about him."

"Yes--I know what you mean," Henry sighing, as he looks up from the paper and off into space, and then he looks at Her and says, "Mike is young and he's still got three years of High School. So, don't worry—he'll mature, and who knows--just as my Dad had once said, 'Someday one of our families will have a Natural Born Pilot'. It might be Mike, remember, he's

just now old enough to take flight lessons.”

“Mike--you got to be kidding!” Maria exclaimed looking at Henry, “You heard him this morning. He told us he doesn’t want to fly and said, ‘Four Pilots in our family are enough.’ No--I think our last hope went with Jeff, and we all know that he’s no natural, at least by your Dad’s definition. Sure, Jeff’s a great Pilot and will probably make a great Fighter Pilot, but I don’t believe he’s the one”

“Don’t under estimate Mike, like I’ve said, he’s still very young,” Henry telling her, as he laid the paper down, “I’ve got this gut feeling that’s telling me, there is something special about him. So, just be patient and see what happens. Speaking of Mike, I think, I’ll go to his room and have that talk.”

Maria returned to the kitchen and resumed what she was doing before her conversation with Henry, and as Henry gets up, Brian comes walking through all dressed up.

“Going out, Brian?” Henry asks, when he sees Brian heading for the door, “Remember, --tomorrow is a school day.”

“Yes I know, but I’ve gotta’ see Brenda, I don’t have a lot of free time anymore. With going into the Marines after graduation, I don’t know how soon I’ll be back, --I’ll try to be home early.”

“Just be sure you’re home by ten, --have a nice evening,” His Father reminding him.

“Thanks--I’ll see you later,” walks out the door and drives off in his car to see Brenda, and then Henry walks to Mike’s room.

Now Mike was lying in bed and reading a book when his Father stopped at his door and inquired, “You busy? I’d like to have that little talk.”

“Sure Dad,” Mike replies, looking up from the book he was reading, “I’ve also got something to tell you.”

“Jeff told us this morning you’re thinking of selling one of your computer programs,” Henry remarks as he walks in and sits down in Mike’s computer chair, “I want to be sure that before you get to far along we discuss your legal rights as the author, you know, copyrights and other legal matters.”

Mike looks stunned, as he exclaimed, “Copyrights! Legal rights!”

Then Mike laid the book down, slid over and sat on the edge of his bed, next to where his Father was sitting in the computer chair.

“I think we should see a Lawyer before you let Mister Chutka have any of your programs,” His Father advising, out of concern for Mike’s interests.

“But Dad--he’s only interested in two of them,” said Mike a little confused, “the one my computer teacher had sent him, which he already has, and the one I’ve been working on here at home, anyway, he’s coming here Saturday afternoon at two. That’s what, I wanted to tell you.”

“He’s coming here—Saturday,” Henry repeated with a surprised expression.

“Yeah--he sure is,” Mike, tells him with a forced smile.

“Well, --we had better tell your Mother, because she’ll want to know that we’ll be having company on Saturday. She’ll need to have some time to straighten the house up a bit, before he comes.”

Maria was walking by Mike’s door when she heard that company was coming and inquired, “When are we having company and who?”

“We’ll be having Mister Chutka,” Henry informing her, “you know--Jeff told us about him this morning. Well anyway, he’ll be coming here this Saturday afternoon at around two--he wants to talk about some computer software, Mike wrote.”

“Well--that doesn’t give me much time to get the house in order,” Maria huffily replied, and then went to her bedroom.

“Have you given any more thought to our discussion this morning about flight school?” Henry asked.

“Here it comes, flight school again,” Mike said to himself, and then he answered, “I have, but I still need some more time to think about it.”

“Ok, but don’t take too long,” Henry told him, nodding, “I need your answer, so I can make arrangements at the airport. Remember, I’ll pay for the flight lessons, so you can get your Private Pilot license, just like I did for Brian and Jeff.”

He then got up, told Mike goodnight and walked out; on his way to join Maria in their bedroom, Henry stopped by Jeff’s room to say goodnight to him as well.

CHAPTER 2 -- THE VISIT

At ten o'clock Saturday morning, Mike was still lying in bed thinking about this day and dreading it, because he still haven't figured out how to tell his family, he doesn't want to take flight lessons.

When Mr. Chutka arrives from ComSoft this afternoon, they'll discover that, Mike's program may be the navigation program that's going be used in that new aircraft; the one Mike's Father had talked about last Monday night at supper.

Jeff and Mike already kind of figured it might be, but Brian, now he's just going to flip out, and Henry, what will he say?

Then Mike said to himself, "God--I wish today was Sunday and this mess would be behind me. How can I tell Dad, I don't wanta' go to summer flight school."

"MIKE, --GET UP," His Mother called, "AND THEN CLEAN UP YOUR ROOM AND MAKE YOUR BED. JEFF IS OUT MOWING THE LAWN AND DAD IS IN THE GARAGE. BRIAN HAS GONE TO SEE BRENDA. YOU KNOW TODAY IS YOUR BIG DAY. MISTER CHUTKA WILL BE HERE THIS AFTERNOON TO LOOK AT YOUR COMPUTER PROGRAMS, SO GET OUT OF BED."

"Oh swell, so this is my big day," Mike bemoaned sarcastically, "I wished I was dead," and so he gets up, puts his clothes on, cleans up his room and makes his bed.

When he had finished, Mike went into the kitchen where his Mother was starting to prepare lunch, and when Maria sees him come in, She asks, "Mike--is your room cleaned up and bed made? I just don't have the time to do it today, with Mister Chutka coming this afternoon."

"Yes Mom, everything is done."

"Then, why don't you go out and see what your Dad is doing in the garage. Oh--by the way, Brian is bringing Brenda over here for lunch. He wants to be here when Mister Chutka arrives this afternoon. We are all very interested in hearing about your program."

Mike now thought, as he was just about to past out, "Oh no, now everyone will be here. Now what I'm I going to do--I've got to think of something fast, but what? I just can't up and leave. Mister Chutka is expecting to see me. I guess I'm going be screwed--big time!"

Mike then walks out to the garage feeling sick.

At eleven thirty, Brian and Brenda pulled up in Brian's car.

Jeff and Henry are in the den watching the news.

Mike is in his room reading one of his motorcycle magazines and trying not to think about the afternoon.

Brian and Brenda get out of the car and walk into the house.

Brian asks, after he enters the house, "Where is everyone? Brenda is here, and how's lunch coming?"

"Your Dad and Jeff are in the Den watching the news," Maria replies from the kitchen, "so, why don't you take Brenda into the den and introduce her to Jeff and your Father, while I finish with lunch. I'll call when it's ready."

Looking in the den and not seeing Mike sitting there, Brian asks, "Where's Mike? The man of the day."

"He's in his room," Maria replies from the kitchen, and being a little concerned about him, she asks, "Will you go and talk to him? He sure doesn't act like himself today. Maybe you can find out what's wrong. He might be coming down with something. I sure hope he isn't going to be sick when Mister Chutka arrives this afternoon," Brian nods and they walk into the den, where he introduces Brenda to Jeff and his Father.

Brian and Jeff then began walking out of the den, leaving Brenda and Henry sitting there talking.

Brian says to Jeff, as they're leaving the Den, "I just heard Mom say Mike is acting a bit strange, and thinks he might be coming down with something."

Jeff grinning tells Brian, "No--he's not sick, but he wishes he was, so he won't have to face Mister Chutka in front of us, especially you and Dad."

"But why?" Brian asked, now looking very confused, "I thought, Mike would be real excited about today. Do you know something that we don't?"

"Yeah I sure do, but you'll have to wait until this afternoon when Mister Chutka gets here," Jeff replied frowning, "all I'll say right now is, Mike has been into something, and it might be really big--you'll see."

Brian is now looking even more confused.

At a little after twelve, Maria announced that lunch was ready, and they all came into the kitchen and sat down at the table.

Brian and Brenda sat next to each other, Jeff and Mike sat next to each other opposite of Brian and Brenda; Henry and Maria sat on each end of the table.

Henry broke the silence while Mike sat there quietly looking down at his plate while he ate. “Brian, Brenda, are you both ready for graduation on Wednesday?”

“Yep,” Brian replied, “we’ll be having the graduation exercises on the school’s athletic field at noon, and I sure hope it doesn’t rain. Mom--you’ll have my cap and gown ready--won’t you?”

“Yes--it will be ready in time for your graduation on Wednesday.”

Maria was now a little concerned about Mike as she looked at him.

“Mike--are you feeling Ok? You haven’t said a word all during lunch.”

Mike still looking down at his plate muttered, “I’m Ok.”

“Are you sure? You sure haven’t been yourself today.”

“Really--I’m fine, there’s nothing wrong,” Mike answered to reassure her.

Jeff said, as he looked over at Mike and smiled, “Just wait until this afternoon when Mister Chutka gets here, then you’ll see.”

Mike’s face was now starting to get a bit pale, and with a lot of anxiety he continued to look down at his plate while he ate.

After everyone had finished eating, Henry, Brian, Brenda, and Jeff, all went into the den, except Mike, he went to his room and laid down on his bed, picked up and opened one of his motorcycle magazines, trying to take his mind off the upcoming visit from Mr. Chutka, while Maria began cleaning the kitchen table.

In the Den, Brian tries to get Jeff to tell him what’s wrong with Mike, but Jeff just sidesteps Brian’s inquiry, “You’ll just have to wait until Mister Chutka gets here.”

At two ten in the afternoon a black sedan pulls up and stops in front of their house; three men in dark blue business suits and an Army Major get out of the car, walk up to the front door and ring the doorbell.

Henry goes to answer the door and Maria goes to Mike’s room.

“C’mon let’s get up, they’re here. Now comb your hair--let’s hurry up,” Maria told him.

Mike in a state of high anxiety, thinking, as he ran his comb through his thick red hair, trying to get it to obey, “This is it—I’m so screwed—good-bye summer vacation, hello flight school,” and then with a long sigh he said to himself, “might as well get this over with.”

Mike and his Mother walked into the living room just as the four men were coming in; the older man of the four started the introductions, “I’m Richard Chutka from ComSoft, and this is,” looking at the man on his right, “Mister Gordon Oxtan. He’s an engineer from the Douglas Aircraft Company, and this is,” looking to man on his left, “Mister Harold Paine, he’s from the CIA, and of course this is Major Howard Larson, Army Aviation branch. We’re here to see your Son, Michael.”

Mike’s throat got very dry and he began to sweat.

Henry shook their hand’s, and then he introduced his family.

When Henry introduced Mike, Mr. Chutka smiled and said, “So this is the computer whiz we all came to see. We’re here to see your navigation program, and if the program is anything like what your School Teacher had sent me, then, it just might be the software that our EXR project requires, and what we’ve been looking for.”

This time, Mike’s face got even paler and wished he could just disappear; Jeff poked Brian and smiled.

Now Brian and his Parents were stunned by this announcement; now Jeff, he just stood there smiling, looking at his little Brother, and with a snicker he said to himself, “Now the secret is out. Now they’ll really find out what Mike’s been up too. Dad’s going to be so proud—there’s no way Mike is going to get out of not going to flight school. I just can’t wait to see how he’s going to wiggle out of going to flight school this time.”

Maria was very surprised as she exclaimed, “Mike--a computer wizard and writing a navigation program! I just don’t believe it--besides, he told us he didn’t want to learn to fly.”

Mr. Chutka said, looking surprised by what he was hearing, “Well, maybe he doesn’t want to take flight lessons, but the fact remains, your Son is into aviation, his program proves that. He may say that he doesn’t want to fly, however, I think deep down inside, his inner-self is saying, I want to fly,” and with a big smile, Mr. Chutka continued, “you know Missis Troff. To discover someone this young who is as talented as he seems to be is quit a find. I’m sure Major Larson will agree, that when he does finally decide to fly, I’m sure whatever aircraft he chooses, he’s going to find it very easy to

master. And when that happens, we'll have what is referred to as a Natural Born Pilot."

"A what!" Mike breaking in, "What did you call me?"

"A Natural Born Pilot," Mr. Chutka returned with a grin, "that is of course, in the right aircraft."

"I'm a Natural Born Pilot," Mike says almost laughing, "You've got to be kidding. You know, I really don't care all that much about flying. Sure--I kinda' like aviation, but I don't have any inner-self saying I want to fly."

"You just wait a year or two," Mr. Chutka says with a smile, "and then we'll see if you still don't care about flying. I'll bet in a year or two, your Father will have to lock you up, because that'll be the only way he can keep you on the ground."

Mike's family began laughing, and poor Mike, he just didn't know what to say next.

Mr. Chutka then tells them that his company has a contract with the Defense Department, to provide software to a top-secret military project which the Air Force and the Army are now developing jointly.

Mr. Chutka then explains, "What we need now is Mike's program to complete the project. That is of course, if it's the one we've been looking for."

Then Mr. Chutka looks at Mike and says, "Well Mike, Mister Oxton, Major Larson, and I would like to see your software."

"My computer system and the program, is in my bedroom," Mike softly replied.

"Shall we go and take look at it Mike?" Mr. Chutka asked, with a big smile.

"Sure, --it's this way," Mike says, and starts walking towards the hallway, motioning for them to follow.

Mr. Chutka, Major Larson, and Mr. Oxton followed Mike to his room, and when Jeff started to follow, he was halted by Mr. Paine.

"No--this might be top secret stuff," Mr. Paine told Jeff, "just wait until they return, and then we'll know for sure," Henry and Maria look at each other in disbelief.

"Can it really be true what Mister Chutka had said," Henry thinking to himself, "that Mike is the one we all have wished for. O' God I hope so, but I wonder, in what type of aircraft?"

Brian just stood there stunned, not knowing what to make of all of this; as for Jeff, now he didn't expect any of this either, Mike, a Natural Born Pilot—unbelievable!

As they all sat there waiting for Mike, and the three men to return, not one of them had anything to say, until finally, Mr. Paine broke the silence and said, looking at Henry, "I understand that you're a Colonel in the Air Force, and you're based at McClellan."

"Yes," Henry replied, "I'm in command of the 132nd Fighter Training Squadron, which is based there."

"What kind of rumors, if any, have you heard of lately?" Mr. Paine asked; both Brian and Jeff are looking at their Father.

"Well--I did hear some talk of a new type of aircraft under test at Edwards," Henry replied, "I also heard that it's called 'EXCALIBUR' and that it's very hot, and that's basically it, everything else about it is hushed up."

Mr. Paine was now concerned about a security leak as he spoke, "Colonel, --Excalibur is top secret. No one is to know until the time is right, so don't say anything more about it. Your Son, Mike, he might be the only one in your family, to be granted access to information on it," the Troff's all looked at one another in disbelief.

An hour later, Mike and the three men returned from Mike's room. Mr. Chutka, smiling, had Mike's program in his hand.

He said, to Mr. Paine, "I think we've got the program we've been looking for," Mr. Oxton and Major Larson both agreeing.

"Gentleman, as soon as we can get this program to Edwards, we'll be on our way to having an operational aircraft," Mr. Oxton anxiously announced.

"Ok, --now the important stuff begins," Mr. Paine announced, "so, anybody that's not in the immediate family must now leave. Anything you've heard must not be repeated anywhere--do you all understand?"

They all nodded they understood.

"I had better take Brenda home, I'll be back later," Brian told everyone.

Mr. Paine looks at Brian and Brenda, reminding them, "Remember, not a word to anyone about us--not a word--national security."

Both Brian and Brenda informed him that they understood and they

wouldn't say a word to anyone, and then they both walked out of the house and departed in Brian's car for Brenda's home.

As Brian's car went down the street, Mr. Paine told them, "There's going to be a security check on all of you. So--do any of you, have any questions?" They all looked at each other shaking their heads.

"I presume that, Mike is now out of school for the summer," Mr. Oxtan surmising, and then he drop's the bomb, "we're going to need his help at Edwards to install his navigation program. That will be just until we get all the bugs worked out, if there are any. He'll be back just in time to start school this fall."

"He's going to be gone all summer!" Henry exclaimed with shock, "I had plan's for Mike, he was going to take flight lessons."

"Yes--he'll be gone all summer," Major Larson replied, "as for flight lessons--if there's any free time and if he wants to learn to fly, I might be able to do something."

"All summer!" Mike exclaimed, "Gosh! I have plan's to go dirt biking with some friends from school this summer."

Then Mr. Oxtan got very excited and shrieked, "ABSOLUTELY NOT! I REPEAT, ABSOLUTELY NO MOTORCYCLING OF ANY KIND," after calming down, he explained, "we just can't risk having you getting injured in an accident, so there will be no motorcycling. Now if you want to learn to fly, maybe we can arrange something, but no motorcycling, do you understand?"

Mike was very disappointed when he gave his word, "Ok--no bikes."

"Good--I'm glad you agree," Mr. Oxtan sighing with relief, "anyway, you won't have time to think about motorcycles, because you're going to be spending a lot of time working on Excalibur."

Then Mr. Paine informed Mike, "We're now going to erase your 3D storage unit in your computer. Also, we're going to remove your Image Drum from your printer and we're going to take all of your off-line storage devices and any printouts that you made with your printer."

Mike cried out, "ERASE MY 3D STORAGE UNIT--AND TAKE MY IMAGE DRUM--WHY?"

Mr. Paine with a straight face, solemnly replied, "We have to be very careful there's no sensitive data still left on any of your equipment. Anyway, we'll replace anything that we damage."

Mike feeling a little better said, "If I get my 3D Storage Unit and Image Drum replaced, then I guess it's Ok."

Mr. Oxtan and Major Larson went into Mike's bedroom, to erase the 3D Storage Unit in his computer; they also removed the Image Drum from his printer.

A few minutes later, they both came back with a box containing Mike's Image Drum, all of his off line storage devices and printouts from his printer.

"Mike--now listen very carefully," heeded Mr. Paine, "I want you to think all the way back to when you started writing the program. No--think even farther back to when you first thought of it. Is there anybody you can think of, a friend, your teacher, or one of your classmates that you could've talked to about your software? If you can remember telling someone, anyone, I will need to know who they are, it's very important that I know about everyone--do you understand?"

Mike nods and replies, "Yes--I understand, and the only person I can think of, is my computer teacher. He had to know, because it was my class project. Part of it, he had sent to Mister Chutka, and I wrote the other part here in my bedroom. Last Monday--I also told my Brother, Jeff, about it."

"Fine," said Mr. Paine, "I'll contact your teacher and have a talk with him."

Mr. Paine turns to Jeff, "Now Jeff, --I also want you to think back. After Mike had told you about his software, did you talk to anyone about it?"

Jeff thought for a minute and responded, "No Sir. In fact--I kinda' forgot what it did. Mike's the computer whiz, and when he explained it to me last Monday, it kinda' went over my head. Although, I do know it's an aviation program and that it has something to do with navigation. As a Pilot, I do know about navigation."

"You're a Pilot?" Major Larson asked, surprised.

"Yes Sir," Jeff replied with a smile.

"How long have you been flying?"

"Two years. I got my Private Pilot certificate when I was fifteen, and now I'm working on my commercial certificate," Jeff paused for a minute, and then he said, "Sir, --Brian is also a Pilot, and he already has his commercial certificate."

Now Major Larson shook his head, looked over at Henry and told him, “Colonel Troff, you must be very proud of your Sons. I know of very few families where everyone can fly. To have three very talented Sons. Where two of them are Pilots, and a third who is just waiting to stretch his wings. Why--this is unheard of. Can it be possible--that we’ve discovered three naturals and all in the same family? My word--this is unheard of.”

Now Henry and Maria were totally blown away by this revelation.

They both looked at their two Sons standing there, with Henry thinking, “Can it really be true? That of all the Fathers in this world, I was the one to be blessed with not one, but three Natural Pilots. Now, I wonder--in what types of aircraft.”

Mr. Paine once more turns to Mike asking, “Now again Mike, we don’t want to leave any stone unturned. I want you to think about your class project again. Is there anything you might have overlooked? Now think very carefully, Mike, --National Security is at stake!”

When Mike began thinking back, he remembered that day in class, when Mr. Vogel, his Computer Teacher, handed back the class’s graded computer projects, and he didn’t get his handed back. Boy, he sure couldn’t forget the feeling he had that day, when Mr. Vogel told him to stay after class, because he wanted to talk to him about his project.

Now everyone in Mike’s computer class was thinking he had flunked; Mr. Vogel sensing what the class was thinking, promptly explained to the class that, Mike’s program was so good, he had sent a copy of it to a friend of his at a software company to examine, and now he was waiting to hear back from his friend, and that is why it wasn’t returned to Mike.

His teacher then informed the class, Mike had received the highest grade in the class, and the reason he wanted Mike to stay after class, was to talk to him about why he had sent a copy of his program to his close friend, Mr. Chutka, at ComSoft.

“No Sir,” Mike firmly told Mr. Paine, “outside of Mister Vogel my Computer Teacher and Mister Chutka, there’s no one else.”

“Mike--are you absolutely sure you know of no one else?”

“I’m sure,” Mike firmly tells him with a nod, “there’s absolutely no one else that knows about my program.”

“Good,” Mr. Paine said exhaling deeply and thinking he’s now got all the bases covered, “well gentleman, I think we now have everything covered.”

“There’s one more little detail we must talk about before we leave,” Mr. Chutka adding, “and that little detail has to do with Mike’s legal rights to financial compensation as the author of the navigation software. You’ll need to obtain Lawyer to see after Mike’s legal rights. We’ll need your decision as to whom you’ve obtained, as soon as possible. We must have his name, so we can run a security check on him before he’s allowed to view any documents relating to the software and the project,” Henry and Maria both nod that they understand.

“We must be going now,” announced Mr. Chutka, getting up, “Major Larson will be here on Monday morning at o-six-hundred, to pick up Mike and take him to Edwards Air Force Base. So please have him ready.”

“So soon!” Maria exclaimed, “He’ll miss his Brother’s graduation on Wednesday. We’re planning to have the whole family there. You know it’s a big day for all of us, especially for Brian.”

“I’m very sorry, but yes, we must get started immediately, because we need to have Excalibur ready by this fall,” Mr. Chutka sadly replied.

After shaking hands they all said good-bye, and then the four men walked out of the house, got in their black sedan, and drove off.

As Jeff watched them drive away, he thought, “Well--it looks like Mike did get out of Dad’s flight school this summer after all,” and then he shook his head, smiled to himself and walked to his room.

Jeff was in the Kitchen reading the sports page in the evening newspaper when Brian came home at nine that evening.

Brian asked, “Well--what did I miss?” After he’d walked into the Kitchen where Jeff was sitting, reading part of the evening newspaper.

“You’re never going to believe it,” Jeff declared, as he put the newspaper down, “Mike’s going to Edwards for the summer and you’ll never guess why.”

“EDWARDS!” Brian loudly exclaimed, and then he asked, “Why is he going to Edwards?”

“Because--he’s going to be working on Excalibur.”

“EXCALIBUR!” Brian again loudly exclaimed, “I can’t believe it! Why that little faker! And all this time he had us believing that he wasn’t interested in aviation. Hell--that little sucker’s been working in it all the long. I’ll bet you a buck, he’ll be a Pilot when he returns this fall, and who knows what type of aircraft they will teach him to fly!”

“You’re not going to believe what else happened,” Jeff announced.

Brian was now preparing himself for some real bad news as he took a deep breath and said, “Ok--now let’s have the bad news.”

“There’s no bad news,” Jeff assures Brian, “Major Larson told Dad we’re all Natural Born Pilots. Well--you can just imagine what Dad thought, especially after hearing that. You know how hard Dad has wished for one of us to be a natural. Well--after the Major had told Dad we’re all naturals. Boy--he just about passed out.”

Brian slowly asked, “Jeff, --do you really think, we all could be naturals?”

Jeff thought for a moment and then he said, “I don’t know--maybe. What does being a natural born supposed to be like, anyway?”

Brain also thought for a moment, then shrugged and replied, “I don’t have any idea what being a natural born is supposed to be like, but you told me, Major Larson said we’re supposed to be those kinds of Pilots.”

Jeff looked at Brian and asked, “Just what is a Natural Born Pilot anyway? I don’t understand how someone can be naturally born to fly with-out learning how first.”

“I really don’t know,” Brian responds with another shrug. “I heard Dad telling Mom once, that a Natural Born Pilot is really good at flying. When one of those Pilots gets in the right type of aircraft, they own the sky. So--I guess it depends on the type of aircraft you fly.”

“Well, --how do you know which type of aircraft is the right type?”

“Well, --when I heard Dad talking to Mom about it, he said when a Natural Born Pilot gets in the type of aircraft that was meant for him to fly, something happens and he knows right then, he was born to fly it,” Brian replied matter-of-factly.

“Does that mean you’re going to be an Ace in an F30?” Jeff asked, smiling.

“Well--if Dad is right, when I get into an F30 and I feel it happening. I guess then, I’ll probably become an Ace,” and then Brian asks, pointing at Jeff, “how about you, what type of aircraft do you like?”

“I don’t know,” Jeff replies, and getting a little worried he says, “I don’t have any real feelings for any type. Brian--maybe I’m not a Natural Born Pilot.”

Brian said, as he softly tapped Jeff on the chin with his fist, “Non-sense, you just wait a year or so. After you graduate from High School next

year and join the military, then it will happen, you'll see."

"I sure hope you're right, Brian," Jeff sighs still a little concerned.

Henry says, as he walks into the Kitchen from the Den where he had been reading his part of the evening paper, "Brian, Jeff, I'm glad I caught the both of you, because we need to talk about your Brother. You know Mike will be leaving for Edwards early Monday morning, so we must not say anything to anybody about what went on here this afternoon, or what your Brother's been doing, even where he's going for the summer. Do I make myself clear?" Both Brian and Jeff nod.

Then Jeff asked, "What if some of his friend's calls or stops by to ask where he is--what do we tell them?"

"Tell them, he's gone off to computer camp in Berkeley and he won't be back until fall. Yes--I think that should do it," said Henry with a smile.

"Then I guess, Mike isn't going to make it to my graduation on Wednesday," Brian concludes with disappointment, "boy--it sure isn't going to be the same without him. The family just isn't going to be complete."

"Yes I know," Henry adds with a hint of melancholy, "remember, your little Brother is working on a very important project. We should be very proud of him, I know your Mother and I are," and then both boy's indicate that they too, are proud of him.

"Besides, that little sucker will probably come home this fall as a licensed Pilot," Jeff remarks with a sarcastic snicker, "after all, isn't that what we all want, our whole family being able to fly?"

Both Brian and Henry smile and nod in agreement.

CHAPTER 3 -- FIRST DAY AT EDWARDS

It was four-thirty Monday morning, and still very dark outside when Mike's Mother came into his room, turned on the light and shook him.

Mike was very sleepy when he opened his eyes and asked, "What time is it?"

"It's four-thirty," His mother whispered, so as not to wake his Brothers, "now get up, so you'll have time to eat breakfast before Major Larson arrives to pick you up at six. Your Dad is already up, and he wants to see you off. So come on, let's get out of bed, you really don't have that much time."

Mike loudly exclaimed "FOUR-THIRTY--O' GOD!"

His mother put her finger to her mouth and whispered, "Shhhh--keep your voice down or you'll wake your Brothers," and then she walked out of his room and went into the kitchen to get his breakfast ready.

As soon as she left, Mike rolled over and put his head under his pillow to block out the light in his room, and then he dosed off.

Meanwhile, his father had just finished in the bathroom and was now on his way back to his bedroom to get dressed.

When he arrived at Mike's room, he stopped and walked in to see if Mike was up; Mike of course was still in bed, with his head stuffed under his pillow.

Seeing this, his father threw the bed covers off him and shook him saying, "Mike, get out of the sack! You've got a big day today, so come on let's go!"

"O' God Dad--I'm too young to go into the Army!" Mike exclaimed, still half asleep.

His Dad laughing, said, "C'mon--get out of the sack. You're not going into the Army. You'll be back home this fall. Just think of it as summer camp, only this is going to be much more fun. Just think, --you're actually going to see Excalibur. Boy, I can certainly tell you, your Brothers and I wished we could. Come on now, get up and I'll tell you a secret."

Mike slowly sat up in bed, and still a bit groggy, he asked, "What secret?"

Henry said very softly, so as not wake Mike's two older Brothers,

“When Brian gets into the Marines, he’ll have to get up this early every day.”

As Mike crawls out of bed, he exclaims, “He will! Boy, --I can tell you, --I’m not going to join the Marines. Getting up at four-thirty everyday isn’t for me,” his Father smiled as they walked to the hallway together after which, Mike went to the bathroom to do the morning business and his Father went to his bedroom to get dressed.

It was five-fifteen when Mike entered the kitchen; his Father was already eating breakfast.

Mike sat down at his place at the table and his mother filled his bowl with oatmeal and sat it on the table in front of him, and then she gave him a glass of cold milk to drink.

“Eat up, you’ve got a long trip ahead of you,” his Father telling him, and then he said, “after taking a look at the road map last night, I think Major Larson will probably take highway ninety-nine from Sacramento to Bakersfield. Then I would think highway fifty-eight to Edward’s Air Force Base, which is about three-hundred and sixty-six miles. Now let me see--driving about seventy miles per hour, and with a couple of stops, I think it should take you about five hours. So, you should be there about noon.”

“When you get there be sure to call us collect,” His Mother told him, “we want to be sure you got there safely.”

“Sure Mom, I’ll call you if they let me,” Mike replied, “You know I’m top secret now.”

“I’m sure they’ll let you call us, just don’t say anything top secret on the phone,” his Father told him chuckling, and then he took some money from his wallet and handed it Mike. “Here’s fifty bucks so you can get yourself settled in at Edwards. Although, --I’m sure the Military will take care of everything for you. Just be sure to call home every Sunday, --Ok?”

Mike put the money into his wallet and told his Parents, he would be careful of what he said on the phone; he told them, he would remember to call home every Sunday afternoon.

It was ten to six when Major Larson arrived, walked up to the front door and rang the doorbell; Henry got up from the table and walked out to answer the doorbell as Mike was just finishing his breakfast.

When Mike heard that it was the Major, he got up and headed for the living room.

The Major and his Father were talking when Mike entered the living room, wearing blue jeans, and a brown and red plaid shirt.

The Major, looking at Mike remarked, "Well, how's the computer software engineer this morning? Don't you think that cotton shirt is going to be a bit warm? The radio says it's going to be in the nineties today."

Mike looking at his shirt, replied, "Your car has air--doesn't it?"

The Major nodded and then asked, "So--are you ready to see Excalibur?"

Mike replied, feeling bit uncertain, "I don't know about being an engineer, but I guess I'm ready."

"Well then, shall we be on our way? We've got a long way to go to Edwards."

Mrs. Troff asked the Major if Mike could call home when he got to Edwards, and on every Sunday afternoon; Major Larson informed Mr. and Mrs. Troff, he'll see to it that Mike does call home every Sunday afternoon, and then Major Larson picked up one of Mike's bag's, Mike picked up the other one and they all walked out to the Major's car.

Maria said to Mike, as they were walking over to the car, "Now be sure to call us when you get to Edwards."

Mike said, looking back over his shoulder, "Yeah Mom, I will."

After putting both bags on the back seat of the car, they got in, pulled away and drove off.

It was a little after six and the Sun had just come up when Major Larson and Mike were finally on their way.

Brian and Jeff were still in bed sound asleep, when Henry and Maria walked back into the kitchen, sat down and had another cup of coffee.

"I sure hope, Mike is going to be Ok. I'm sure going to miss him this summer," Maria remarked with a bit of melancholy, as she's already beginning to miss him.

"He's going to be just fine," Henry reassuring her, "I think this is going to make a man out of him, anyway, he'll be phoning home every Sunday evening."

"Yes--I guess you're right, but I'll miss him anyway," Maria sighing, feeling a wee bit forlorn, "you know--he's our youngest--our baby. I just can't believe he's now all grown up, as you've said, a man. Just think--all of our Sons have now grown into manhood. In a few days, Brian will be

going into the Marines, and who knows when I'll see him again."

"Jeff will be here this summer and Mike will be home this fall," Henry told her matter-of-factly, trying to ease her anxiety, "the both of them are going to be around for a while yet. Jeff's still got another year of High School, and Mike's got three, as for Brian, he'll be home on leave before you know it, anyway, he hasn't gone yet."

"You know--Jeff will be here all alone this summer," Maria remarking, and then suggesting, "I just thought--maybe we can help him out with his flight school a little. As you know, he is trying to get his commercial license with an instrument rating. I was just thinking, if he can get a part time job this Summer, then maybe we could help him out with the payments, that's if he wants our help."

"Yes, that's a good idea, but Jeff must get a part time job first," Henry told her, and then looking at his watch he said, "it's now ten to seven, I've got to be going to McClellan. We'll talk to Jeff this evening. I think you better be getting both of them up."

Henry then got up, and gave Maria the usual peck on the cheek and headed out the door to his car.

By now, both Mike and the Major were headed southwest out of Roseville on Interstate highway eighty to Sacramento; sometime later, they turned south on highway ninety-nine to Bakersfield

It was eight o'clock when Maria woke up both Brian and Jeff; she was getting their breakfast when they came into the kitchen and sat down at the table.

"I see Mike has already gone," Brian remarked crestfallen, "you should've awakened me. I would've liked to have said good-bye. I don't know when I'll see him again. I'll be in the Marines when he comes home this fall."

Maria feeling bad said, "I'm sorry that I hadn't awakened you, so you could've said good-bye, I'll have Mike write you," and then she smiled and asked, "now then, what have you planned for today?"

Brian told her, his class will be having graduation practice today at nine, on the school's athletic Field; after looking at the clock on the wall he said, "I've got to be going," he then got up and said good-bye, walked out to his car, got in and drove off to school.

Jeff announced, after Brian had gone, “I’m going down to the employment office and see what they have for part time jobs. I need a good job to earn enough money to pay for my flight lessons this Summer, so I’d better be off too, because they open at nine and I want to be first in line,” and then he got up and also told her good-bye, walked out of the house, got his bicycle from the garage and rode off to the employment office.

At nine o’clock, Mike and Major Larson pulled into Fresno, and made their first gas stop.

The sun was well up in the sky and it was starting to get hot; the DeeJay on the radio said it would be in the nineties today.

“It’s sure is going be hot today, maybe I shouldn’t have worn this shirt,” Mike thought.

After filling the car with gas, the Major bought them each a cold can of pop, and then turned on the car’s air conditioner as they pulled out of the gas station and headed south; resuming their journey on highway ninety-nine to Bakersfield.

It was almost ten-thirty, when they got to Bakersfield, and it was now very hot outside when Major Larson asked, “You getting hungry?”

“Yeah, --I could go for a cheeseburger, some fries and a coke.”

“We can stop here and eat, or we can continue to Edwards and eat there. It will be about another hour’s drive to Edwards, so what do you want to do?” Major Larson asked.

“Stop here--I’m hungry and I need to make a pit stop,” Mike told the Major.

“Ok, we’ll look for a Burger Haus.”

Upon locating a Burger Haus, they pulled in and parked.

After they both had used the bathroom, they ordered some burgers, fries and drinks; after finding an empty table, they sat down and ate.

It was after eleven when they finally got going again.

After the Major had turned the car east on highway fifty-eight to Edwards, he looked over at Mike and said, “Well Mike, we should be at Edwards in about an hour, are you getting tired?”

Mike looked back and replied, “No--I just can’t wait to see what Edwards is like.”

Major Larson looked over at Mike, smiled and told him, “You’ll like it just fine.”

It was a little after twelve when they turn into Edwards Air Force Base, and stopped at the main gate; a Sentry came over to the car and asked to see some ID's.

The Major showed the Sentry his Military ID and had to explain Mike, and then the Sentry went into his small booth and talked on the phone.

After a few minutes, the Sentry came back out and told them, "The both of you have been cleared, so you can now proceed, Sir."

The Sentry stepped back and saluted; Major Larson returned the salute, and the Sentry waved them through.

The Major drove over to the base residential area, pulled up and stopped in front of a gray and white house and shut off the engine; as he unbuckled his seat belt, he told Mike, "This is where I live, and this is where you'll be staying this summer. Let's go inside and get you settled in, --you can call your parents and tell them you've arrived safely."

Mike was looking at the Majors house while unbuckling his seat belt.

Then they both got out of the car; Mike went and got his bags from the back seat.

The Sun was very hot as they walked up the short walk to the Major's front door; when they got there, they were greeted by the Major's Wife, and she promptly herded them inside where it was cool, before the Major had a chance to introduce her to Mike.

Once inside the Major introduced Mike to his Wife, "Mike--I would like you to meet my Wife, Joan, and dear, this is our guest, Michal Troff, he'll be spending the summer with us."

"Pleasure to meet you Missis Larson, and it's just Mike if you please," Mike tells her politely with a smile.

"And it's real pleasure to meet you too, Mike," Mrs. Larson returning the gesture smiling, "why don't you just call me Joan. I sure hope you'll like living here for the next few months. Shall we go and see your room, and then you can unpack your things?"

Mike followed Joan to see his new room and Major Larson got his cell phone and made a call.

"Well, --how do you like your room?" She asked.

"Oh it's just fine," replied Mike, "it's just like my room at home."

“Well then, why don’t you unpack your things, and then come out to the living room, I’m sure the Major will want to show you around the Base.”

After Mike had unpacked his things, he headed to the living room, where Major Larson was just completing a phone call.

“I got everything all arranged, so now I can show you around the Base, but first, you must call your parents, here’s the cell phone,” the Major told him, handing his cell phone to Mike; Mike went over to the sofa, sat down and called home.

Mike told his Mother he was Ok, and he will be staying at Major Larson’s house; after talking for about another five minutes, he said good-bye and handed the cell phone back to the Major.

“How would you like a tour of the Base,” Major Larson asked?

“Yeah--sure,” Mike replied in a casual tone.

“I’ll introduce you to some of the people that you’ll be working with on Excalibur,” Major Larson informing Mike.

“That would be cool. Sure--let’s go,” Mike declares, as he was now getting a little excited, hoping he’ll also get a peek at Excalibur; the Major just laughed, and then they walked out to the Major’s car, got in and drove off

For the next hour, they drove around the Air Base; the Major showing Mike the various areas of interest, like the dry lakebed that’s use as a runway.

The Major told Mike, they sometimes use this runway when they are testing experiential aircraft, because it’s so long; Mike asked if Excalibur would also be using this runway to which the Major replied, “Excalibur doesn’t really need a runway, because it can take off and land vertically.”

Mike was now very confused, because he didn’t know how an Air-plane was able to take off and land vertically.

Mike, with a sparkle in his eyes, asked the Major when he could see Excalibur.

Major Larson seeing Mike’s enthusiasm said, “You’ll see Excalibur soon enough, but first, we have to get you registered on the Base, so let’s go and do that next.”

So, they drove over to several rows of long white buildings, and pull up to one of the buildings and parked.

“Here’s where we’ll get you registered,” the Major tells him, as he shut the engine off and unbuckled his seat belt; the Major and Mike then got out of the car, and went inside.

Mike now had his picture and his fingerprints taken, and then he had to answer lots of questions, to which he thought most were stupid; he also had to sign several forms after which he received an ID card with his picture on it.

He was then told he would need this ID card to enter the Air Base, just as the Major had done when they stopped at the main gate; he’ll also get a second one, which he’ll clip to his shirt pocket.

Mike was told he’d need to wear the ID card while he’s working inside the project building, and in the building where they keep Excalibur.

When they were back inside the car, Mike a little impatient, asked, “Are we done? When can I see Excalibur?”

“We’ve still got one more stop to make,” Major Larson told him, “and then I’ll take you over to where you’ll be working. There, you’ll meet the team members you’ll be working with on the Excalibur project.”

The Major drove Mike over to another row of long white buildings; again they pulled up to one of them, parked the car, got out and went inside.

This time Mike was given several one-piece outfits; each outfit had Mike’s name printed on a patch, which was sown above one of the pockets.

He was told these were called jump suites, and he’ll be wearing them when he’s working in the hangar on Excalibur; he was also given three long white coats with his name on them as well, and these were called lab coats, and was told he’ll be wearing these when he’s working at his computer terminal, in the computer room, and at some of the staff meetings he’ll be attending.

When they were both once again back in the car, Major Larson asked, with a smile, “Well Mike, how do you like your new outfit?”

“They’re really cool! I guess I’m in the Air Force now,” Mike remarks smiling, as he looked at his new clothes.

“No, --not quite yet, --you’re still a civilian,” Major Larson told him with a chuckle, “when you graduate from High School, like your Brother, and you still want to join, well--I’m sure the Air Force will take you.”

“I guess it’s time for you to see where you’ll be working, and meet the people on your team.”

Mike looked at him, nodded, and said, “Cool—let’s go,” hoping this time he’ll finally get to see Excalibur.

The Major drove over to some very large concrete blue and gray buildings, pulled up to one of the buildings and parked.

On the building in front of them was a sign with a large picture of a sword; the words ‘EXCALIBUR’ were written underneath the sword.

“Here we are. This is where you’ll be working,” Major Larson announced, as he shut the engine off.

“To find this building back, just look for that sign with the sword on it, or building number four-hundred and ten,” the Major told him pointing to both the picture and the building number.

“Shall we go inside?” He asked, looking at Mike.

“You bet, --let’s go,” Mike replied with excitement, as his curiosity was growing and he could no longer wait, and so, they both got out of the Major’s car and went inside.

When they were inside, Mike saw a large rack of ID badges; Major Larson went over, took one of them out of the rack, and clipped it to his shirt pocket.

“Here’s where all the ID badges are kept,” He said to Mike, as they looked at all the badges still in the rack, “you’ll also have one to wear on your shirt pocket while you’re inside this building. And when you leave, you will put it back in its spot in the rack. Your badge won’t be here for a few days yet, so you’ll have to stop at the Sentry’s window, so he can let you in.”

They walked over a small window by a locked door, here, the Major had to explain Mike to the Sentry, and like before, the Sentry used the telephone.

After a couple of minutes the Sentry hung up the phone and pointed to a book and told Mike, he had to sign in; after Mike had written his name in the book, he was given a badge to wear on his shirt pocket.

The badge was blue with a large red “V” on it; it also had word ‘VISITOR’ printed across the top.

After clipping the badge to his shirt pocket the Sentry told him, “You can now go in,” Mike heard a loud buzzer which was followed by a loud metallic click, and then the door opened.

The Major led Mike down a long hallway with lots of doors on each side leading to other rooms, until they finally halted at a door on Mike's right with a placard that read, 'CONF. 122A.'

As Major Larson reached for the doorknob, he said, "We'll meet your fellow team members in here," the Major opened the door and they both went inside.

There were five people seated at a large table, a large white writing board was mounted on the wall and a computer terminal sat on a desk off to one side.

The Major greeted the people seated at the table, "Good afternoon," he said, as he and Mike walked over to two empty chairs at the table and sat down.

"I would like you all to meet the newest member of our team," the Major, introducing Mike, "this is Mister Michael Troff, and he'll be working on the main navigation software."

Upon seeing this young teenager seated next to Major Larson, eyebrows were raised on everyone seated, then Major Larson explains, "As you can all see, Mike is quite young, but I can assure you, he is well qualified to be here working on this project. I have personally seen some of his work last week, and it's very impressive."

Then Major Larson began introducing the people seated, "Mike, allow me to introduce you to the staff as we go around the table from the right. First, as you already have met at your home, is the head Project Engineer, Mister Gordon Oxtan. Next to him, we have Mister Richard Sherlock our Electronic Systems Engineer, and next to Mister Sherlock, we have Mister Robert Palmer, Avionics Specialist. Then we have Doctor Dianne Kosel, she'll be the one you'll be working with on the computer. She's our Computer Specialist and is here from MIT. And finally, we have Lieutenant David Kuehn--he is in charge of our Project Security here."

Major Larson paused, smiling, he looks around the table, and then he added a bit of additional information about Mike's young appearance, "As you can also see, Mister Troff is rather tall for his age. He could easily pass as a seventeen year old, but he's only fifteen."

"I'll be sixteen next month," Mike quickly adds, "and it's a pleasure to meet all of you. I hope we can work together to get Excalibur off the ground and into the air," to which a hushed remark is heard, "We have a Kid on the team."

Still, there was smiles, some forced, and nods indicating they too, will be looking forward to having him on the project.

Dr. Kosel got up from her chair and came over and shook Mike's hand, smiled and said, "I can't wait until we can go over your software. I've been looking at some of the printouts that Mister Oxtan gave me, and they look very impressive. I just couldn't believe, until you walked in here with Major Larson, that you're just a teenager."

"Yeah—well, I guess I'm stuck with being a teenager for a few more years," Mike returned with a grin, "I hope my age isn't going to be a problem, because I'm looking forward to working with you," Mike couldn't help noticing how nice she looks and wishing he was a bit older.

It was about five o'clock when Mike had finished meeting and talking with everyone, and when they were about ready to leave, Mr. Oxtan and Dr. Kosel walked up to the Major and Mike.

Dr. Kosel looked very troubled. "Major--we've got a major problem with the software for the MTCC (Main-Transmission-Control-Computer). All of the simulations we've done so far show a complete transmission failure below one hundred rpm's. Now that's approximately hundred knots true airspeed."

"This is very serious," said the Major, as he too, was now very concerned, "are you sure you haven't forgotten or left something out of the simulations?"

"I don't think so," She replied, "however, I will go back over the program and check."

"May I have a look at the results of the last simulation?" Mike asked.

Dr. Kosel looked at Mike with an expression of surprise and said, "Sure--I'll go and get the printouts."

She then went to get the simulation and program printouts, and when she returned, she went over to her chair, placed the pile of printouts on the table in front of her and sat down.

Mike went over, and sat down next to Dr. Kosel; he then went over all of the printouts with Dr. Kosel, and when Mike had finished studying the printouts, and after a discussion with Dr. Kosel and Mr. Oxtan, Mike now thought he knew what the problem might be.

"I think I may know where the problem is," Mike declared, as he looked up from the printouts, "it looks like it could be a time-speed

problem, you've seem to have overlooked it in the program. I've got a routine in my navigation program that we might be able to modify to make it work here."

Dr. Kosel was very impressed with Mike and she said glowing, "Why yes--I think you might be right, we'll have to work on it tomorrow. I'll have a computer terminal in the main computer room, all setup and ready for you."

Major Larson interrupting, "Mike, I think we should be going, Joan's probably got dinner waiting for us."

When Mike heard the Major mention dinner, he was now beginning to realize how hungry he was.

The Major ended the meeting, and then they left the conference room and walked back down the hall to locked door by the Sentry's window.

Once through the door, the Major put his ID badge back into the rack.

Mike had to turn in his badge at the small window and sign-out in that book.

Major Larson remarked, as they drove away in his car, "I see you were able to read and understand the simulation printouts, but are you sure you, Doctor Kosel and Mister Oxtan will be able to solve the problem?"

Mike was pretty sure of what the problem was and how it might be solved. "Well Sir--I think I understand what they are trying to do, and yeah, I think we might be able to solve the problem tomorrow."

Then they pulled up and parked in front of the Major's house, and went inside.

It was five-thirty that afternoon when Jeff came home with some great news. "Mom--I've got a job for the summer," He announced with excitement, as walked into the house, "and if everything works out, my new boss told me, I can continue to work part time after school this fall. I've already started working today, and have to be at work in the morning at eight. I guess I'll have to set my clock radio tonight."

"So soon--you already got yourself a job!" She exclaimed surprised!

Jeff beaming with excitement had to tell her about the rest of his good news, "That's not all, after I told him why I needed the job, he told me he'll help me with my flight school, and once I get my commercial ticket I'll be flying the company's Airplanes. Isn't that just great mom! I'll be flying

and getting paid for it. I can't wait until I tell Dad and Brian."

"That's wonderful Jeff, your Father will just be thrilled to hear about it," and then she asked, "what's the name of the company that you'll be working for?"

"It's called 'Elcor Corporation', they make special electronic systems," Jeff told her beaming, "my new boss says, his company is now working on a top secret government project. He couldn't tell me about it, but after I get my Commercial Plot License, he'll have me flying parts and electronic systems to different places around the country."

"That's just wonderful," Maria replied, feeling happy for Jeff, and then she asked out of curiosity, "So--what will you be doing now?"

Jeff all smiles and glowing, replied, "I'll be working on an assembly line, installing circuit boards into a machine."

It was almost five when Brian walked into the house and announced, "I'm home--where is everyone?"

"I'm out here in the kitchen making dinner," Maria answered back, "Jeff's in his room and your Father isn't home yet. Oh--by the way, there's a letter for you on the desk, it looks important so you better open and read it."

"We're already for graduation on Wednesday," Brian said, as he headed for the den, to get his letter from the desk.

"Where did you say that letter was?"

"It's on the desk. Oh--one thing more, Jeff's got some good news for you to hear."

"I found the letter," Brian loudly announced upon locating the letter and picking it up. "So, Jeff has some news huh. I'll see him later. I'm going to my room, to read my letter. Call me when dinner is ready."

Henry pulled into the driveway at five forty; when he gets inside the house, he puts his briefcase down, opens the entryway closet and puts his military cap on the top shelf, and then he walks into the kitchen unbuttoning his coat and loosening his tie on the way.

When he sees his wife, he says with delight, after giving her a nice peck on the cheek, "That smells good, Hon, how was your day?"

She gives him a return kiss, "Just great dear, the boys are in their rooms. They both have something to tell you, --especially Jeff. I think you'll like what he's got to tell you. Mike had called a little after one and told me he was staying at the Major's house and everything was just fine.

Oh--by the way, the lawyer that we got for Mike. He is coming here tonight, he wants to talk to us about Mike's legal rights, as the author for his computer program, so why don't you go and change out of your uniform. Dinner is about ready, and will you tell our two remaining boys?"

With a nod, Henry went to his bedroom to change out of his uniform, and then to the bathroom to get cleaned up for dinner; he then informed both Brian and Jeff dinner was ready.

Ten minutes later, Brian, Jeff, Maria and Henry were seated and eating dinner.

Jeff was the first to tell everyone about his new job; he told them that, as soon as he gets his commercial ticket, he'll be flying for his new boss.

Henry was very pleased to hear Jeff's news and told Jeff, the company he is now working for, has a very good reputation and has several government contracts.

Brian interrupting, as he was excited about the letter he had received, "I got a letter today, from the Department of Defense, it's from the Marines. I have to report to Camp Pendleton, on the second of July at o-eight-hundred, that's on a Monday. God--that's only three weeks away!"

"Well Brian--you had better get your affairs in order before you leave," Maria telling him, and then she asked, "What are you going to do with your car?"

Brian looks at Jeff, smiles and announces, "I'll let Jeff use it. He'll need wheels, now that he's got a job."

"Awesome, --thanks Brian," Jeff tells him elated with a surprised look on his face, "I'll take real good care of it."

"You had better," Brian told him, smiling and feeling good about letting his Brother use his car, "and I'm going to hold you to that promise, and you had better write to me, because I want to know how my Brother is doing as a Commercial Pilot. Boy--I'm sure going to miss flying. You know--it's going to be quite a while before I can fly again, with boot camp and all."

Jeff, with a big smug grin, said with a snicker, "Yeah--and you're going to get nice and rusty."

Brian just shook his head and slowly repeated, "Nice--and--rusty!"

When dinner was done, Jeff went to his room to study on his commercial flight lessons, and Brian, well, he went and got dressed up, got into

his car, and drove off to see Brenda; he wanted to tell her the good news that he's going to be leaving for the Marine Corps on the second of July.

Henry went into the living room to read the paper and wait for Mike's lawyer to arrive.

Maria, she preceded to clean up the dinner table and to wash the dinner dishes.

It was seven o'clock when the lawyer arrived; Henry took him into the den so they could talk.

After they had sat down, the Lawyer said to Henry, "I'm very pleased to handle Mike's legal interest's, --so let begin."

Henry asked the Lawyer how much money, Mike would be getting for his software; to which the Lawyer told Henry, he didn't really know, but Mike could be a very rich young man.

He explained to Henry that while Mike was still under age, Henry would be made executor of Mike's estate until he becomes twenty one.

Then the Lawyer had Henry and Maria sign some legal documents, and finally, the Lawyer told Henry if he had any future questions or problems, to be sure to give him a call at his office, and then he gave Henry one of his business cards.

After the Lawyer had gotten up, he shook Henry's and Maria's hand, and then said good-bye and departed.

CHAPTER 4 -- THE EXCALIBUR PROJECT

At seven o'clock Tuesday morning, Mike's alarm clock went off; Mike was already awake, because today he was going to begin working on the Excalibur Project and just couldn't wait to get started.

"MIKE ARE YOU AWAKE," Mrs. Larson called, "GET UP, BREAKFAST IS READY. THE MAJOR IS ALREADY HERE."

Mike of course was already dressed when she called, and then he hurried into the kitchen and sat down.

"What?" Mike asked, as he sat there looking at both Major Larson and his Wife staring back at him with surprise expressions on their faces.

"Where's breakfast I'm starved?"

Major Larson and his wife started laughing, and then Joan went to get a bowl of hot cereal for Mike.

"What's so funny?" Mike asked, with a quizzical expression.

"Why--it's you," Major Larson replied, after he stopped laughing, "I never saw anyone so excited and worked up as you are this morning. I thought you didn't care about aviation."

Mike started to blush, and while looking at his cereal he said, **"I guess I don't hate aviation. I just don't care that much about Airplanes."**

Major Larson looked at Mike and solemnly said, **"Excalibur is an Airplane--isn't it?"**

"Yeah--but it's different," Mike replied, kind of on a spot, "it can take off and land vertically, you told me it could!"

"Yes--I guess I did, and I suppose someday you'll want to learn to fly it?"

Mike with wide-eyed enthusiasm snapped back, **"You bet--as soon as it becomes operational."**

Then Major Larson in that solemn tone said, **"First--you and your team must get it to fly. Then maybe--we'll see about flight lessons."**

"Don't you worry," Mike told him, as he was now very serious, "we'll get Excalibur into the air by the end of next week."

"Good!" Major Larson exclaimed, "The first real dead line that I've had in a long while. I'm going to take that as a promise."

Then the Major looked at Mike and with a solemn and serious expression on his face and tells him, **"So you had better work real hard."**

“We’ll have Excalibur flying by the end of next week,” Mike firmly announced with a firm nod and looking very serious.

“Well then, hurry up and finish your breakfast,” commanded Major Larson, turning jovial again, “so we can be off to work, and you can meet your deadline.”

After they had finished eating breakfast, Mike and Major Larson got into the Major’s car and drove over to the large blue and gray concrete building; the one that had the sign with the sword painted on it.

Major Larson pulled up to the building and parked the car in one of the stalls that had a sign with the words, ‘RESERVED FOR OPERATIONS COMMANDER’, painted on it.

They got out of the car, Mike and Major Larson put on their lab coats and went inside.

Once inside, Mike had to write his name in that book again, and then he was given that same ID badge with the large red ‘V’ on it, because his ID badge wasn’t in the badge rack yet; Mike was informed, by the Sentry at the small window, his ID badge would be there tomorrow, so he wouldn’t need to wear the one with the large red ‘V’ anymore.

After going through the locked door, they again walked down the long hallway with all the doors.

When they arrived at the door with the plaque that read, ‘CONF. 122A’, they opened the door and walked inside; there sitting around the table in their lab coats talking, was the rest of the Excalibur staff.

Both Major Larson and Mike sat down at the table, and then looking at everyone the Major said, “Good morning. This morning, Mister Troff here, has informed me, by the end of next week, Excalibur will be operational,” everyone had a surprised expressions on their face.

“Well--if Mike and Doctor Kosel can solve the transmission problem,” said Mr. Oxtan optimistically, “I can see no other reason at this time, why we can’t meet his deadline.”

“Now it’s all up to you and Doctor Kosel,” declared Major Larson, as he looked at Mike.

Mike was now looking over at Dr. Kosel, hoping she was ready to get started; She was smiling as she announced, “I’ve got a work station for Mike, all set up next to mine in the main computer room.”

“Well Mike, shall we go and get started,” Dr. Kosel eyeing Mike, her

smile was gone and a serious expression replaced it, “we have a lot of work to do, to meet that deadline of yours.”

“Ok--I’m ready, so let’s go,” Mike told her as he matched her expression and hoped his excitement didn’t show; Mike and Dr. Kosel then got up and left the conference room.

They walked down that same hallway until they got to a door with a plaque that read, ‘COMPUTER MAINFRAME ROOM’.

“This is where we are going to work,” Dr. Kosel told him, as she opened the door to the computer mainframe room and they walked in; inside, Mike saw several rows of very large 3D laser drives, a couple of plasma line-printers, and the main CPU, which was housed in a huge metal cabinet that went from floor to ceiling.

The room was being cooled by cold air coming from large vents in the ceiling, and was very brightly lit.

Mike hoped he’d didn’t have to work in here; otherwise, he’d need his winter coat and mitts, but to his relief, they kept walking until they got to the other end of the room, where there was another door.

Dr. Kosel opened this door and they walked into a small room, and to Mike’s delight, this room was much warmer and had two computer terminals at one end; on the far wall a white board was mounted, with several marker pens of different colors laying in its tray, next to a large table with six chairs.

“Well Mike--here’s where we are going to work,” Dr. Kosel told him good naturedly, “at which terminal do you want to work at?”

“The one on the right should be Ok,” Mike replied, eyeing the terminal on the right.

“Ok then--the one on the left is mine, now make yourself at home while I go and get a printout of your navigation program, and I’ll see you in a little bit,” she departed through the door they had just come in, and Mike sat down at his new terminal and got comfortable.

The video display in front of him displayed, ‘ENTER PASSWORD’ in big green letters and just below, and there was a blinking white cursor next to a small red arrow.

Mike said, to himself, “Doctor Kosel didn’t say anything about needing a password.”

Mike started to enter different words, to which he always got the same results, ‘**ILLEGAL ENTRY**’ in big bright red letters, followed by that same blinking cursor next to the arrow.”

Mike then had an inspiration, “I wonder--,” he said aloud to himself, “it couldn’t be so simple, as to be my name?”

Then Mike entered his name and it worked; now the screen displayed, ‘**WELCOME TO EXCALIBUR, MR. TROFF**’ in big bright blue letters and below, a sword with wings.

Mike laughed and said, “How stupid--they call this security!”

When Dr. Kosel came back into the room, she said, “I forgot to tell you the password...” Pausing in mid-sentence when she saw the welcome message on the screen, and then finishing the sentence slowly with a surprised expression, “so you can use the terminal,” and then she asked, “How did you figure out the password so quickly? You must really be good with computers.”

“It wasn’t all that hard,” replied a grinning Mike, “anyone could’ve figured it out--so much for your security. Now let’s take a look at that time-speed routine of mine and see if we can modify it to work in Excalibur.”

They both worked on the problem all day, trying different things as they worked out problems on the white board, and then putting the problem into the computer to see if it would work; if it didn’t, they would go back to the white board, and then back to the computer terminal again.

They did this all day until Mike hit on a possible solution, but it was getting late and time to quit for the day, tomorrow they will try the simulation again.

Mike and Dr. Kosel met Major Larson at the badge rack on their way out. “Major, I think we may be close to solving the transmission problem. Mike’s come up with a routine that just might work. Tomorrow we’re going to try another simulation, and I think maybe this time it just might work. Major--I don’t know how you found this young man, but you can credit him for putting life back into Excalibur.”

Major Larson smiled, as he looked at Mike. “Ah’ yes--he sure is a find and what if I told you, he doesn’t like Airplanes and couldn’t give a hoot about aviation.”

Mike was now looking a little embarrassed, as he stood there looking at the floor.

Dr. Kosel was shocked, at what she heard and declared, "I just can't believe it. He's so deeply involved in aviation I just can't believe he doesn't like it. I don't know of anyone who spends so much time doing something and not liking it, if you ask me, he's pulling your leg--five gets you ten, he'll be flying before he's seventeen."

Major Larson eyes Mike, smiles, and reiterates, "Yes--I agree--he'll be flying before he's seventeen."

Dr. Kosel pats Mike on the his back, as they walked out of the building.

After Mike had gotten into the car, Major Larson backs out and starts to drive away, and as they leave, Mike waves good-bye to Dr. Kosel and she waves back; on the way home, Mike is thinking about his first day with Dr. Kosel.

It was a long first day and he was tired and very hungry, because today, he and Dr. Kosel may have written the program that will let Excalibur fly for the first time.

Mike was up bright and early the next morning; Mrs. Larson didn't even have to call him.

"How come you're up so early?" She asked him, as he entered the kitchen to eat breakfast.

"Today is already Wednesday, and I've only got eight days left to get Excalibur to fly," Mike told her.

After Mike and Major Larson had breakfast, they got into the Major's car and drove to work; Dr. Kosel was already at her terminal when he walked into the room.

"Good morning," was her greeting as Mike entered, "are you ready to run the simulation today? I'm been checking out a few things and it really looks good. I think today it will work."

"Well then--what are we waiting for, let's give it a try," Mike replied with confidence, "let's see if it'll run this time."

And so, they started up the simulation, and they just couldn't believe the results, it ran far better than they had it designed for; now, with this program in Excalibur's computer it would be far more superior than any one had ever imagined.

Dr. Kosel was now very excited and said, "Let's get the rest of the staff together in the conference room, so we can break the news to them,"

and then she walked out of the room to find Major Larson, so he can scheduled a staff meeting, for that afternoon in the conference room.

Later that afternoon, Dr. Kosel and Mike were seated at the table, discussing the program, when the rest of the staff came in and sat down.

Dr. Kosel said, as she and Mike were smiling, “We have some very good news. We have the results of our latest run and it was a complete success, the results are beyond our wildest dreams, here’s the printouts,” She and Mike got up and pass out copies to each person.

After they sit back down, she says, praising Mike, “Thanks to Mike and his program, we’ve now got a fantastic aircraft.”

“GREAT!” Mr. Oxtan loudly exclaimed in astonishment.

“We’ll have the program this very afternoon, downloaded into Excalibur’s computer memory. Tomorrow we’ll test fly her for the first time!” Major Larson exclaimed elated, as he looked Mike, “Well Mike, you have kept your deadline, but so soon! I thought, it would have been this time next week.”

“The aircraft hasn’t flown yet, only the software,” Mike reminding them with a hint of uncertainty, “so--until the software is down-loaded into Excalibur and it is flying, only then can we say we have met the deadline.”

Dr. Kosel said, eyeing Mike her smile had vanished, “Mike--what are you doing--raining on my parade?”

Mike looked back at her and shrugged as everyone looked on chuckling.

“Yes--you’re right,” Major Larson agreeing, “Tomorrow we’ll know if Excalibur will in fact fly.”

It was almost nine on Wednesday morning, when Brian got up and went to the kitchen to eat breakfast.

“Well--you finally got up,” Maria said to him, as he entered the kitchen, “Jeff went to work at seven. He told me, his boss would let him off for the afternoon, so he could be at your graduation and your Father has the afternoon off too, he should be home around eleven.”

Brian sighed and said, “Well--I guess everything is ready. I’ve got one final practice session today, and it’s at ten, so I’ve got to eat and run.”

Then Brian sat down and ate breakfast; after he had finished eating, he got up, walked out of the house and drove off to School in his car, because this will be Brian’s last graduation practice before he graduates this afternoon.

Later that morning, both Jeff and Henry were home before eleven-fifteen and Maria made them lunch; after they had eaten, they got ready to go to Brian's graduation.

Maria told Henry that Brian would meet them at the school's athletic field at noon.

Now, when Brian had left that morning for his final practice, he had taken his suit and gown with him, because he wouldn't have time after practice to go home and change; he would change into his suit and gown at the school.

That afternoon everyone was at Brian's graduation, except Mike; his Brother Jeff, and his Father and Mother, they were all here at his graduation; also at his graduation today, were both of his Uncles and Aunts, and of course, his two Grandfathers and Grandmothers, they all came from great distances just to be here to see him graduate today.

It was such a nice sunny day when the ceremony started at two o'clock.

The graduation ceremony had taken about two hours before it had finally ended.

Brian's class was now through High School and their futures now lay ahead of them to pursue.

Brian's future was already laid out for him, and he was looking forward to it; for him, it was becoming a Marine Fighter Pilot.

It was nine thirty on Thursday morning, when Mike, Dr. Kosel, and Major Larson entered the hangar, where Excalibur was located.

Mike was wearing the jump suit with his name and he finally got his own ID badge to wear.

There before him was Excalibur, it was so sleek painted in black with a light gray underbelly, Mike never saw anything like it in his life and he just stood there and admired it; Mike just knew it had to fly and someday he was going to learn to fly it.

Now Excalibur was the sleekest looking aircraft, Mike has ever seen; it had two stubby wings on each side, in fact, they were so small he didn't see how they worked.

Mr. Oxtan later explained they only provided aerodynamic lift when Excalibur was flying at or above Mach one, which was made possible by the jet engine in the end of the fuselage.

At the end of the tail section, there were two small round openings on each side of the fuselage; these were two small jets, that replaced the tail rotor.

Mr. Oxton explained to Mike, the amount of propulsion they produce was determined by the foot pedals in the cockpit, the peddle on the left controlled the left jet, and the peddle on the right controlled the right jet.

Mr. Oxton went on to explain that the amount of propulsion was directly proportional to how far the pedals were depressed.

Excalibur also had three small wheels that retracted into the fuselage, and two horizontal stabilizer fins mounted on both sides of the tail section, just forward of the small jet openings.

On the top of Excalibur was the main rotor, it was comprised of two very large blades, because Excalibur was a super Helicopter; it was the only Helicopter capable of flying at or above Mach one in the world.

Mr. Oxton explained to Mike, that with its computer controlled main transmission, it could slow its main rotor speed so the blades wouldn't stall when Excalibur went Mach one; plus those small wings also provided some lift at Mach one as well.

"Now if your program does its job at controlling the main transmission," Mr. Oxton said to Mike, "then we will have an operational aircraft."

Before all of the cables were disconnected, Mike and Dr. Kosel made several last minute checks; when they were both satisfied that everything was ready, they informed Mr. Oxton, that everything seems to be in order and they were ready to see if Excalibur could fly.

Excalibur was then disconnected from all the computers, test equipment, rolled out of its hangar and made ready for its first flight.

The Test Pilot was there and waiting; Major Larson introduced him to Mike. "Mike, this is Major Kitzman, and he'll be the one to test fly Excalibur."

Mike shakes his hand saying, with some envy, "I sure wished that I was the one flying Excalibur today. Major Kitzman--be sure that you take good care of Excalibur."

"Don't worry Kid--I'll take good care of your aircraft," said the Major with a sarcastic chuckle.

Mike didn't like the way that Test Pilot answered, it made him feel like a little kid, but he felt very confident the program was going to work,

and he knew Excalibur would come through with flying colors.

Major Kitzman walked over, got into Excalibur, put on his helmet and started up Excalibur; its jet engine made a whining sound as it revved up.

Major Kitzman said, on the radio, “All of the gauges are normal and lights are green. The aircraft is running very smooth, like nothing I’ve ever flown before,” he then asked to continue with the run up checks.

Mr. Oxtan instructed Major Kitzman, “Engage the main rotor system and the computer, then using the computer, bring the rotor system up slowly and to report anything unusual.”

Major Kitzman engaged the main rotor and the transmission computer, the main rotor slowly began to turn, and then it begin to pick up speed until it was just a blur and making a buzzing sound as it spun.

Major Kitzman said on the radio, “Everything is still Ok, and this is one smooth aircraft and I’m hoping that it would remain so, once she becomes airborne.”

Mr. Oxtan commands, “It’s now time to bring all of Excalibur’s systems up to takeoff conditions, hold, and then report back.”

Major Kitzman proceeds to bring up all systems to takeoff status; the aircraft now made a loud buzz and whine; Major Kitzman again reported that everything was still indicating green and Ok.

Mr. Oxtan looks at Dr. Kosel and Mike; Dr. Kosel and Mike look at each other, they smile and nod the go ahead to Mr. Oxtan.

Then Mr. Oxtan informed Major Kitzman to bring Excalibur up off the ground, and hold it at a five-foot hover.

Then Major Kitzman very slowly made Excalibur fly and it slowly rose and left the earth.

When Excalibur was about five feet in the air it stopped and hung suspended there, not moving up, down or sideways.

Major Larson shouting to Mike over the noise, as he pointed to Excalibur, “See how she can takeoff vertically, she can also land the same way.”

Mike was now very excited, because Excalibur was now flying; Mike’s and Dr. Kosel’s program was now doing its job.

Major Kitzman informed them on the radio, that everything was still in the green and asked if he could do some very basic maneuvers.

Mr. Oxtan agreed, but cautioned him to take it slowly and report anything unusual.

Major Kitzman very slowly turned Excalibur around and pointed it east, and then very slowly, he flew Excalibur across the tarmac to an area that was marked off; Major Kitzman then flew basic hover patterns, all the while reporting back, telling everyone that everything was just fine and this was one incredible aircraft.

Major Kitzman remarked on the radio, “This aircraft handles like a dream. Like nothing I’ve ever flown before.”

After several minutes of flying basic hover patterns, Major Kitzman asked if he could take her up and fly some basic flight patterns; Mr. Oxtan again consenting, but with caution on keeping the airspeed down until the transmission computer was more fully tested.

Major Kitzman then took off, went up to about two thousand feet, and flew around the area, and as he flew, Major Kitzman kept in constant radio contact with Mr. Oxtan on the ground.

For the rest of the forenoon, and again that afternoon, they all watched and listened to his radio reports, as Major Kitzman flew Excalibur, and for that entire day, Excalibur performed just beautifully.

After Major Kitzman had finished flying Excalibur, and had parked it back in its hangar, they all had a meeting back at the big concrete building, where they all agreed, everything today went very good; Excalibur’s maiden flight was a complete success and now, they can proceed with further flight testing.

As they were leaving for the day, Major Larson asked, “Well Mike, what do you think of Helicopters, now that you’ve seen Excalibur?”

“Awesome--they’re really cool and a whole lot better than an Airplane. Now that’s my type of aircraft.”

“How would you like to learn some things about Helicopters and how they fly?” Major Larson asked with a twinkle in his eye, “I can get you some military manuals.”

“Yeah--that would be cool,” Mike replying with fascination, as he now wanted to learn all about them.

Mike had missed a couple phone calls home, when he and Lieutenant Kuehn went up into the Sierra Madre Mountains to camp.

Lieutenant Kuehn taught Mike basic woodsman skills, so he could

survive in the wilderness by himself.

Mike was now getting to be very good at living in the wilderness; he enjoyed hunting, fishing, and tracking animals; he could now read a few signs of nature.

Mike also loved animals and the animals seemed to sense it too.

Now one evening, when Lieutenant Kuehn returned to their camp, he found Mike feeding and playing with a large Wolf.

Now when Lieutenant Kuehn saw this, he became very nervous and said, "Mike--do you know what you're playing with?"

"Sure do," Mike replied, smiling at the Lieutenant, "what do you think of my friend Kelso?"

"Mike! That is not a dog you're playing with!"

As the large wolf was eyeing the very nervous Lieutenant, Lieutenant Kuehn exclaimed, "So--very slowly get up and move over here. I've got a gun, so if it attempts to attack I can defend us."

"Lieutenant--relax--I know what I'm petting," Mike told him giggling while petting the large animal, "its a Wolf, and he isn't going to attack anyone, so put that gun down, because it makes me nervous as well as Mister Kelso."

The Wolf now looked at Mike, and Mike smiled back at the Wolf, and then Mike patted its head; the Wolf, just like a large Dog, licked Mike's hand.

And when the Wolf turned and went back into the forest, Mike said pointedly, while still looking in the direction where the Wolf had disappeared, "See Lieutenant, I have nothing to fear in the wilderness. I've got friends here--like Mister Kelso."

"Well I'll be," remarked Lieutenant Kuehn with surprise, "I wouldn't have believed it, if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, no one back at the base is going to believe this. Yes Mike--I do believe you can live in the wilderness and now I don't have to worry about you being out here anymore, because like you've said, you've got friends here to take care of you."

The second day of July came and everyone was at the Bus Station to see Brian off to the Marines.

Brian told Brenda, he'll be home on leave in about ninety days after he finishes Booth Camp.

Brian also asked if everyone would write to him; he told them he would write back, and then it was time to board the Bus.

They all waved to him as the Bus pulled away and drove off; Brian was now in the Marines and on his way to Booth Camp.

The next week, Jeff went for his check-ride to obtain his Commercial Pilot License, which he easily passed.

It was later in July when Mike turned sixteen and all of the Excalibur team gave him a surprise party in the hangar; there even was a cake with candles on it.

Mike had to make a wish and blow them out, which he easily did.

“Well--Mike, what did you wish for?” Major Kitzman asking.

“I wished I could someday, when Excalibur becomes fully operational, learn to fly her.”

“Someday your wish just might be granted,” Major Larson solemnly told Mike, “because when Excalibur finally becomes fully operational, there’s going to be a great need for Pilots to fly her. Not just any Pilots, but specially trained Pilots. Pilots that will be able to take her to her limits. Pilots to take her into combat and bring her back in one piece, and Mike--in a few years you could be one of those Pilots.”

It was after another month had passed, when Jeff went and took the test for his instrument rating, which he again easily passed.

Then Jeff’s boss, took him off the assembly line and assigned him to the companies aviation section, along with company Pilots, Jim Pitman and Mark Dittmar.

Jeff would now be flying with Mark most of the time, because Mark was the company’s senior large multiengine jet transport Pilot, and had the most hours logged in the company’s large commercial jet transports; Mark was also a certified flight instructor, and so, it was going to be Mark, who will be teaching Jeff how to fly those large jets, besides, they needed Jeff as another Pilot to help Jim and Mark fly the company’s large aircraft, so now, Jeff must get his multiengine rating.

For the next two months, Jeff flew as Co-Pilot with Mark, taking multiengine flight lessons until he had enough hours logged, so he could take his test for the multiengine rating.

As Jeff flew with Mark, learning all about how to fly the heavies, as Mark affectionately call them, he also began to like these big jets and couldn’t wait for the next flight.

For the rest of that summer, Mike was very busy testing all of Excalibur's systems, which was going great.

The computer worked just fine and Excalibur had gone to Mach one-point-two, a lot faster than anybody had thought it could; Excalibur also performed some simple aerobatic flight maneuvers, like rolls, loops, and spins.

With August almost gone and summer ending, school was again just round the corner.

Jeff thought of all the things he had accomplish this summer; he remembered the sheer fun he had, flying those large jet aircraft with Jim and Mark, and now he had found the type of aircraft he liked to fly.

During the last week in August, Mark explained to his boss that Jeff seems to have a natural feel for flying the heavies; Mark asked his boss, if Jeff could remain on the staff, and if Jeff could maybe work after school and do some flying on weekends.

Later that week, after Jeff had returned from a flight, his boss called him into his office, where he asked Jeff if he would like to stay with the company and work part time after school and maybe a few Saturdays.

Jeff was elated when he heard this and said, glowing, "Yes sir, I would very much like to continue to fly for this company."

"There's one condition to your continued employment," His boss told him, "and that is, you must maintain at least a 'B' average in school."

Jeff then told him, "I need an 'A' average, because I've been thinking of maybe going to the Air Force Academy when I graduate next spring. I need a high grade point average to get the appointment."

His boss was very pleased to hear that, and said, "If there's anything I could do to help, just let me know."

CHAPTER 5 -- THE DEMO

At 1:15 PM on the last Saturday in August, Mike and Major Larson pulled up in front of Mike's house; Jeff and Henry came out of the house to greet them.

"Well--little Brother, have you gotten Excalibur to fly yet?" Jeff asked, as Mike gets out of the car and gets his bags from the back seat.

"You bet--can't tell you too much yet," Mike teasing, "top secret you know--you'll hear more about it in about two months."

"Come on, surly, there must be something you can tell me that isn't top secret?" Jeff asks, hoping to extract a tidbit of information.

Mike looks over to Major Larson, who had just gotten out of the car, gives him a nod and smiles back as he walks over to join him.

Mike winks at Jeff, teasing like, and with his finger he motions for Jeff and his Father to come closer. "Well--I can tell you both this, without getting into trouble."

Mike now speaking in a hushed tone, "You should see her--she's just about the most beautiful thing in this whole world, and she can take out an F30."

Jeff and Henry just stood there in shock with their mouths open.

Henry regaining his composure exclaimed, "Mike--did I hear you right! Excalibur can take out an F30 in combat!"

"Shhhh--yeah--that's what I just said," Mike replied in a whisper, nodding, "Excalibur has taken out an F30--blew it clear out of the sky."

"The F30 was setup as a drone and flown from the ground by a computer," Major Larson quickly adding to keep everything truthful, "an F30 Fighter Pilot from the fighter school at Miramar, was at the computer's flight controls," Jeff and Henry just couldn't believe what they heard.

Major Larson reassures them, as they walk up the sidewalk to the house, "Don't you worry about the F30 becoming obsolete, I can't tell you too much right now. You'll just have to wait until October, when there'll be a demonstration and the spec's will be made available to you."

When they were back inside the house, Maria remarked to Mike, "My word, you sure have grown!"

Mike just smiled and asked, "Mom--I'm hungry, when's dinner?"

"Why--it's only one thirty--didn't you two stop for lunch?"

“No--Major Larson and I decided to wait until I got home to eat.”

Maria was surprised to hear they haven't eaten and said, “My goodness, the both of you must be starved. I'll go and get you both something to eat. Mike--in the meantime, why don't you go to your room and unpack your bags, by the time you're finished I'll have something for you and the Major to eat,” Mike nods and goes to his room to unpack his bags.

His room sure looked good, because he was glad to be home again, and tonight, he'll be looking forward to sleeping in his own bed.

After Mike had finished unpacking his things, he went to the kitchen to have something to eat, and as Mike was entering the kitchen, he heard his Father and Major Larson talking about him, and then Jeff walks into the kitchen.

Maria had made hamburgers and fries, and for dessert, she cut a couple slices of apple pie and put some ice cream on it.

After the Major had finished eating, he thanked Mrs. Troff for the lunch and told them he must be heading on back to Edwards, so he would be home before it gets too late; he then got up and shook Henry's and Jeff's hand and informed Mike, he can come to Edwards at any time.

“Just call me before you leave, so I can inform security that you're coming,” He told Mike, and then the Major and the Troff's walk out to his car, he gets in, says good-bye, waves, and drives off.

“I'm sure going to miss all the excitement that I had at Edwards,” Mike lamenting, as the Major's car disappeared from view, “but I'm sure glad to be back home again.”

It was the final Friday before Labor Day, and the end of summer vacation for the boys.

It was raining outside, so everyone was indoors catching up on all of the past summers activities; Maria was in the den writing a letter to Brian, telling him, Mike was home from Edwards.

Mike, Jeff and Henry were sitting in the living room, watching a video on TV of Brian's graduation last spring.

“It sure is going to be hard, getting used to Brian being a Marine and not being around,” Mike remarking with some longing for Brian.

“I hear you're now a transport Pilot, and at your age,” Mike said jokingly looking at Jeff, and then he smiled at his Father and said sarcastically with a snicker, “how can a seventeen year old be flying such large

aircraft? God--he must be a Natural Born Pilot.”

“Don’t make fun of your Brother’s accomplishments,” Henry scolding, “because, I’m very proud of him. If he really likes flying those large aircraft--well--the airlines are always looking for young Pilots to replace their retiring ones. When Jeff graduates next spring and wants to go on work for the airlines, he’s got my blessing.”

“Well Dad, I sure do like flying those large multiengine aircraft,” Jeff tells him with a sparkle in his eye, “why—they’re so big and roomy, you can get up and go for a stroll. I’d like to see you do that in a fighter, and like a Semi on the highway you’re king of the road, everybody gets out of your way, and anyway, I’m still taking flight lessons in those heavies. I’ve only been flying as a Co-Pilot, but as soon as I get my multiengine rating I’m going for an Air Transport Pilot License.”

“Well Dad--if Jeff follows Brian into the military next spring after grad, It looks like we might be having an Air Force Bomber Pilot in the family.”

“Yeah--Stealth B80 Bombers, that’s for me,” Jeff announced with elation; Mike and Henry looked at each other in disbelief.

“Jeff--are you seriously thinking of entering the Air Force Academy after you graduate next spring?” His Father asked in astonishment.

“Well Dad--I wasn’t going to say anything until the end of school next fall, but since you asked...” Jeff began with some uneasiness, and then hesitating for a moment, because he didn’t know how his Father would take, what he was about to tell him.

“Yes--I’ve been doing a lot of thinking, and ever since Brian went into the Marines, I thought I would like to enter the Military too, but I just couldn’t decide on which branch to join. That is, until I started working over at Elcor and started flying those large transport jets with Jim and Mark. You see Dad, both Jim and Mark are Air Force Reserve Pilots, and they fly B80 Stealth Bombers out of McClellan two weekends a month. Jim told me, if I really liked to fly large aircraft, I should think about the Air Force Academy. Dad--I’ve been doing just that, thinking about it a lot--all Summer, and the more I thought about it, the more I knew--this is what I wanted more than anything else in this world. Dad--I want to enter the Air Force Academy after I graduate next spring.”

Henry excitedly called to Maria, “Hon--come in here, Jeff has something to tell you.”

Maria walks into the living room, wondering what was so important, “Jeff--have you’ve got something you want to tell me?”

Henry, Mike and Jeff were now all smiles.

“Yes Mom--I’ve got some great news for you,” Jeff announces with excitement, “I’m thinking of entering the Air Force Academy next summer, that’s if I can get an appointment.”

Maria was now very surprised with a worried expression, and looking at Henry, She exclaimed, “My god--now we’ll have two Sons in the military! With another war on the horizon. Oh Henry--we may lose them both!”

“It’ll be all right dear, because it going be at least four years before Jeff will see any action,” Henry reassuring her, “that’s if there is another war, and anyway, I’m sure when that time comes, he will make us real proud.”

“Yeah--don’t worry Mom,” Jeff reassures her, “like Dad had said, I’m going to be in school for four years at the Air Force Academy, before I’ll see any kind of combat. Anyway, I don’t plan on dying just yet, because there are all those big Jets, just waiting for me to fly em’.”

“Well Mike--tell us--when did you get your Private Pilot License?” Henry asking, his smile is gone and with a straight face, he looks at Mike. Mike was now looking a little stunned, as he didn’t know what to say.

How could he tell them he didn’t have a Pilot License; he had to say something, but what?

They were now all looking at him and expecting an answer.

“C’mon Mike--tell us about all those awesome Airplanes they let you fly?” Jeff asking impatiently with glowing eyes, waiting for Mike to answer.

Mike was now really starting to sweat, as he slowly replied, “The only aircraft I got close to was Excalibur, and I didn’t fly it.”

His family was quite shocked and a little confused, to say the least!

Henry asked with shock and disappointment, “Mike--are you telling us you still can’t fly?”

Mike was now really sweating, as he softly replied, “Yeah--I don’t have a Pilot’s License and I can’t fly.”

“I don’t believe it--with all those aircraft around and you never got close to one,” Jeff declared with surprise, and then boasting, “hell--I would’ve found some way to get close to one of em’.”

“With all the security, I wasn’t allowed to get close to other aircraft,” Mike weakly tried to explain, “The only aircraft that I was allowed to get close to and touch, was Excalibur.”

“I can understand what you are saying about not being able to get close to any military aircraft,” Henry responding, and then his voice got harsh and firm with a hint of anger, “however--Major Larson had said he could arrange for you to take flight lessons so you could learn to fly. So, why didn’t you take the opportunity and get your Private Pilot License?”

Mike tried to give a good excuse, as he was now on that preverbal hook again, but good this time, “Well Dad--I didn’t have time, because I was working on Excalibur.”

Mike was now hoping his answer would again satisfy his Father, however, Mike’s Dad just wasn’t satisfied and he was showing signs of becoming very angry with Mike, because this time, Henry was not going to accept Mike’s explanation.

“I’m not accepting that answer!” Henry harshly told him.

Then, in a very angry tone of voice, Henry said, “You had plenty of spare time. You never even ask Major Larson if you could take flight lessons. I know, because while you were unpacking your bags last Saturday, I had a long talk with him, to see if you had ask him to teach you to fly. Major Larson told me, you had never mentioned flight training to him. Although you seemed to have found the time to go camping and hiking in the mountains, so--while you, Jeff and your Mother are shopping for school supplies tomorrow, I’m going to set up an appointment for you to take flight lessons at the airport, then we’ll talk about it some more tomorrow evening.”

Mike now felt totally trapped, as now there was no way to get out of taking flight lessons.

“Maybe it won’t be so bad and I’ll like it,” Mike thought, “Major Larson and Doctor Kosel did say, I would be flying by my seventeenth birthday.”

On Saturday, Maria and the two boys went shopping for school clothes and supplies; Colonel Troff went to the local airport to make an appointment for Mike to take flight lessons.

That evening, Henry informed Mike that his first flying lesson will start next Saturday; ground school will start right after the first day of school on Tuesday, and both will each last for about an hour.

Labor Day came and went, and Tuesday morning arrived very quickly; it was the first day of the new school year, and both Mike and Jeff went to school in Brian's car, because Brian was letting Jeff use it while he's in the Marines.

After school, Jeff dropped Mike off at the airport, to attend his first hour of flight school.

As Mike was about to get out of the car, Jeff told him that after the flight lessons, Mr. Winslow, his flight instructor, will take him home.

Mike sat back down complaining, "Oh that's just great! Tomorrow, I'll ride my bike, like--it's only three miles."

"I don't think so," Jeff firmly told him, "I'll drop you off after school and you'll ride home with Mister Winslow. Dad has it all arranged. He's mad enough at you right now, so don't make it worse."

"Yeah--and like what's he going to do--lock me in my room?"

"He might."

"Great--then I don't have to learn to fly," Mike barked very upset.

"I'm afraid you'll still have to take flight lessons, but he just might take away your computer or that stupid dirt bike."

"I'm now sixteen--old enough to fly an Airplane and drive a Car and I still get treated like a little kid," Mike groaned, now feeling very irate, "you all think because I'm the youngest in this family that I'm still a little kid. Look at me--do I look like a little kid? Don't you all know I'm now grown up?"

"No--you don't look like a little kid, and yes, I do believe you have grown up," Jeff said matter-of-factly with a chuckle, and then he reached over to his Brother and messed up his hair. "I'll talk to Dad tonight and see if maybe he'll let you use your bicycle."

Mike combed his messed up hair, got out of the car and went into the operations building, and then Jeff drove off to his job at Elcor.

That evening, Jeff talked to Henry and explained to him that Mike was sixteen, and didn't need a baby sitter.

Jeff asked Henry if it would be all right to let Mike ride his bicycle to school, and then to the airport and back; Henry agreed, and told Jeff to tell Mike, it would be all right for him to use his bicycle.

On October twelfth, Jeff turned eighteen, and then he went out and bought himself a car with the earnings from his job at Elcor.

“Since you’ve got your driver’s license last week,” Jeff said to Mike, as he handed the keys to Brian’s car to Him, “you can use Brian’s car to drive to school and to the airport.”

“Awesome--thanks Jeff, and I will take good care of it,” Mike says glowing with delight.

“You had better, or Brian is going to kill you when he comes home on leave next Saturday,” Jeff told him.

Mike used Brian’s car for the rest of the week; on Saturday, everyone was at the Bus Station to meet Brian.

When Brian got off the Bus, he was in his Marine uniform.

Maria was the first to greet him, and she hugged and kissed him.

Both Jeff and Mike shook his hand and told him they had missed him too, then they asked him how long he’s got before he has to leave for flight school; Brian told them he’s only got a week, after which, he has to report to the Miramar Naval Air Training Station at San Diego, for flight training.

“I guess I’m now going to have to call you Sir,” Brian remarked looking at his Father.

“Finally--after all these years,” Henry lamented with a fiendish grin, “it takes the Marine Corps to get Brian to call me Sir.”

Everyone started to laugh with Jeff laughing the loudest and the hardest.

“Just you wait until next year when you get into the Air Force, and then we’ll see how much laughing you’ll do,” Henry teasing, eyeing Jeff with furrowed brow and a devilish grin;” Jeff immediately stopped laughing, his face took on a somber and worried look.

Brian asked, looking at Jeff, “What’s all this I’ve been hearing about you flying those big heavy transport jets? And then planning on going to the Air Force Academy next spring after grad.”

“That’s right,” Mike piping up, “Jeff’s in love with those big jets. He wants to be a Bomber Pilot, you know--Stealth B80’s.”

“I don’t know if I’m all that much in love with em’,” Jeff says, bashfully looking down, and then with a gleam in his eye he said grinning, “but I sure do enjoy flying em’,” then turning solemn, he told them, “and yes--I’m thinking about the Air Force Academy next year, that’s if I can get an appointment. God--I really do want to learn to fly those Stealth B80 Bombers.”

“Jeff—I’m sure you’ll get your appointment,” Brian reassuring him, “you’ve always been good in school with an ‘A’ plus average, so I don’t see any reason why you shouldn’t get it,” then they all got into Henry’s car and drove home.

When they were all inside the house, Brian said, “I hear Jeff’s went and bought himself a car, and Mike’s now driving mine.”

Brian turns to Mike and asks, “Well little Brother--how’s my car? I hope you didn’t put any dents in it. I need my keys back, I wanta’ to go and see Brenda.”

“No--I didn’t put any dents in your car,” Mike snapped, “and here’s your keys,” Mike tossing the keys over to Brian.

“Thanks little Brother. Boy--I sure can’t believe you can now drive,” Brian remarked, after catching the keys, and then he tries to mess up Mike’s hair.

Mike ducks away from Brian’s fingers, while responding gruffly as he was now starting to get piqued, “Thanks for the loan--big Brother. Why does everyone in this house still think I’m a little kid? I’m now sixteen and all grown up,” and stomps out of the room and heads to his bedroom looking very upset.

“What’s wrong with Mike?” Brian asks, looking very confused, “did I say something wrong?”

“I think, Mike’s at that point in his life where he’s very sensitive about how he’s treated,” Henry explaining, “I guess he doesn’t like being called little Brother and anything to do with being childlike, and for heaven sakes don’t call him the family baby, he just might fall off and slug you. So try and remember to treat him like a man, after all--he really is grown up now,” Brian and Jeff both nod.

Brian went to his room to change clothes, and after he had changed into his civilian clothes, he drove over to see Brenda.

Both Mike and Jeff had Friday off, so they could go to Edwards, because on Saturday they were going to see a Demonstration of Excalibur.

Henry was also going to examine Excalibur’s specifications, and of course, Mike was very excited about being able to see Excalibur again.

On Saturday, the whole family was seated in the reviewing stand to see Excalibur perform.

When Excalibur flew by for the first time, Jeff, Brian and Henry all

exclaimed, “Why—it’s only a stupid Helicopter!”

Mike adoringly said, “Isn’t she just the most beautiful aircraft you’ve ever saw?”

Henry, Brian and Jeff looked at Mike with revulsion and disbelief, and then with indifference, Brian remarked, “Boy--you sure got a warped sense of what’s beautiful. An F30 or B80, any Airplane is beautiful, not that--that--thing you call an aircraft. Why--Just look at those funny stubby wings, they’re just terrible!”

Now Mike was now starting to feel a little perturbed about what they were saying about his aircraft, and thought, “Just wait until they see what Excalibur can do.”

Excalibur performed aerial and combat maneuvers for most of the afternoon.

After the performance, Henry informed Maria he had to go to a briefing on Excalibur; Maria and the boys were to take his car and go back to the Major’s house with Mrs. Larson, he will return with the Major after the briefing.

On the way to the Major’s house, Mike was a bit upset; he kept to himself and was quiet.

That evening they all discussed what they thought about Excalibur, with Henry telling them he didn’t see any useful purpose for Excalibur.

Henry telling them unconvinced of its abilities, “Its ceiling is only twenty thousand feet and it only has a range of about six hundred miles, as for shooting down F30’s, so far--it’s all been done by a computer. Everything changes when you get an experienced Fighter Pilot at the flight controls in a F30, not a computer controlled F30, like what we’ve seen demonstrated today.”

“I believe someday with the right Pilot, Excalibur will prove to everyone she can and will take on and defeat a jet fighter. As you were told at the briefing Colonel, Excalibur is extremely maneuverable and fast. I have no doubts in my mind, that in combat, Excalibur can and will defeat a jet fighter,” said Major Larson in its defense.

“Well--I’m just glad that none of my Sons are into flying Helicopters,” Henry pointedly announced, to Mike’s chagrin, “Helicopters are very dangerous to fly and are the most unstable aircraft that’s built. Anyway--you don’t find Ace’s flying Helicopters.”

“Well Colonel--in the next war--if there is one, that’s all going to

change and there's going to be Helicopter Aces," Major Larson fervently replied, while looking at Mike.

"Yeah right," Henry grunted huffily, and then with a hollow laugh he said, "Helicopter Aces--who ever heard of such a thing?"

"Don't laugh, Colonel," said Major Larson in a dangerous sort of way, "maybe Excalibur can't fly as high or as far as an F30 right now, but it sure can out maneuver it. You know as well as I, that most dogfights are done in close quarters and not at thirty thousand feet, most are carried out below fifteen thousand. If an F30 Fighter Pilot, in a dogfight, is going to fly above thirty thousand feet. Well--my guess is, he's probably trying to run," and then he looks at Mike and winks.

Finally, with a sarcastic chuckle, he tells Henry, "I would like to see him try to out run a missile fired from a EXR1."

The Major's defense of Excalibur makes Mike feel very good, for now it seems, he's the only one in his family who likes Helicopters and Major Larson had just defended them, but now, how was Mike now going to explain to his Father, that he likes Helicopters; for now it seems, his Father doesn't like them and he doesn't want any of his Sons flying them.

Brian yawning, "Well--enough with Helicopters, I've got to catch a Bus tomorrow for Miramar, so that I can learn to fly F30's and shoot down all kinds of Helicopters."

Mike made a face at Brian as he got up to go to bed; Brian just smiled, and messed up Mike's hair as he went by on the way to his room, and as he walked pass Jeff, he asked, "You comin'?"

"Yeah," Jeff replied, yawning and stretching his arms, and then he gets up and follows Brian to the same room, because they were sharing the bedroom at the Major's house.

"We have a long drive back to Roseville tomorrow. So I'm also going to hit the sack as well," Henry informs everyone as he gets up, and with a lazy drawl, "See ya' all in the mornin', you comin' Hon?"

"Yes dear," Maria replies, and gets up and follows him to their room, and as Henry walks out of the living room he tells Mike, "don't stay up to long, we've got a long drive home, ahead of us tomorrow."

"Sure Dad, I'll be coming in a few minutes, I want to talk a bit longer with the Major first."

Mike was now worried as he softly spoke to the Major, so his Family wouldn't hear him from their rooms, "Major--what I'm I going to do? Dad

doesn't seem to like Helicopters and what if he finds the books you gave me?"

"It'll be quite a while before you're ready to fly the EXR1," the Major softly tells Mike, and then reassuring him he says, "by then, I think your Father will come around to our way of thinking, until then, don't worry about it--and for peat sakes don't worry about the books, I'm sure you Father isn't going to think anything about them. If you really like Helicopters, then don't pay any attention to him. You just go on reading and studying books on Helicopters and someday, and I don't think it's going to be very far off, you're going to be flying them."

"I sure hope that you're right," Mike responds, feeling a bit melancholy, "you know, I would rather be learning to fly a Helicopter than that pathetic Cessna, he's got me learning to fly."

Major Larson chuckled and said, "It's getting late and you've got a long trip home tomorrow, so you had better be getting to bed."

"Yeah sure—I guess you're right. I had better hit the sack--good-night Major," Mike then got up and headed to his old room, the one he had, when he was working on Excalibur.

The Major also got up, turned out all the lights, and went to join his wife in their bedroom.

Brian was now laying there in the dark looking up at the dark ceiling above him when he whispered over to Jeff. "Jeff, are you asleep?"

"No--not yet--what's up?" Jeff whispered back.

"I may be wrong, but I think we may have a problem with Mike," whispered Brian, as he was a little concerned about Mike.

"What do you mean we got a problem with Mike?" Jeff asked taken aback and surprised to hear, Mike might be trouble.

"You're not referring to his problem about being the family baby."

"No not that--I think maybe something worse."

"I can't imagine what would be worse," Jeff declares with uneasiness, as he was now wondering what the problem was.

"How about flying Helicopters, I think Mike's hooked on em'."

"MIKE--HOOKED ON HELICOPTERS!" Jeff shouted.

"Shhhh--Keep it down, we don't want to wake Mom and Dad," Came the reply from across the room where Brian was laying.

"You've got to be kidding," whispered Jeff, now shocked and sitting up in bed, "hell--Dad had to force him to take flying lessons!"

“I’ll bet the flying lessons are in an Airplane, an old Cessna to be exact. I’ll bet it would have been a different story, if they were in a Helicopter,” Brian pointedly told him.

“Helicopters--I still can’t believe it,” Jeff says in disbelief, as he lays back down, “what makes you think, Mike likes Helicopters?”

“Just think back to this afternoon when we were sitting in the grandstand and Excalibur flew by for the first time,” Brian reminiscing, still lying on his back, and trying to make out the patterns on the dark ceiling, “do you remember what he had said about it? He had said it was the most beautiful aircraft he has ever seen, and later when we said how terrible it was and called it a stupid Helicopter. Did you happen to notice Mike’s face? I mean--he was starting to get quit steamed.”

“Yeah--you’re right,” Jeff now remembering, “I did notice something was bothering Mike. I never thought it was what we were saying about the Helicopter, --what are we going to do? Dad’s not going to like this.”

“Well, --you’ll just have to keep an eye on Mike, so he doesn’t do something stupid, like taking Helicopter lessons.”

“Why me? Why do I have to watch him?” Jeff asks irritably.

“Because--dear Bro--I’m not going to be around, I’m in the Marines --remember. Anyway, it shouldn’t be too hard, because he doesn’t have a job to earn the money to take Helicopter lessons, and you know how expensive they can be.”

Jeff now rolls over and remarks, “Yeah, they are expensive and Mike doesn’t have a job to pay for them. Night—Brian, see ya’ in the mornin’.”

“Yeah, Night,” Brian returns and they both fell off to sleep.

The next day they all said good-bye to Major Larson and his wife, get into their car, and leave Edwards Air Force Base.

On the way, they dropped Brian off at the Bus Station and waited to see him leave for Miramar.

As Brian gets on the Bus everyone waves, saying good-bye.

“Bye now,” Brian tells them from the window, he had opened, and looking at Jeff, he softly tells him, “Keep an eye open now,” Brian glances over at Mike as the Bus started to move.

“Will do--no problem,” Jeff told him with confidence, and then said, “I’ll email you and keep you up to date--bye now and take care.”

Brian continued to wave from the window as the Bus pulls away and drives off; his family waving back until the Bus was out of sight, and then they get back into the car and depart for home.

Henry asks Jeff as he drives, “What did Brian mean, when he said to keep an eye open?”

“I don’t know, maybe it has something to do with flying,” Jeff replied, not wanting to upset his Father.

CHAPTER 6 -- THE FIRST FLIGHT

The third Saturday in November was such a great day, clear blue sky with a light and gentle breeze blowing from the south; the temperature was in the fifties, just great for flying, and that is what Mike was doing, he was at the airport taking his flight lesson.

That morning, after Mike had left for the airport, Henry asked Jeff, if he had to work that Day; Jeff informed him he had the day off, so he could do some studying for both his ATP written exam, and for a History exam that he had in school on Monday.

Later that morning, Henry asked Jeff if he would like to take a little time off from studying and go to the airport with him, so they could see how Mike was getting on with the flight lessons.

“Yeah--I would love to go and see Mike fly,” replied Jeff with curiosity.

“Mike should have close to forty hours by now, and he should be getting ready for his check ride,” Henry remarking.

“I hear he did great on the written exam last month,” Jeff added crisply, “But, I can’t understand why he’s taken so many hours of flight training, has he soloed yet?”

“I would think so,” Henry replied, now wondering himself, “Mike has never mention a thing about a solo flight. I would think, with over thirty hours of flight time, he must have soloed by now.”

“Well--I should hope so,” Jeff declared, “usually everyone has soloed by the time they’ve logged twenty hours.”

Henry and Jeff got into Henry's car, and drove to the airport, because they were now anxious to see how Mike was doing.

Now Mike was having a terrible time, because he just couldn’t get the hang of flying that old Cessna.

His instructor, Mr. Winslow, was now getting a very impatient and was yelling profanities at him, which only made matters worse.

Mike was now so nervous, he couldn’t do anything right, so in disgust, Mr. Winslow took the flight controls from him and flew the Airplane back to the airport and landed it.

“MY GOD--MAN! THIRTY EIGHT HOURS!” Mr. Winslow

shouting at him in exasperation, after they had taxied to the tie down area and stopped.

As Mike sat there despondent, Mr. Winslow harshly told him, "You're no closer to soloing this aircraft now--then you were when you started in September. What in the hell is the matter?"

Mr. Winslow looking at him, waiting for an answer.

Mike just sat there looking down at the rudder pedals and shrugged, because he didn't know what to tell him.

"You don't know," barked Mr. Winslow, very upset and throwing his hands up, "I'm going to the office, you can finish shutting the aircraft down," and then he said to Mike, in a tone of ridicule, "you do remember how to do that--don't you?"

Mike nods, and Mr. Winslow having enough for today of trying to teach this dodo, gave Mike some final orders, "After you get it shut down you get someone to help you to tie it down, and then come into the office," Mr. Winslow gives Mike a final glance, gets out of the Airplane and starts walking to the office shaking his head.

When Mr. Winslow walked into his office, Henry and Jeff were already there waiting for him.

"Mister Winslow--this is another one of my sons--Jeff," Henry introducing Jeff to Mr. Winslow, "Jeff's a commercial pilot with instrument and multiengine ratings. He's now working on his ATP. We're here to see how Mike's doing."

Mr. Winslow shook Jeff's hand and said, "That's quite impressive Jeff. Good luck on the ATP. If you need a job, I sure could use an ATP or a Commercial Pilot with a multiengine rating, so--what types of aircraft are you now current in?"

Jeff replies with pride, "I'm current in the B867's and L2212's, the large jet transports, but I'm not really looking for a job, because I'm already employed at Elcor."

"Wow--heavies!" Mr. Winslow exclaims, and then he bemoans, "how come all of the best Pilots, are always already working for someone else? All I ever get are the has-beens."

"Mister Winslow, I'm not here to talk about Jeff, I'm here to see how Mike is doing."

Mr. Winslow then paused and looked at the floor, because he didn't quite know how to tell Henry about his Son, and then he slowly said, "Well Colonel--I just don't know how to tell you this. Your Son Mike, --well, --he just doesn't have what your other Son, Jeff, has. I mean--it's not going well, he's having a lot of trouble and it's going to take a long time for him to be able to fly a small Airplane, my recommendation to you--is to drop the lessons. By the time he can pass the check flight, it's going to cost you a small fortune."

In the meantime, Mike had finished with the Cessna and was now on his way to the office; when he reached the door to the office he heard his Dad and Mr. Winslow talking about him, so he paused just outside in the hallway by the door, so as not to be seen, and stood there listening to what they were saying about him.

Jeff and Henry just stood there in stunned silence, for they couldn't believe what Mr. Winslow had just said.

"I just can't believe this," Henry declared in disbelief, "are you sure Mike isn't faking all of this? I mean--learning to fly a single engine Cessna is the easiest thing there is, even my wife can fly one."

"I too, also thought that he might be pulling something," Mr. Winslow acknowledged, "especially after he had logged about thirty five hours and still hasn't soloed. So then, not saying anything to him, I gave him a test that would prove one way or another if he were faking. Colonel Troff--I now have no doubts in my mind, your Son isn't faking. Mike just doesn't have the necessary skills to fly an Airplane. It will take him a long time to acquire the basic skills to just get by. I think it would be a waste of time and money to continue."

Mike was now feeling ashamed and very depressed, and in anguish, he was almost to the point of crying, but he couldn't let anyone see him cry, after all, he's sixteen and all grown up.

Now, he just didn't know what to do.

He just couldn't understand why he was having so much trouble learning to fly that old Cessna; it would have been ok if he was faking, but he wasn't, and that made it so much worse.

Mike had thought, because his Mother, Father and both Brothers didn't have any trouble learning to fly, he wouldn't either, but how come he was?

Didn't Major Larson say he was a Natural Born Pilot; boy, was he wrong!

Now being able to fly has started to take on new meaning for Mike.

Now, more than anything in the world, Mike wished he could fly like his Brothers and his Mother and Father.

Mike, now trying to hold back the anguish, forces a smile and tries to act as if he hasn't heard anything, walks into the office and says, "Hi Dad, what are you and Jeff doing here. Mister Winslow, the Cessna is all tied down and secured."

Henry, ashamed and very disappointed tells him sharply, "You're finished here--the flight lessons are over. Get your bike and go straight home, I'll see you later."

A tear started to form in Mike's eye and his face started to distort as he fought not to cry.

Mike, looking into his Father's red angry face tries to explain, "Dad--I..."

"I told you to go home, NOW GO," Henry breaking in with a loud harsh command, because he wasn't in any mood for explanations; Mike got his logbook and his flight bag and walked out the door.

As soon as Mike was outside, he is now feeling so bad and the anguish so intense, he broke down and started to sob, and as the tears started to run down his red swollen face, he mounted his bicycle and rode off towards home.

"I don't want to see another airport or Airplane as long as I live," He said to himself between sobs as he pedaled.

Mike was so upset that, as he passed a dumpster, he threw his logbook into it saying, "Good riddance, I have no more use for this damn thing!"

He then stood up on the pedals and pedaled harder, to get away from the Airplanes as fast as he could.

Henry paid the bill, informing Mr. Winslow there will be no more flight lessons and thanking him for being so patient with Mike and being honest with him; after Henry and Jeff shook Mr. Winslow's hand they departed, driving off towards town to get a few things at the market for Maria.

Mike, still languishing and now seated, was slowly riding his bicycle down a narrow dirt pathway alongside a gravel road which ran along the

backside of several airport operations buildings, because now he didn't care about anything, he didn't even care if he got home.

After a while, Mike approached a flight operations building with an old weathered sign mounted on a pole that had an image of a white horse with wings and above the horse in big blue faded letters was the words 'PE-GASUS AVIATION'.

Then, Mike heard a whup-whup-whup-sound, coming from overhead; he looked up and saw a small Helicopter coming down behind the building.

The sight of the Helicopter temporarily made Mike forget his problems, he just had to see more of that little Helicopter, and so, Mike pedaled across the road and onto a weed-strewn parking lot with a clean shiny brown pickup, that was parked next to the door leading into the building.

Swinging his leg over the bike, Mike gets off the seat and coasts up to the building standing on one pedal.

Jumping off at a bit of a run, he pushes his bike up to the building and leans it against the wall on the opposite side of the door, and looks for a way inside the fence that surrounds the airport, because he didn't want to go inside the building.

Walking along the fence, he comes to a small hole in the fence and is just barely able to squeeze through.

After Mike had gotten through, he slowly strolled over to where the Helicopter had landed, to get a better look, and as Mike got closer to see it more clearly, the Pilot was already shutting it down.

When the blades had stopped turning, the Pilot got out and positioned them so they were pointed fore and aft.

Mike just stood there and admired it, thinking to himself, "God--it's so beautiful, I sure wish I could learn to fly it," and then he remembered the conversation over at the other office and the trouble he had trying to fly the Cessna and once again, reality came crashing back.

The feeling of worthlessness smacked him hard, he once again got very depressed and another tear ran down his cheek.

"What good will it do," he thought, "I won't be able to fly it any better, and where will I get the money to pay for the lessons. I surely can't ask Dad, because he doesn't think they're safe, he'll never let me take Helicopter lessons."

Mike sat down on the mowed grass with his arms crossed on his knees and his head buried in his arms, languishing and feeling worthless.

“What’s the matter?” Asked a male voice and a tap on the shoulder, “Looks like you’re upset about something, is there anything I can do to help?”

Mike looks up and there stands the Pilot, he quickly wipes the tear off his cheek with his arm and weakly replies, “No Sir--it’s me. I don’t know why I was born--I’m not good for anything.”

Then the Pilot puts his hand on Mike’s shoulder and says sympathetically, “I’m sure that’s not true, God’s got a purpose for all of us and that includes you. You’ve just got to find out what it is. Now, my name is Larry, Larry Clark, but you can just call me Larry--Ok. So--what’s your name?”

Then he offered his hand to Mike, and after Mike gets up, still trying to hold back the tears, he takes the Pilot’s hand and they shake.

“Mine’s, Mike Troff. You can just call me Mike.”

“Fine then, Mike it is,” He said with a big gentle smile, “shall we go inside and find out what it is that’s troubling you? Maybe I can help.”

When they got inside, Larry walked over to an open window where he handed the Helicopter keys to a lady on the other side, she takes the keys and hands him a ring binder; Larry fills out several forms, puts them into the ring binder, and closes it.

“How was the flight today, Captain Clark?” The lady asked.

“It was just great,” Larry replied, handing her the ring binder, “I had a perfect day for flying. I couldn’t ask for better flying conditions. Be sure to have Sixty-Three-Tango topped off with fuel before you leave tonight.”

“Yes Captain--I’ll take care of it,” she told him with a smile.

Mike was a little confused as he inquired, “That lady had called you Captain, are you in the military?”

“Well--sort of,” Larry tells him, “I’m in the Army Reserves.”

Larry also informs Mike he’s an Army Helicopter Pilot.

“Please don’t call me Captain--like I told you before, Larry will be just fine. Now--let’s go to my office and see if we can fix your problem.”

Mike followed Larry into an office and sat down on a sofa like couch and began talking; Mike told Larry all about what had happen over at the other operations office and about all the trouble he had trying to learn to fly

that old Cessna.

Mike also told him his Father was a Colonel in the Air Force and his older Brothers were Pilots, and that his oldest Brother was in the Marines, and is taking Flight Training at Miramar in San Diego, and his other Brother was planning to go to the Air Force Academy next fall after graduation.

Mike then look down at the floor and said, “What’s wrong with me? Why can’t I fly like my Brothers? If I can’t fly, then I don’t want to live.”

“Now you listen to me,” Larry snapped, shaking him and sternly telling him in a scolding tone of voice, “don’t you do anything stupid, like maybe thinking of killing yourself? You got a lot to live for, you hear me?”

Mike taken aback nods fervently saying, “Ok--Ok--I hear you. I’m not going to kill myself!”

Larry then relaxed, smiled and softly said to him, “If you promise that you won’t tell anyone around here, I’ll let you in on a little secret.”

“Ok--I promise.”

Larry got up, and went to the door and looked up and down the hall, and after shutting the door quietly, he came back, sat down, and whispered to Mike, “I can’t fly a Cessna either.”

Mike was surprised by what he heard, and started to giggle softly as he very quietly exclaimed, “You can’t fly a Cessna!”

Larry nodding and replies with a chuckle, “Nope.”

Mike was totally blown away and very puzzled, and then he asked, “Then how is it that you can fly a Helicopter?”

Larry now also giggling softly began to explained, “Mike, all aircraft aren’t the same, because each type has its own operating style. That’s why you have different classes of licenses, and that’s also why, not every Pilot can fly every kind of aircraft. I’ll bet your Father and Brothers would have the same problem trying to fly a Helicopter, just like you’ve had trying to fly that Cessna. Mike, you just have to find your own type of aircraft to fly. I’m sure with your family aviation background, there’s an aircraft out there somewhere, waiting for you to climb in and takeoff. So now Mike, what kind of aircraft do you like?”

A smile broke out on Mike’s face, as he remembered the days at Edwards and the joy he had working on Excalibur.

“Larry--ever since that first Helicopter I saw last summer, I always get this strange feeling when I see one. I can’t explain it--it’s as if I’ve got to be near them. That’s why I’m here, when I saw you coming down in that

Helicopter--I just had to get a closer look. I also think, they're just about the most beautiful aircraft there is, and someday, I hope I can get to fly in one. The only aircraft that I've ever flown in, is an Airplane like that stupid Cessna, that I hate."

"Well then--how about you and I go for a little ride in my Helicopter tomorrow. Let's say--about one o'clock tomorrow afternoon--do you think you can be here?"

Mike face was glowing as his spirits shot straight up, and with excitement and joy, he answered, "You bet! Nothing's going to stop me from coming here tomorrow."

"Then it's all settled, tomorrow we go flying in my Helicopter. I just can't believe your Father could be so cruel as to force you into flying something that you hate. Well young man--I guess you've got a big day tomorrow," Larry tells him and they get up to leave for the day.

Now the Sun had just set and it was dusk and getting dark when Larry told Mike, "I think you had better be getting on home, it's already starting to get dark and your parents will be worried."

Mike and Larry both walked outside, then Larry asked, looking for Mike's car, "Where's your car?"

"Sorry--only got my bicycle," Mike replied pointing to his bike leaning against the building, where he had left it.

"I can't let you go home alone in the dark on a bicycle," Larry being a little concerned, told him, "C'mon, I'll take you home in my pickup, we'll put your bike in the back," and so, Larry put Mike's bicycle in the back of his truck, and then the both of them got in and drove to Mike's home.

Mike was now really beginning to like this Pilot, because just like him he couldn't fly a Cessna either; Mike thought, "We're just alike, Larry and Me."

When they got to Mike's home, Mike got out of the pickup and took his bicycle out of the back of the truck.

Mike was feeling good when he said, "Good-bye," and waved to Larry; Larry waved back, and then he drove off.

Mike's Father was waiting at the door when Mike walked up and he he didn't look to happy.

"And just where in the hell have you been for the last several hours?" Henry asked in a harsh angry tone.

“I told you several hours ago to go straight home. Now, put your bike in the garage and get your butt in the house, your Mother has your dinner waiting,” Henry commanded in a scolding tone.

After Mike had put his bike away and walked into the kitchen from the garage, his Father was there waiting.

“You got a lot of explaining to do young man,” his Father scolding, “your Mother and I was worried that something may have happened to you. We were about to call the police when you arrived.”

“Dad--I’m sorry for being late, but I had to think some things out by myself,” Mike apologizing.

“I’ve met this Army Captain, his name is Larry Clark,” Mike trying to explain and hoping his father will accept it, “We kind of talked some, and--he’s real nice, and I like him.”

His Dad still upset said gruffly, “Well--I’m glad he brought you home and you found a friend.”

His Mother gets him what’s left over from dinner, which she had kept warm in the oven, puts it on the table in front of him and he begins to eat; while he was eating, Mike told his parent’s all about Larry, but was very careful to leave out the part’s about Larry being a Helicopter Pilot, because he was afraid his Father would not approve of anything that has to do with Helicopters.

After Mike had finished eating dinner, his Father, still very distraught, sent him to his room and told him to go straight to bed.

Sunday morning finally came and Mike was very excited, because this afternoon he will get his first ride in a Helicopter.

All through church services and the rest of the morning, he just couldn’t sit still; his Parents didn’t know what was wrong with him.

Mike was so excited, he couldn’t even eat his lunch; he kept looking at the clock.

His Mother was starting to get worried and was little concerned asked, “Mike, are you feeling all right?”

“I’m just fine.”

“Are you sure? You’ve barely touch you food, and you couldn’t sit still in church.”

“I’m supposed to meet Larry at one o’clock at the airport. Larry is going to give me a ride in his airplane,” Mike explained, being careful not to mention it was a Helicopter.

“Mike that’s just great, you’re getting interested in airplanes again,” Henry remarked with piqued interest, “I can give you a ride to the airport if you like, because I would like to meet this Captain Clark.”

“No thanks Dad,” Mike replied, now getting a little nervous, for the last thing he needed was for his Dad to find out he’s going for a Helicopter ride. “You don’t have to drive me to the airport, because I can drive myself in Brian’s car--I’m not a little kid anymore.”

Henry was starting to sense that Mike was now getting a little touchy about being treated like a kid. “Ok Mike, you can go in Brian’s car, but try to be home at a sensible time tonight, remember, tomorrow is a school day.”

“I will,” Mike told his Father; it was twelve thirty when Mike finally got into Brian’s car and departed for the airport.

When Mike arrived, he parked the car alongside of Larry’s pickup, behind the operations building with the sign that had the white horse with wings; Mike got out of the car and went into the operations office.

When Mike walked in, Larry was already there waiting for him.

“Hi Mike, are you ready to do some flying today?” Larry asks with exuberance.

“You bet I can’t wait.”

The excitement in Mike was now showing and he could barely hold it in.

“Ok then, let’s go. I’ve got sixty three tango all preflighted and ready to fly,” Larry told him with a big smile.

Mike and Larry walked out to where the Helicopter was parked and got in; Mike sat in the right seat and Larry was in the left seat.

Larry told Mike, the Helicopter they’re in is a Robinson Model R22 N (November), and then he explained the three sets of flight controls and how they all worked.

Larry explains most of the instruments are the same as what’s found in a Cessna, except for a couple; Larry pointed them out and explained what they are.

Mike told Larry, he had read all about Helicopters in a couple of books that were given to him last summer.

“I just can’t wait to see how the flight controls all work,” announced Mike full of anticipation.

After putting on their headsets, it was now time to start the engine, and Larry showed Mike how it was done as he went through the run up procedures with him; Larry went on to explained the purpose of each step in the run up procedure.

After Larry had finished telling Mike all about the little Helicopter, they were now ready to take off.

Larry explained to Mike that a Helicopter was a special kind of aircraft, and because it is special it has certain privileges other aircraft don't have, such as being able to take off and fly in minimal weather; while other types of aircraft would be grounded, unless the aircraft and Pilot were instrument rated, a Helicopter can take off and fly.

"As long as you can see where you're going, you can fly," Larry told him, "you can fly at any legal altitude and airspeed, and if you run out of sky, then just set it down until you see the sky again. So--shall we go and do some flying?"

"I'm ready, so what are we waiting for--let's go," Mike emphatically declared on the intercom!

Larry lifted the little Helicopter to a five-foot hover, and then he contacted the airport tower for a takeoff clearance; the tower told Larry, he was cleared for takeoff from right where they are.

Larry then said on the radio, "Roseville Tower, this is Helicopter, Five, Six, Six, Three, Tango--Roger."

"Well Mike, they said we can go--so, shall we?" Larry asked Mike on the intercom, as this is the only way they can talk over all the noise. Mike nods, as he was already enjoying every minute of this.

"You mean--we can take off right from where we park?" Mike asked over the intercom, surprised.

"You bet, and we can also land the same way," Larry told Mike, over the intercom, grinning .

"Awesome--this is really cool," Mike replied with a big grin.

"You see Mike, fixed wing Pilots don't really like us to fly in their flight patterns," Larry explaining, "that's because we normally fly to slow for them and they will run into us. So, if we use the airport flight patterns, we must be very careful to not cause an accident by flying to slow—we must fly just as fast as they do. It's better for us to just come in under the traffic pattern and land at our area. So this way, while an airplane is caught in the traffic pattern we're already home."

They were out over the country when Larry asked, “Well Mike, how would you like to take the cyclic for a while? I’ll operate the other controls, so all you have to do is keep her on course.”

“You bet,” Mike replied, as he was waiting all day for this moment.

After Mike took hold of the cyclic grip it felt very light and easy to move, not like the hard resistance you get from an airplane yoke.

Mike nudged it a bit and the Helicopter dived to the left and headed for the ground, as this was way too much cyclic!

“Whoa’--easy does it,” Larry telling him as he grabs the cyclic and regains control of the Helicopter and returns it to normal flight, “it doesn’t take very much cyclic movement to have her do something. The saying goes, if you can see cyclic movement then you’re probably over controlling the Helicopter, so, use just enough cyclic to do the job. Just think of the maneuver you want to make, and then like magic it will happen, it’s as if you and the Helicopter are one unit. So, it’s very important that you get a the feel for your aircraft. You must know every vibration, every noise, because she’s talking to you all the time, you must know what she’s saying, because if you don’t she’ll hurt you bad, and when you do come to understand her, she’ll be a real fun filled friend.”

Larry gives the cyclic back to Mike, and after Mike had operated the cyclic for a while, Larry was amazed at how fast and well, Mike caught on, so then he let Mike try the other flight controls, and after a while he let Mike take all the flight controls and Mike did a great job.

“Mike--look at what you’re doing!” Larry exclaimed over the intercom, while holding his hand up smiling, “I thought you had told me you couldn’t fly. It looks to me as if you’ve got a natural feel for flying a Helicopter. I think maybe you’ve found your aircraft.”

Mike just smiled, to him it was now so easy, like he would think, I want to go there and they would go there.

Mike was having a ball this was even more fun than his dirt bike. All afternoon Mike flew and Larry giving him pointers.

They flew all over, down through canyons and up into the high country; they landed at an airport just long enough to refuel and get a bite to eat, and then off they went again, but eventually, all fun must come to an end, because the Sun was sinking low in the west and the day was coming to an end.

Larry regained the flight controls and flew the Helicopter back to the airport, and after they had landed, he showed Mike the procedures for shutting down the Helicopter; when the Helicopter was secured, both Larry and Mike walked back to the operations building, and went inside.

Larry turned in the keys and logged in their flight time in the Helicopter's logbook; explaining to Mike, this was for maintenance reasons and it was required by the FAA.

"The logbook will also tell us when certain maintenance procedures are to be performed on the Helicopter," Larry told him.

After they returned to the office they sat down, Larry sat at his desk and logged his flight time in his personal logbook.

"Well Mike, I think you've got the touch," Larry told him with a smile, after turning around in his swivel chair to faced Mike. "I think with the proper training you could be a great Helicopter Pilot, but it's going to be expensive, because Helicopter flight training is very expensive. I'm thinking, maybe if your Father was willing to pay for fixed wing lessons in a Cessna, he just might pay for your Helicopter lessons. That is, after I have a talk with him, explaining that you have a natural touch for flying a Helicopter."

Mike's heart just fell through the floor, because he knew his Father would never allow him to take Helicopter lessons, much less pay for them; Mike was now feeling even worse than he did yesterday, because he now knew he would be able to fly, but was forever grounded.

Once again he was fighting to hold back the tears; to be grounded, when you know you can fly, is so much worse than not being able to fly at all.

"Mike! What's wrong?" Larry asked, looking at Mike and seeing a tear run down his cheek, "didn't you hear me? I said you've got the touch, you can fly, and after I have a talk with your Father, you'll be up there taking Helicopter lessons."

Mike was now feeling so bad he could hardly talk. "Larry, there's something I haven't told you. My Father doesn't approve of Helicopters. He thinks they're bad and dangerous and doesn't want any of us flying them, so he'll never pay for my lessons and I don't have any money or a job. O' God Larry! I'm now permanently grounded! I'll never be able to fly again!"

"Just let me think," said Larry leaning back in his chair and looking

out the window, “we can’t leave you grounded, because that wouldn’t be right. I think God, for some reason, had intended for you to fly Helicopters, so we’ve got to find a way to get you back into the air.”

Larry sat leaning back in his swivel chair looks out the window and thinks, and then he looks at his books on the shelf above his desk and a smile brakes out on his face and he asks, “Mike--are you free after school and on Saturdays?”

“Yeah--sure,” Mike replied, looking puzzled, “I’m free every day after school and on Saturdays and Sundays too--why?”

“Because, I think I’ve got the answer,” announced Larry, “how would you like to work for me in exchange for the flight lessons? You’ll be working as a Groundhandler doing all sorts of odd jobs around here and whatever other errands that needs to be done. Besides, I need another hand around here with all the work that needs to be done, so--what do you say?”

“Yeah—that sounds great,” replied Mike nodding with a smile, and then adding, “but, my Father must never know I’m taking Helicopter lessons.”

“Ok--good, then it’s all settled, you can begin tomorrow after school. And to start with, we’ll begin your lessons with ground school on Wednesdays and flight training on Saturdays. I see that it’s getting rather late and I think you should be heading on home before your Parents start getting worried.”

“I’ll be here tomorrow after school and thanks. Good-bye--see you tomorrow,” Mike told him, then he gets up, walks out the door and drives home in Brian’s car.

When he gets home, he tells his Father he’s now got a part time job at the airport as a Groundhandler.

Mike tells his Father, if he can’t fly airplanes, then at least he can work on and around them.

CHAPTER 7 -- THE HELICOPTER PILOT

After school on Monday, Mike hurried as fast as he could to the airport to start his first day on his new job, because he was so excited about it all day and now he was almost there.

He drove Brian's car up to the operations building, parked, got out and went inside.

Larry was in the office doing some paper work when Mike walked in.

"Hi Larry, I'm ready to start earning my wings," Mike greeting him impatiently, as he walks over to where Larry sat working at his desk.

"Ok--then follow me and I'll show you around," Larry commanded smiling, getting up and heading for the door to the hallway.

The first place, Larry took Mike, was to the locker room, where Mike was given a locker to keep his things in.

Larry told Mike, he would have to wear a uniform, so that everyone would know he's a Groundhandler; he then showed him where to change and shower.

Next, Larry took Mike out into the hangar, it was a large area with four Helicopters parked in two rows, and in each row there was a large and a small Helicopter; one of the small Helicopters was the one he and Larry had flown in last Sunday.

"Part of your job is to keep the floor here in the hangar and in the office swept and moped, and be sure to keep all of the Helicopters wiped down. I don't like flying dirty and grimy aircraft, and I don't want our customers to either. You'll also need to wash and wax the Helicopters when they return from a job, so their nice and shiny," said Larry pointing to the Helicopters parked in front of them, "and one more important thing, you're to refuel and clean the windshields of any aircraft, which you're asked to do by a customer,"

"Sure Larry--no problem," Mike tells him with a smile.

"Ok--now it's time for you to meet the other two Groundhandlers," said Larry pointing out to the taxiway and airport runway.

Mike follows him out to where Wayne and Scott are helping a customer, who had just landed.

“Mike--I want you to meet Wayne Tripp and Scott Schultz. Wayne, --Scott, --this is our new Student Pilot and Groundhandler--Michael Troff.”

Wayne and Scott shook Mike’s hand.

“Ok, --that’s about it, I’ve got lots of work that needs to be done in the office. So, --why don’t you all get acquainted, and the two of you can show Mike what else a Groundhandler is supposed to do,” Larry adding, and then he walks back to the office and his waiting paper work.

“Wayne and I, --we also fly--that is, when we get a job from the Captain to make a run somewhere,” Scott tells Mike matter-of-factly after Larry had left.

Wayne nods smiling and adding, “Otherwise we double as Groundhandlers.”

Then Wayne tells Mike, “Captain Clark is a good boss, and this business he has is very small, so we all work as part time Pilots and Groundhandlers. So, don’t feel too bad if some smart ass Pilot comes in here and starts badmouthing you, because you’re wearing a Groundhandler uniform and thinking you’re some peon. You just do as we do--that is, you very politely go up to him and say, ‘I’m also a Pilot, and is there anything I can do for you sir?’, and then watch the expression on his face. I believe that alone will make up for all the bad words,” then they all had a good laughed.

“Wayne and I are sure glad to have you on board and that you like Helicopters, because we also think their cool--and if you need any help in your lessons just ask,” Scott offers with a big grin and Wayne nodding fervently.

“And like Larry, we’re also Army Helicopter Pilots,” Wayne added nonchalantly with a hint of boasting, “we’re Warrant Officers, and Captain Clark is our Commanding Officer.”

Mike now knew he was in the right place, because now, Mike was going to become a Helicopter Pilot, even if he couldn’t tell his Father.

For unknown to Henry, his wish for his entire family to fly will at last come true.

On Thanksgiving Day, Brian had just returned from the mess hall, and had lain down on his bunk.

His roommate hadn’t return from the mess hall and Brian was feeling a little homesick and wished he could be home enjoying Thanksgiving with his family and Brenda.

Brian closed his eyes and started to dream back to his first day in flight school and what the instructor had said on that first day of course introductions.

“Gentleman--welcome to Miramar Naval Air, Flight Training Center, or better known by us as Fighter Town USA. You’re here to learn to become Fighter Pilots, and we’re here to teach you,” and then the Instructor told them, as he looked at the class, “not all of you are going to make it through the 42 weeks of training, some of you are going to wash out. If you want to know, how many of you are going to make it through school? Well--just look around, because only one out of every four of you are going to make it through the 42 weeks of training to become Fighter Pilots, because our country can only expect the very best of you to defend her, nothing less will do. In the first two weeks you’ll be in phase one of preflight training, which will teach you basic aviation knowledge, and from there you will go on through the last three phases of preflight, which some of you who are civilian Pilots know as ground school.”

He pauses, and looks at a couple of students including Brian and gives these men a devilish look, along with a devilish smile.

“And for all you so called hot shot civilian Pilots, you might as well forget everything you’ve learned, because it isn’t going to help you here,” telling them pointedly, and then he emphatically tells them, “you’re going to learned to fly our way or you’ll be walking out the main gate.”

The Instructor walks over and goes behind the podium, presses a button and the lights in the room darken; a picture of a jet fighter was projected onto the screen behind him.

“Gentlemen--we will be teaching you to fly one of two types aircraft. The Navy Students will learn to fly the F32D, two man fighter, shown here and known simply as the F32,” He turns and glances at the projection and the students look at the picture as well; he turns back to face the students and continues, “Those of you who wash out will have the opportunity to become Radar Officers. That’s ‘RO’ for short, and fly as the second man in the F32.”

He pushes the button again and a different jet fighter is projected on to the screen, he once again turns and looks at the projection and explains, “The Marine Students will learn to fly this single seat F30K. The F30K Wasp, as it’s called, can fly faster and higher than the F32D Falcon.”

He turns back and faces the class and continues the course introduction, “The F30K, we’ll just call it the F30, because of its small size doesn’t have the range or the capability to carry any bombs. The main job of the F30 is to keep the enemy fighter’s busy, while the F32 goes in and knocks out enemy ships or ground targets. Then, once the F32 has dropped its bombs, it can then also engage the enemy in aerial combat.”

He pushes another button and the jet fighter disappears and the screen goes blank, the lights in the room brightened.

Brian’s roommate comes into the room shakes Brian, who’s asleep; Brian wakes up.

“Troff, are you sleeping again?” Dale Taylor huffily asking.

“C’mon--let’s go into town for a while and celebrate Thanksgiving,” said Dale trying to persuade Brian to join him for some entertainment at the local bar.

“Thanks--but I think I’ll stay here and hit the books,” Brian tells him remembering his dream, “I’m also going to call home a little later. I think you should do some studying as well, that is if you want to graduate and fly F30’s.”

“It’s Thanksgiving, and you’re going to study on Thanksgiving Day, man--what’s up with that? You and me--we’re the top two guys in the class. If we don’t make it--then none of the others sure won’t. Man--you gotta’ ease up a bit, you need to get out and have some fun before you drive yourself and me stark raving mad,” Dale telling him, hoping he’ll change his mind and come.

Brian looks at him for a while, and then throws his hands up. “Why not--I need to call home first and change out of these fatigues,” Dale nods smiling and loudly exclaims, “YES!”

Both Dale and Brian made it through the six weeks of preflight, and they were now looking forward to begin actual flight training; already over a fourth of their class was gone.

On the eve of their first day of flight training, Brian with a lot of anxiety says to Dale, “Tomorrow, the hard part starts, we start flying. What if I don’t have what it takes, what if I wash out? What will my Father and my Brothers say if I did wash out?”

“Ah’ man--you worry too much,” Dale tells him, “you’re going to do just great. I’ll make you a wager.”

Dale gets his wallet out and removes a twenty, “I’ll bet you this twenty that we’ll solo a whole week before anyone else in the class. If I lose--the twenty’s yours, and I mean the both of us, not just you or me--the both of us.”

Mike was also doing just fine, because he had passed the written exam and had just soloed, his first Helicopter.

Both Wayne and Scott initiated Mike by throwing him into the shower with his clothes on.

“Well Mike--how does it feel to be a real Pilot?” Scott asked, as Mike came out of the shower all wet.

“It feels sooo cool,” Mike says grinning, jubilant, and beaming with pride, as he stands there dripping wet, “I can now fly like my Brothers. Major Larson was right after all--I’m a Pilot before my seventeenth birthday.”

Now Larry just couldn’t believe how fast, Mike had learned to fly; and had soloed in half the time it would have normally taken most students.

“You sure have a feel for flying Helicopters,” Larry tells Mike, “It’s too bad your Dad couldn’t see you solo today, I’m sure he would’ve been proud of you. Are you still sure your Father doesn’t want you to fly a Helicopter? To solo your first aircraft, is something your Father would’ve liked to have watched--maybe I should have a talk with him.”

“NO!” Mike wailed, losing his composure as a shot of fear ran through him, because of what would happen if his Father found out.

“Please--don’t say anything about me flying a Helicopter, he’ll never let me work here again,” Mike bemoaned, feeling distraught at the thought of not being able to work there again and fly the Helicopters.

“Ok--I won’t say anything until you feel the time is right--at least for now anyway,” Larry told Mike to soothe him.

“Thanks Larry, I don’t know what I would do if I couldn’t be here anymore. This is the best job in the whole world, and next to my dirt bike and computer flying a Helicopter is so awesome, I wouldn’t want to be any other place,” Wayne and Scott smiled nodding.

“Yes--this is a cool place to work alright,” Scott boasting and patting Mike on the back.

“Well Sir--I guess you had better count on another Pilot,” Wayne remarked, as he looked at Larry. “It looks like before too long you’ll be having three of us around here to fly for you.”

“In three years, this young man may be our next Army Helicopter Pilot,” Scott telling everyone smiling, putting his hand on Mike’s shoulder.

“He sure would make a good one,” Larry remarks grinning, “as for flying for me, he’s got to get his Private License first and then he needs to get his Commercial. Well Mike, what do you think, can you do it?” Larry asks.

“You bet--no problem. To get a Commercial license and fly for you would be just awesome, so I want to get that Commercial license as soon as I can,” Mike replied beaming, “someday I would also like to become an Army Warrant Officer, like Wayne and Scott, and fly Army Helicopters,” and then he paused, and thought for a moment and finally asked, “would it be possible--to skip the Private and go straight for the Commercial?”

Larry and the others were taken aback.

“This isn’t the way things are usually done, but--I see no law that says you have to get a Private first,” Larry concedes shrugging, “if your serious about this, then you’re going to have to work extra hard, because all of the maneuvers must be now done with more precision. You do seem to have the talent--my God--I think maybe--you just might pull it off, sure--why not, let’s go for the Commercial.”

Jeff also went and took his check ride for the Air Transport Pilot License and pass with no problem; now, he doesn’t have to fly as a Co-pilot anymore, and boy, was he ever feeling good.

He sure loved flying those large jet transports, and now, he could fly as Pilot-In-Command.

When Jeff got home that evening, Maria had prepared a special dinner for him to celebrate his passing the ATP check ride.

Henry was now beaming with pride, because of Jeff’s accomplishment, he shook his hand and patted him on the back; now, Jeff was the first Pilot in the family to obtain such a high-level Pilot License.

“Nice going Jeff,” Mike congratulating him and shaking his hand, “just don’t get up and go for a stroll--without first putting the aircraft on autopilot, remember, you’re the Pilot-In-Command now.”

“Me! Why--I would never do such a thing!” Jeff exclaimed, and then they all laughed.

“It’s too bad you can’t fly,” Jeff lamented looking at Mike and feeling sorry for him. It sure would’ve been great if we all could’ve been Pilots.”

Henry, now showing his disappointment in Mike, solemnly told everyone, "Mike just doesn't have what it takes to fly, so it just isn't going to happen. We all might as well get use to the fact that Mike will never fly."

Mike now starts to blush and looks at the floor, because he knows he's also a Pilot, but he'll never be able to tell his family.

Oh how he wished, he could tell his Dad and his Brothers that he can fly, because it won't be too much longer, before he'll have his Commercial Pilot License, and he now wished more than anything, that his Dad would change his mind and like Helicopters.

"Maybe I can tell Mom," He thought, "I wonder if she likes Helicopters. I'll ask her tonight when Dad and Jeff are watching TV and she's doing the dishes, but can I trust her not to tell Dad? God--how I would like to tell someone in my family that I can also fly."

So, after dinner that night when Henry and Jeff had gone into the den to watch some TV, Mike, a little apprehensive, asked his Mother, "Mom--what do you think of Helicopters--do you like them?"

"I guess their Ok. I've never thought about it before--why--is there some reason you're asking?"

Mike became very uneasy with the way she wanted to know, so he got cold feet and told her, "Just curious, that's all--no reason."

Mike then finished helping her with the dishes and didn't say anymore.

It was now well into April, Brian and Dale were still in Flight School and most of the original class was now gone, with only about ten students in the class remained.

The instructor told the class, if no one screws up, they should all make it through to graduation in August.

Both Brian and Dale were the top two men in their class and they were the first to solo the F30 wasp; they did it a full week ahead of everyone else.

Dale lost the Twenty Dollars with Brian, telling him as he handed the money to him, "I told you so--didn't I tell you?"

And what a party they had, the class tossed them both into the Pool at the Student Pilot's Club, to initiate them.

Jeff and Mike also had reasons to be happy, because school was again getting close to being over for the summer; there was only a month and a half of school left to go.

Jeff got his appointment to the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, for which he was very excited.

Mr. Nash, Jeff's boss at Elcor, told Jeff he'll miss him, but wished him the best in his new career.

"After you graduate from the Academy, we hope you'll pick McClellan as your first duty station, if you get a choice that is," Mark said to Jeff, with Jim nodding.

"Just think--all of us flying B80 Bombers together, wouldn't that be awesome," said Jim with a gleam in his eye.

"Yeah that would be real cool," Jeff replied glowing, "and if I get the chance I'll choose McClellan."

Mike's big day also came; he took his check ride for the Commercial License and passed.

"You know Larry, Mike is one of the youngest Pilots that I've ever given the Commercial test to," The Examiner, a bit astonished tells Larry, "and quite frankly, I was surprised he wasn't already a Private Pilot and I might add, he's one of the most skilled Student Pilots that I've ever given a check ride to. That Kid has really got a good feel and working knowledge of his aircraft, he's going to make a fine addition to your staff."

"Yes, he's going make a fine addition alright," Larry happily replied, as he's contemplating enlarging his business, "and just in time too, because I'm thinking of adding to my Helicopter fleet with another Helicopter."

"You're a very fortunate man to have such fine Pilots on your staff like Wayne, Scott, and young Troff," commented the Examiner, "where did you find Mister Troff?"

"Would you believe--he found me," Larry told him, "and the worst part--his Father doesn't want any of his Sons to fly Helicopters--so, Mike just kept it a secret all this time. I think it's just a shame too, --because he's such a fine Pilot."

"Yes, it must be awful hard on him," The Examiner sympathizing with a sigh, "not being able to share his accomplishments with his Father and his Brothers, and as you know, this is something a Father and Son should do together."

"Yes I agree, but in Mike's case--not telling his Father was the only way he could keep flying," Larry explaining, "Mike told me as soon as he turns twenty-one he'll then tell his Father. He feels then his Father can't

stop him from flying Helicopters.”

“I see it’s getting late, I’ve got another check ride over at Yuba City,” The Examiner announced, looking at his watch, “so, I’ve got to be running along,” they shake hands and he leaves.

Mike had another party in the hangar that afternoon, to celebrate his passing the test for the Commercial License.

Scott and Wayne gave Mike a small present; Mike opened it and found a pair of metal Pilot’s wings inside.

Mike didn’t know what to say, he was so full of emotion a tear ran down his cheek, he just smiled and said, “Thanks Guys, you two have been like Brothers to me.”

Mike looked at Larry, and with lots of respect and deep emotion he solemnly said, “You sir, have been like a second Father to me, how can I ever make it up to you? These wings--I’ll cherish them as long as I live.”

Larry smiled, and now with a tear in his eye he replied, “You’ve been like a Son to me too. Come here,” Mike goes to him and they hug each other tightly, like Father and Son, and then Larry leaves, returning a short time later with a cart filled with bags of potato chips, boxes of hot pizza, and a cooler full of pop.

Scott and Wayne went out and brought in a cake, and on the top, there was a Helicopter made of frosting; written under it in letters of green frosting was ‘MICHAEL TROFF COMMERCIAL PILOT’.

“Well fly boy, how about cutting the cake for us,” said Larry with a big grin as he looked at Mike with eagerness, “it sure does look good and I sure would like a piece,” then Mike cuts the cake and they all have some.

They had a great party that afternoon, eating cake, pizza, potato chips, and drinking pop; they also played volley ball outside until it was finally time for everyone to go home.

As they all got ready to leave, Mike thanked everyone saying, “To-day was one of the best days I’ve ever had.”

That night, Brian called his Father with some good news, “Dad--I soloed today--sure wished you and Mom could’ve been here to see me fly the F30.”

“Yeah--wished I’ve could have,” His Father tells him lamenting. “Can’t wait to see you fly the F30. Oh’ by the way--did Mom send you an email, telling you Jeff has gotten his appointment to the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs? So it’s only going to be Mike and us in this house this

fall.”

“Yeah Dad--got her email yesterday. I’m very happy for him--I’ll bet he’s all excited. I’ll be finishing up and graduating in August--I would sure like to have you, Mom, Mike and Jeff, if he’s still home that is, to come and see me get my wings. Dale’s family will be here to see him get his wings--it would be great if you all would be here too.”

“We’ll be there. Email us the date and I’ll make it a point,” Henry telling him.

After Henry hung up the phone he looked at Mike with disappointment and said, “Well Mike--I guess Brian’s a Fighter Pilot now, and in a few years Jeff is going to be a Bomber Pilot—so, --what are you planning to do after high school? You know you’ve only got two year’s left, so are you going be a Groundhandler all of your life?”

Mike now was getting a little peeved and was tempted to tell everything, but instead, he nonchalantly said, “I thought about going to Sacramento Junior College or maybe Berkeley. I was thinking of maybe a major in computer science. Anyway, what’s wrong with being a Groundhandler? I like it and it’s a good job.”

Later that evening, when Henry and Jeff were in the den watching TV and talking about Brian, Maria was again in the kitchen doing the dishes, when Mike once again asked her if she liked Helicopters.

“Helicopters--they’re alright--I guess,” She said perplexed, wondering why Mike is asking again.

Mike was overjoyed on hearing that, because he had to tell someone in his family about his flying, as he couldn’t hold his secret in anymore.

“Mom--have you ever mentioned to Dad that you think Helicopters are alright?” Mike asking her, with some hesitancy.

“No, --your Father wouldn’t be very happy if he knew I liked Helicopters,” Maria says pointedly, “so, I’ve never said anything about them to him.”

Mike was now hoping she would keep his secret, because he just had to tell someone; he was about to burst when he said, “Mom--if you can keep a secret, I’ve got something to tell you. Now it’s very important, you don’t say anything to Dad, because I’m afraid of what he might do to me if he ever found out.”

Maria was now very puzzled by all of this.

“Now Mike, did you break something or gotten into trouble with the

law?" She asked, as she was now very concerned, because obviously he had done something very bad.

"No—it's nothing like that," Mike reassures her, "do you promise?"

"Are you sure you're not in any kind of trouble?" Maria asked again, because she was now also getting very curious as to what Mike could have gotten into.

"I'll only promise if you aren't in some kind of trouble," She finally told him.

"Mom, --I hadn't done anything wrong, --honest!" Mike firmly repeated, reassuring her, and then he pauses, takes a deep breath, and then tells her with uncertainty, "Now you had better sit down, because I have something I want to tell you."

Now for her to sit down to hear what Mike had to say, was now getting her a little worried, because she just couldn't imagine what Mike had done, so reluctantly, she sat down at the table.

Mike then took another deep breath, closed his eyes and said, "Mom, --I'm a Commercial Helicopter Pilot."

Maria sat there stunned and didn't know what to say.

"Mom--are you Ok?" He asked, hoping the shock wasn't too much for her.

"Mom, --I can fly a Helicopter," He repeated, to be sure she heard it, "I'm a Pilot now, --just like Brian and Jeff."

"Mike, --how long have you been flying?" She asked, still stunned by Mike's announcement.

"Since I started working as a Groundhandler--and I got my License today," Mike replied with a smile, "Captain Clark, --he was my instructor. He and the rest of my friends at work gave me a celebration party in the hangar this afternoon. We had pizza, pop, and cake too, --and look what my friend's gave me," He proudly showed her his wings, she look at them and started to cry.

"What's wrong Mom?" He asked, fearing he had upset her somehow.

Maria motion for him to come to her, and when he came to her, she then hugged him and whispered in his ear, "My baby can fly, and now we all can fly. I want your Father to know that our dream has been fulfilled."

Mike pulled back in fear and cried, "NO! Dad and my Brothers must never know--you had promised you wouldn't tell! If Dad ever find's

out--he'll not let me work there again, and I'll never be able to fly Helicopters again. Only the two of us shall ever know that I'm a Pilot."

Maria then smiled nodding, and softly conceding she said, "Ok Mike --only the two of us will know your secret until such time you want to tell your Father."

"Thanks Mom, it sure feels good to tell someone in our family," Mike said now feeling relieved and happy, "I'm so very glad it was you."

Mike took his Wings and went to his room where he hid them, so his Dad and older Brothers wouldn't find them.

Maria was now sobbing when Henry walked in.

"What's the matter with you?" Henry asked her.

"Michael," Was all Maria could say, as a tear of joy ran down her cheek.

"Now what did Mike do to upset you?" Henry asked sharply in a vindictive tone, figuring Mike was up to no good again, "all he ever does is make trouble. I'll just go and have a good talk with him."

"You leave Mike alone," Maria told him emphatically, shaking her finger at him, "He didn't do anything wrong and I'm Ok."

"Ok--you win, I won't say anything to Mike," Henry grumbled walking out of the kitchen, shaking his head, throwing his hands up and mumbling, "Woman, ---twenty-three years and I still can't figure em' out," and headed for his bedroom to retire.

By the end of the those next two weeks the entire class had soloed, and followed Brian and Dale into the pool.

Jeff graduated from high school in the first week in June, just as Brian had done; only this time it was Brian, who wasn't at the graduation.

Jeff was to enter the fall semester at the Air Force Academy, which starts in September, so he had all of that summer to fly for Elcor.

Mike turned seventeen in July, and was now working on his instrument rating.

Mike could now fly all of Larry's Helicopters, and became one of Larry's safest Pilots as well as becoming Larry's most skilled Pilot.

Mike got his instrument rating just before they left to go to Brian's graduation in August, and of course, he then told his Mother and she started to sob again.

The day before they would leave for San Diego and Miramar, Mike

took his Mother and introduced her to Captain Clark, Wayne, and Scott.

Then Larry proceeded to tell her about how good Mike really was, and that Mike was a very safe Pilot.

“That’s why he gets most of the passenger job’s,” Larry told her, “Mike can be trusted with the lives of other people when he’s flying and he does a good job as a Groundhandler as well, because he always gets things done right the first time.”

CHAPTER 8 -- THE HUMMING BIRD'S

Jeff, Mike and their Parents arrived in San Diego on Tuesday afternoon and got themselves settled in at a motel.

The next day they were all seated in the reviewing stand, along with the parents and friends of the other graduates; Brian was graduating second in his class followed by Dale, his roommate.

Dale had been right, they both had made it through, and were now about to become Marine Fighter Pilots.

After the graduation ceremony, which lasted about an hour and half, Brian walked over to where his family was standing, with his Lieutenant insignia and wings in his hand.

Brian said, as he first turned to Jeff, and then to Mike, handing them each a gold bar, "Would you two do the honors and pin these on for me?"

Both Jeff and Mike said sure, and then pinned the gold Lieutenant bars on Brian's uniform, and then Brian turned and looked at his Father, handing him his wings he said, "Sir--will you?"

"Son I'd be proud to," Henry replied, and then pinned the wings on Brian's uniform; then Brian stepped back and saluted his Father, and after Henry returned the salute, he shook Brian's hand and gave him a Fatherly hug.

Dale brought his Parents and Sister over to meet the Troff's with a round introductions, followed by some friendly chatter until finally, Dale said, "We got some celebrating to do--we'll see you all later," after which Dale and his family walked away.

A few minutes later, the School Commander comes walking over; Brian salutes the School Commander and introduces his family to him.

The School Commander said to Henry, "Brian had been one of our top Student Pilots and he'll probably be returning to Miramar to attend our Advance Fighter Training School."

"I would like to add that, you should all be proud of Brian, because he's got the talent to become an excellent Fighter Pilot, maybe even an Ace Someday," on hearing this, Henry, now looking at Brian, just smiled with pride.

The school Commander said, turning to look at Jeff, "I suppose young man, you'll also want to join the Marines or maybe the Navy, to become a Fighter Pilot--like your Brother?"

"No Sir," Jeff firmly replied, "I'm entering the Air Force Academy next month. I want to learn how to fly the B80 Bomber."

"Well, --congratulations on your appointment," The School Commander told him, "if you're just as good as your Brother, well, I think the Air Force is going to have one hell of a Bomber Pilot," he then smiled and shook Jeff's hand.

And finally, the School Commander turns to Mike and says, "Now let me guess, --I'll bet you want to become a Marine Fighter Pilot, --just like your Brother."

"No Sir," Mike told him, "I'm going to collage when I graduate from High School. Anyway, I don't like airplanes all that much."

The School Commander now looked shocked, and said, "You don't like airplanes! And your family fly's! I just can't believe you don't like to fly, now tell me, --what are you planning to study in college?"

"I'm going to Major in Computer Science," Mike replied.

Henry puts his hand on Mike's shoulder and tells everyone, "Mike's our computer whiz. He's even sold a program already. However, he does like airplanes, but he can't fly. He just hasn't got what it takes to be a Pilot."

"That's too bad," The School Commander lamenting with a sigh, "I'll tell you one thing thought, if he's that good with computers, I just know he'll go a long way and make you proud of him. Someday fighter aircraft will be flying in combat without a Human Pilot. The Pilot will be a computer operator on the ground. You can already began to see it today, with all the on board computers that we now have in our aircraft. Events just happen to fast for a Human Pilot to react too. Mike just might be the warrior of the future."

Finally, the School Commander told them he had to go and shook everyone's hand; Brian again saluted and the School Commander returned the salute, and then he saluted Henry and after the returned salute, he walked away and headed towards another graduate and his family.

"Dad, I've got orders for duty on the Aircraft Carrier Nimitz and I'm leaving on Friday with Dale for Mediterranean," Brian abruptly telling his Father to his surprise.

The next day they all bid good-bye to Brian and leave for home. Saturday morning, Mike pulled up in front of the office and parked; he then got out of the car and went inside, and when he walked into the office, he saw Larry talking to three strange men.

Larry greets Mike, when he sees him entering the office, “Good morning Mike--I want you to meet the Humming Birds, they’re a Helicopter aerobatic team.”

Larry then introduces them to Mike, “Mike, --I would like you to meet the Team Leader Donald Zempel,” and then pointing to the tall man standing to the right of Zempel, “this is Harold Tate, Mister Zempel’s Right Wingman, and next to him is John Sutton, Mister Zempel’s Left Wingman.” Mike then shook their hands and said, “Hi--pleased to meet you all.”

“Mister Zempel and his aerobatic team will be using our facilities for the next several months to practice,” Larry announced with a grin.

“Larry’s been telling me all about how good a Pilot you are,” Donald piping up, “I thought maybe, you would like to fly with us and learn some aerobatic maneuvers.”

Mike said, as he was now getting a little excited, “I sure would, but I don’t know if I’ll have the time, there’s lots of work I have do around here. I still owe Larry for the flight lessons he gave me.”

Larry then said, “Every employee who works here for a year gets a two week vacation, so Mike, if you want to take your vacation by the hour, as flight time with the Humming Birds, that’s up to you.”

“That’s eighty hours--wow! When can I start and how will we work this?”

“You can start anytime,” Larry replied, “I’ll use your Logbook where you log your aerobatic flight time during the work week, to keep track of how much vacation time you have used up. I won’t count Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays. When you get the eighty hours used up, I’ll then tell you, your vacation time has been used up.”

Mike then asked Mr. Zempel when he could start, Mr. Zempel told him, if he wanted to, he could start flying tomorrow.

And so for the rest of August Mike flew with the Humming Birds.

Mike flew a couple hours here and an hour or so there, until he had used up his vacation.

Donald told Larry, he was surprised at how fast and how well, Mike had learned the difficult aerobatic flight maneuvers.

Donald asked Larry if he could use Mike in the Airshow on Labor Day, Larry told him, "Sure, --if you're sure Mike's good enough," to which Donald nods with a big smile.

The next day, Donald asked Mike, if he would like to perform on Labor Day in the Air Show.

At first, Mike was about to tell Donald, sure, he would love to fly in the Airshow, and then he thought about what his father would do if he found out he's been flying Helicopters, so he then said, "Oh no--I can't--not here in Roseville, maybe somewhere else. Maybe in Los Angeles or some other place that is far away, but not here!"

Donald was shocked at hearing this. "Mike, I thought you loved aerobatic flying. All of those hours of training and now you don't want to perform--I just don't understand--what's the problem?"

Then Larry explained to Donald about Mike's Dad not wanting any of his Sons flying Helicopters.

"Why--that's dumbest thing I've ever heard," Donald retorted, "to deny his Son the right to choose what aircraft he wants to fly. Now that's nuts."

"I'll perform if no one will find out who I am," Mike offering a solution.

Larry then got an idea and said, "Couldn't you all use handles like what Fighter Pilots use, to let the people at the Airshow know who's doing what?"

Donald then smiled and said, "Why of course--that's a great idea--how about it Mike? Can you come up with a handle?"

"Yeah, --just give me some time to think of one," Mike replied.

"I've got mine," Donald announced with a big smile, "it's Twister, because of the way I fly in Airshows, always turning and looping."

Mike turns and looks out of the window thinking, and then as he's looking at the sign, he suddenly turns around and says, "I've also got mine. That's if Larry says it is all right."

"Ok, --let's have it," Donald requested "what have you decided on?"

Mike said, while looking at Larry, "I would like to use the call of Pegasus, but only if Larry says it's ok, because it's here where I got my wings."

"Why Mike, that's a great handle and you honor me by using it," Larry solemnly told him.

“Well then, it’s all settled,” Donald announced with a big smile, “we’ll all perform here on Labor Day.”

On Labor Day morning, Mike laid there in bed thinking about how he was going to slip away from his family without his Dad and Jeff getting suspicious, so he can join the Humming Birds to perform in the Airshow.

Maria walked to the hallway and hollered, “BOY’S GET UP, THAT’S IF YOU WANT TO GO TO THE AIRSHOW TODAY.”

When the Boys entered the kitchen to eat breakfast, Henry informs them, “I’ve got us seats in the portable grandstand that will be setup to view the main runway.”

“What time does the Airshow start?” Jeff asked.

“I believe the Airshow starts at two o’clock,” replied Mike, “it will last for about three hours.”

Jeff announced with excitement, “I’ve heard there will be a B80 from McClellan, doing some flybys. I just can’t wait to see it.”

Maria said, as she looked at Mike, “I also heard there will be an Aerobatic Helicopter Team performing too.”

“Yes and there will also be a lot of other aerobatic act’s,” Henry adding, “it’s going to be a great afternoon, and probably the last one with Jeff along.”

“I’ve got to go,” said Mike getting up from the table, “I’ll see you all at lunch, --bye now,” and he walks out of the house.

Donald and his teammates were talking in the hangar when Larry walked in, and when he got to where they were talking, he said greeting, “Good morning. Are you guys ready for the Airshow today?”

“Yes we’re ready,” Donald replied, and then he smiled and said, “What would you say, if we would let Mike do a solo, --you know he’s good enough.”

Larry answered with another question, “Have you asked Mike about doing a solo today?”

“No, --not yet, but I’ll ask him when he comes in,” Donald replied, “I just know, he’ll be real excited about it.”

The Humming Birds were cleaning and polishing their aircrafts when Mike walked into the hangar.

“Good morning,” Mike cheerfully greets all of them, as he walks over to where Donald was polishing his Helicopter.

“You had better get busy,” replied Donald, “your aircraft needs a cleaning,” Mike looks at his Helicopter, smiles and says, “Yeah, --she sure does,” and so, he goes and gets a bucket with soap and water.

Mike spent the next two Hours washing and waxing his Helicopter, because he wanted his Helicopter to shine today when he performs with the Humming Birds.

When he had finished, Donald asked Mike to come into the office, because he wanted to talk to him about something.

“Now what did I do?” Mike asked himself, and then he thought, “Maybe I’m not good enough after all, and they’re not going to let me fly in the Airshow.”

When Mike walked into the office, Larry, Donald and the other Team members were there waiting.

Mike thought, when he sees them all sitting on the couch in the office, “Well, I guess this is it, I might as well get it over with.”

Mike then said, starting to feel bad, “I’m old enough to take the bad news, so let’s have it.”

“What bad news?” Larry asked a little confused.

“Why, --aren’t you going to tell me that I’m not good enough to fly in the Airshow today?”

They all laughed, and then Donald said, “Whatever gave you an idea like that.”

“Because you’re all here, and you wanted to see me.”

“Mike, --you’re a very skillful Pilot,” Donald told him with a big smile, “we’re all here, because we wanted to ask you something. To not let you fly in the Airshow is the last thing we want. Mike, --you’re definitely in the Airshow.”

“You’re not washing me out!” Mike exclaimed, and then a bit confused he asked, “Then, --what is it that you want to talk to me about?”

Donald looked at Larry and started to smile again, and then he looked back to Mike and said, “Mike, --how would you like to do a solo. That is, after you get finish flying with us?”

Mike just stood there stunned, not knowing how to respond.

Donald then asked, “What ya’ say, will you do it?”

“Sure,” Mike replied, after getting his composure back, “if you think I’m good enough.”

“Believe me--you’re good enough,” Donald assured him smiling, “so, --I guess it’s all settled, --you’ll fly again after we finish.”

“It’s now getting close to noon,” Larry announced glancing at the clock, “Mike, you had better be heading home for lunch, we’ll see you at the Airshow later.”

“I want you to be here at three o’clock,” Donald tells Mike, as he heads for the door, “so you’ll have time to preflight your aircraft for our performance at three thirty.”

Mike turns and nods to them, indicating he’ll be there, and then he walks out of room and heads home for lunch.

Henry, Maria and the Boys were seated in the grandstand by two o’clock.

The Airshow started with a flyby of a group of F30 Fighters, from McClellan AFB; next, a small jet performed some aerobatics.

Mike kept looking at his watch, because he didn’t want to be late for his performance.

At two-forty-five, Mike finished the hotdog he was eating and said to his Dad, “I’ve got to leave for a little bit, but I’ll be back, so hold my seat,” and then he got up and left for the hangar; at the hangar, the Humming Birds were getting ready, so Mike went over to his Helicopter and started his preflight.

Donald walked over to where Mike was doing his preflight and asked, “You nervous? We go on after the next group,” after hearing this Mike said, as his stomach was now starting to get a little queasy, “Yeah, --I guess I shouldn’t have eaten that hotdog, I feel kinda’ sick.”

Donald giggling told him, “You’ll feel just fine once you start flying. The ‘War Birds’ are just about done with their performance. You had better start your run up checks, because we’re next.”

Mike and the rest of the Humming Birds, started up their Helicopters, performed their run up checks; and when the ‘War Birds’ finished and taxied back to their area, Mike and the rest of the Humming Birds flew out to the main runway where they waited, hovering at the holding line on the approach-way to the main runway, because they were now waiting to be introduced by the announcer.

Finally, it was time for the Announcer to start the introductions for the Humming Birds, “Ladies and Gentlemen. I know you’re all going to

enjoy this next group. For they are the Worlds Helicopter Aerobatic Champions. I've been told they can do some flight maneuvers with their Helicopters that you just won't believe. Now he r r e's--Twister and the Humming Birds."

Donald, Mike and the rest of the Humming Birds flew over to the grandstand, where they turned and faced the people sitting there.

Mike saw his Parents and Brother sitting there, looking at him, and was hoping they didn't see him sitting inside of the black and red Helicopter. Next, they did a ninety degree turn and flew away to start their performance.

They began to execute maneuvers, the people in the grandstand just couldn't believe a Helicopter was capable doing; the people cheered and applauded after each difficult maneuver.

Maria remarked, "Well Henry--what do you think of the Humming Birds, --aren't they good?"

"Why, --they sure are," Henry replied, quite impressed, and then he asked, "Where's Mike? He's sure taking his time getting back, --he's missing the best part of the show!"

Maria thinking, "Henry's right, where is Mike? He should see this."

"The Humming Birds have a new member with them today," the Announcer informing everyone about the new member of the team, "He's flying the black and red Helicopter. His handle is Pegasus, and he'll be doing a solo performance for us after the Humming Birds have finished."

Mike was now feeling great, the queasy feeling he had earlier was gone, and now he was having a ball performing with the Humming Birds.

When they finished with their performance, they flew back to the hangar area; Mike then started to refuel his Helicopter for his solo performance, as the Announcer said, over the PA, "In just a few minutes Pegasus will be back to perform, --he has to refuel first."

When Mike had finished refueling, he did a quick preflight; to be sure that everything was still Ok.

Donald walked over to where Mike was checking things out and said, "You did just fine with us. Now, you just go out there and have some fun, and enjoy yourself. You're a great Pilot and you shouldn't have any trouble. Just go and do those special maneuvers we practiced all week and you'll knock em' out of their seats."

Now the audience didn't know it, but the best was yet to come; Mike told Donald, he'll give them a show that they'll never forget.

Mike restarted his Helicopter and did a quick run up check, and as soon as he was finished, he flew back out to the main runway and once again waited for the announcer to introduce him.

After he was introduced, he flew back over to the grandstand, and there, he turned to face the audience, just as he did previously with the Humming Birds.

After a very brief pause, so his family wouldn't see him sitting inside the Helicopter, he once again made a ninety degree turn and flew out to do his solo flight, which will become the greatest aerobatic flight of the show.

As he flew and preformed some very intricate aerial maneuvers the audience rose to their feet cheering, clapping, yelling and whistling, because they have never seen a Helicopter perform like this one.

When he had finally finished, he flew back to the hangar area; the audience then started to shout, "ENCORE, ENCORE, WE WANT PEGASUS, WE WANT PEGASUS!"

When Mike heard all of this shouting, he became uneasy and a little frighten.

Donald said, "Mike, you're a star, they want you to fly some more. You had better go back and fly or they won't stop shouting."

Mike in a state of sheer panic cried, "I can't go back! What if they want me to land and get out of my Helicopter, then Dad will see me. No way, --I'm not going back!"

"Mike, --you're just going to have to go back and fly some more," Donald said in demanding tone.

Mike defiantly snapped back, as he was now very frightened, "NO--I'm not going back and that's final. Larry, --you can go, they won't know the difference. Anyway, I'd better be getting back before Mom and Dad comes looking for me."

Donald then said to Larry, "Looks like Mike's really upset. He's not going back out there, because he's afraid his Father will find out he's been flying a Helicopter. Larry, --now you must fly, after all your business could use the publicity. Mike wants you to do it, so how about it?"

"Larry, Donald is right, you sure can use the publicity," Mike pleading, "please Larry, --will you do this for the company?"

Larry hesitated for a moment and then he said, "Ok, just this once.

I don't like taking honors, especially if I didn't earn them."

Then Larry looked at Mike, and told him bluntly, "Young man, -- next time you're going to take your own bows--you hear!"

"Yes Sir and thanks, --you just saved my life," Mike sighed, as he was now relieved and grateful, and then he said, "I've got to be going, -- bye."

Mike then hurried back to grandstand and Larry went and got into Mike's Helicopter and flew back out to the grandstand, where the crowd was still shouting, "ENCORE, WE WANT PEGASUS."

When Mike had returned to his seat, Henry gruffly asked, as he was upset that Mike wasn't there to see the Helicopter performance, "Where in hell have you been? You missed the best part of the show."

"Sorry Dad," Mike apologetically replied, "I met some friends from school and we were talking about going dirt biking."

Henry was now getting very upset and said, in a scolding tone, "You and that damn motorcycle, just look at this crowd, they just saw a fantastic aerobatic flight by a Helicopter, and that Pilot is one hell of flyer. Just once, couldn't you take a little interest in aviation?"

"Look Dad! Here comes Pegasus for an encore!" Jeff exclaimed, now seeing the black and red Helicopter flying towards the grandstand, but this time it was Larry, who was flying to the grandstand and the crowd didn't know the difference; they sat down and stopped chanting.

When Larry arrived, he did the ninety-degree turn, just as Mike had done previously, and then he went and did some simple aerobatic maneuvers; when he had finished, he landed in front of the grandstand, got out and waved to the crowd.

The Announcer told everyone, he was Larry Clark from Pegasus Aviation, and with a final remark he said, "Well, --now we all know from where he got his handle."

The next morning was the first day of school for Mike; he was now a junior in High School.

Henry was reading the morning paper when Mike walked into the kitchen to eat breakfast, and on the front page was a picture of Larry; the picture showed Larry standing by the Helicopter in front of the grandstand and the headlines read, "THE AMAZING AEROBATIC HELICOPTER PILOT."

Jeff suddenly announced, “I have to be in Colorado Springs by Friday, because the Air Force Academy is having enrollment exercises, so Mark and I will be flying out on Wednesday with some parts for a company in Denver. Mark and I have everything worked out, he’ll fly the aircraft back alone and I will take a Bus from Denver to the Air Force Academy. It looks like it’ll work out just great for me, and this will probably be my last flight as a civilian.”

“Sounds like you’ve got everything all planed out,” Henry says to Jeff, “I guess you’re going to be the last one in our family to become a Military Pilot. As Mike just doesn’t seem to have what it takes.”

“To bad about Mike,” Jeff laments feeling a bit sorry for Mike, and then he remarks, “Say Dad, --that Helicopter Pilot--you know--the one in the Airshow and in today’s paper, Larry Clark, that name sure sounds familiar, I know I heard that name somewhere.”

Henry said, as he looked up from the paper he was reading, “Yes, now that you mention it, --his name does seem to ring a bell.”

Mike was now starting to get worried, because his Dad and Jeff just might remember who Larry Clark was.

Now if they would happen to remember it was Larry, who he works for, then they would put one and one together and come up with Helicopter Pilot Mike.

Now Mike was very concerned and becoming uneasy, his only hope was to change the subject, so he said, as he looked at his cereal, “Dad, --what do you think of the Humming Birds?”

“They’re just great. The way they flew, --never saw anything like it before. Pegasus, --that is Larry Clark, he’s best Pilot I’ve seen in a long time.”

Mike was now very nervous and thinking, “That was a close call, --wrong subject. I’ve got to think of something fast or he’s going to remember and I’ll be grounded,” so, Mike turns to look at Maria, his eyes pleading to her for help and hoping she could bail him out of this mess.

Maria sensing Mike’s problem says to Henry, “Dear, do you still think Helicopters are still too dangerous for our Sons to fly?”

“Yes, and I’m sure glad none of our Sons are flying em’,” Henry firmly replied, “look at Mister Clark, --he probably spent a lot of hours practicing to do that one performance that we saw yesterday. A Helicopter is the most difficult aircraft there is to learn to fly. It takes a special Pilot to

master its flight controls. If Mister Clark was flying EXCALIBUR in combat, then, --I'm afraid, Major Larson is right, --a Fighter wouldn't stand a chance. EXCALIBUR with the right Pilot can be very deadly."

Mike was now looking at his Mother with a worried expression on his face; she just shrugged and looked back at him with a blank expression.

So Mike figured, the best thing to do was leave before he or his Mom would get him in deeper. "It's time for me to leave for school, I'll see you all later, --bye," Mike said, terminating the discussion, he then got up, walked out of the house and drove off to school in Brian's car.

And as he drove to school he thought, "God, that was close, I sure hope Dad doesn't remember who Larry is or I'm grounded for sure."

As he continued down the road, Mike remembered what his Father had said about his Sons flying Helicopters and Mike's heart sank again, for now, he must still keep his flying secret; although now, he's feeling a little better, on hearing his Dad recognizing Excalibur's qualities.

On Wednesday, Jeff said his good-byes to everyone for the last time as a civilian, and told them he hoped he'd be home for Christmas; he then left in a Cab for his last day at Elcor.

CHAPTER 9 -- THE MIDDLE EAST WAR

The World was now starting to come apart at the seams the Middle Eastern Nations were all lining up behind Syria and Iran; their goal was to unite all of the Islamic Nations into one United Islamic Nation.

In Tehran, the leaders of the Eight Islamic Nations signed a treaty, which became known as the Tehran Pack.

The Eight Nations that signed the Pack were Syria, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Pakistan and they were now ready to launch an all-out war against anyone who would stand in their way to unite all of their Islamic Brothers.

Libya with its Pack Nations and with military help from China was now threatening Spain, Italy, and Southern France; Syria, Egypt, and Iran, was threatening Israel.

Israel came to the UN asking for help, the United States and England offered assistance.

Spain, Italy and France had also formed a treaty to defend themselves from the threat from Libya and its Pack Nations.

The United States, in response to Israel's call for help, sent the Fourth Fleet into the Mediterranean.

The Aircraft Carriers Kennedy, and Galaxy, joined the Nimitz, which was already on station in the Mediterranean.

Henry was watching the news reports on TV, of the fighting in Middle East and said, as Maria walked into the Den, "Well dear it's finally happen. It looks like we're into another undeclared war, but I'm afraid it may turn into a World War within the next year or so, especially the way, the Soviet Union, China and North Korea are aligning."

"My God," Maria responded with deep concern about Brian, "I hope Brian will be ok. You know he's over there on the Nimitz."

"Now, don't you go and start worrying about Brian," Henry replied, trying to reassured her, "he's a very good Fighter Pilot and he'll be just fine."

"You know, Jeff is also in the Service. I'm afraid he'll also be in combat shortly," Maria adding, as she's now started to worry about Jeff.

Henry once again reassured her, "Jeff's in the Air Force Academy, and that's where he's going to remain for the next four years, so he won't

see any combat no matter how bad the Middle East gets, at least for the next four years. Anyway, it's still a Navel affair, the Air Force and the Army hasn't gotten into it yet."

Saturday, the weekend before Thanksgiving and it was late afternoon, Mike had just returned from a long commuter flight and was now in the process of shutting down the Aérospatiale Dolphin when Larry flew in with an EXCALIBUR EXR2T Helicopter.

Mike got out of the Dolphin and just stood there, because he couldn't believe his eyes, for there, just thirty feet in front of him sat an EXR2T Fighter Helicopter.

Now, Mike just couldn't wait until Larry had it shut down, so he could get a closer look; when Larry had finally shut it down, Mike was on his way over to get that closer look.

Larry was just about to get out of the aircraft when Mike walked up and asked, "Larry, were did you get the EXR2?"

"This is an Army Helicopter, and I've been assigned to this one, how do like it?"

Mike fell instantly in love and said, "God, --she's so beautiful, --can I look inside?"

"Sure, but let me get out first, then you can get a closer look," said Larry climbing out and taking off his helmet, and then Mike climbed in, because he wanted to see what has changed from the time he had worked on the EXR1 prototype at Edwards.

"Larry, —what's the difference from this one and the EXR1?"

"Not very much, only that, this one has more electronics and it can fly higher. Its operating ceiling, is now at thirty thousand feet."

"Wow," Mike exclaimed, "that's ten thousand more than the EXR1!"

Larry was now grinning when he said, "How would you like to go for a ride? I just might teach you to fly her, that's if you don't tell anyone and promise to do exactly what I tell you, because if you tell, I will be in big trouble."

Mike got very excited and consents, "Sure, --I promise, now we both have secrets, and I'll do exactly what you tell me, --when can we go?"

"How about tomorrow afternoon, let's say about two o'clock, it should be quiet around here and no one should see us," Larry told him with a big grin.

“I’ll be here,” Mike replied, as he was now so excited he couldn’t wait.

Mike was at Pegasus Aviation by two o’clock on Sunday, and was now so excited he couldn’t wait until they were flying.

After Larry had just finished doing a preflight on the EXR2T, he walked into the office where Mike was waiting, holding an Army Flight Suit and Helmet.

“What are those for?” Asked Mike pointing to the gear that Larry was holding.

“You mean this stuff here,” replied Larry holding up the flight gear that he was carrying.

“Yeah, --that stuff. What’s it for?”

“Why, --it’s for a hot shot young Pilot, --like the one standing here that I’m talking to,” Larry replied with a grin.

“For me!” Mike exclaimed, and then he remarked, “Hey, --it says US ARMY on it. Say Larry, --I got news for you, --I’m not in the Army.”

“Yes that’s true for now, but this is for you to wear,” Larry explaining, and grinning he said, “You’re going to have to wear this while we fly, just in case someone sees us. This way they’ll think we’re both in the Army, --so hurry up and get into this.”

Mike took the flight gear from Larry and went into the locker room to put it on; a short time later, Mike returned to the office where Larry was waiting, wearing the flight suit.

Larry said, as Mike walked in. “My god, you look great.”

“I was afraid you were too small and the suit wouldn’t fit, but it fit’s you just fine, you now look just like an Army Pilot. Try on the helmet, let’s see how that fit’s,” the helmet, it also fit Mike just fine.

Mike had noticed the word, ‘Pegasus’, was written on the front of the helmet and asks, “Why does it say Pegasus on my helmet?”

“That’s your call sign, --all Military Pilots have one,” Larry explained, “that’s how we identify ourselves when we are flying. You’re also going to need one, so I went and had the one that you used, when you flew in the Labor Day Airshow, printed on your helmet, --I hope that was ok.”

“Yeah--sure, that’s just fine,” Mike replied, and is now thinking, “I’m now called Pegasus when I fly, and now nobody will never know who I really am. This is great, now Dad will never know that I can fly. Now I’ve got a real military call, —how awesome is that.”

“Larry--what’s your call?”

Larry said, as he then showed Mike his helmet, “See, my call is Reamer, so--are you ready to go and do some flying?”

“Yeah, I thought you would never ask.”

As they walked out to the aircraft, Larry explained to Mike, the EXR2T that he had, was an Army Trainer; so it had two seats and two sets of controls, the regular models that are used in combat only have one seat.

Larry told Mike, this model was called an EXR2T and the ‘T’ stood for Trainer, all the other models have letters ‘A’ through ‘H’.

When they arrived at the aircraft, Larry took Mike through the walk around preflight procedures; he explained to Mike every step in detail and told Mike, he has some manuals that the Army had given him. “So when we get back I’ll let you study them.”

When they had finished, Larry told Mike to climb into the front seat and Larry got into the back seat; he told Mike, the front seat is where the Student Pilot sits, and went on to tell Mike that here is where he’ll teach Mike how to fly the EXR2T.

For the first part of that afternoon, Larry taught Mike how to fly the EXR2T.

Larry was once again amazed at how easily Mike learned to fly the EXR2T, as Mike’s talent was again showing.

Now, Mike just loved flying the EXR2T, for no matter what he wanted it to do, the EXR2T would do it with ease; Mike found he could fly it just as easy as the other Helicopters he fly’s.

“Pegasus, how would you like to try your hand at some target practice?” Larry suggesting, because he’s curious to see how well Mike could shoot.

On hearing Larry mentioning target practice, Mike got real excited and said, elated, “you bet Reamer--lemme’ at em’, let’s go.”

“Ok then, change course to zero-niner-five,” Larry chuckling, telling him over the intercom the direction to the target range. “The Army has a practice range about one hundred and fifteen miles from here.”

“Yes Reamer--Sir. Changing course to zero-niner-five,” Mike replies and using the flight controls and flies to the new heading as the compass indicator changes to point to the new direction of flight.

“Please--don’t use the Sir with the call sign, if anyone is listening,

they'll know right off you're a Kid," Larry making a little point with Mike. "Oh, --sorry about that--Reamer--Si...", Mike replied, stumbling.

"We can use the target range as long as there aren't any other aircraft there. The Navy sometimes also uses this range for target practice, so you don't want to be there, when there's F30's, and F32's flying around."

"Reamer, --what if I'm there first, do I have to leave then?"

"No," Larry replied, "it's generally first come first serve, but sometimes the range is scheduled and you don't want to be around then, but otherwise if you're there first, then they should leave you alone."

"What if they don't leave, --then what should I do?"

"Well, --if they persist on hassling you, then I want you to leave and let them have the range."

"But Reamer, --I can out fly them, so why can't I stay?"

Larry declares in very strong words, as he doesn't want an incident, and having to explain the loss of his aircraft and why a Kid was flying it, "Pegasus--NO. I do not want you to engage in aerial combat with any F30's or F32's. Do you understand?"

"Yes Sir," Mike replied sounding disappointed, and then mumbling, "but I know that I can out fly them..."

Larry, hearing Mike's unhappiness tries to raise his spirits, "Pegasus, from what I've seen today, I know you probably could out fly them in EXCALIBUR. However, I don't want an incident in which you or they might inadvertently shoot down and kill someone. So, --no engagement's with any other aircraft, --DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR."

"Yeah, --there will be no dogfights," Mike conceding.

Now they were at the target range and they were alone, and then Larry told Mike to select his guns and try to take out the two targets on a hill to their left.

Mike flew at one of the targets and fired his guns, but all that happened was a lot of dust being kicked up.

Mike disappointed said, "SHIT! I missed, I'll try again."

Larry now laughing said, "Not to bad for your first try. Now let me explain to you on the proper use of your weapons computer and your Head's Up Display (HUD)," Larry then went and explained to Mike just how to use them, after which Larry took the flight controls and demonstrated just how it all works.

After Larry had destroyed the two targets on the side of the hill, he told Mike, “Now try to take out those three pillboxes at the base of that hill over there, but this time use your weapons computer and the HUD.”

Mike tried again, this time using his weapons computer and the HUD, and he destroyed all of the pillboxes.

“Yeah, --how about that,” Mike happily announced feeling good and adding, “by using both the HUD and the weapons computer, I can’t miss.”

Larry just laughed and said, “Oh yes you can. You still must be able to lock up your targets on the HUD, by flying this aircraft. If you can’t fly good, then you won’t hit anything either.”

“But Larry, --the EXR2T is easy for me to fly, so how can I miss?”

“You’re right, --you can fly the EXR2T,” Larry replies with concern, “so you probably won’t miss, and that’s another good reason why I don’t want you to mess around with F30’s and F32’s.”

Mike spent the rest of the afternoon shooting up the range with his guns and missiles.

After it started getting dark, they came back to the airport and landed.

When they were back in the office, Larry said, “Well Mike, --you’re going to be one hell of an EXR Fighter Pilot, that’s after you learn how to shoot at night, dogfight, and a few other things that I’ll teach you. I’ll teach you all those things each Sunday afternoon, that’s if you still want to learn?”

Mike's face was glowing with anticipation and he replied, “You bet I do,” and then looking at the clock on the wall, he said, “God! Look at the time, I’ve got to be going, tomorrow is school. Mom and Dad will be wondering where I’ve been all day. I’ll see you tomorrow after school--bye Larry,” and he walked out of the room and departed for home.

Brian and Dale were in a flight briefing, along with fifteen other Pilots, on the Carrier Nimitz; the Wing Commander, Commander Carlson, was giving the briefing.

“We’re here to help the Israeli Pilots and their Army, defend their country,” Commander Carlson told the group of Fighter Pilots, “the target for today is Al-Qunaytirah, which is just south west of Damascus, as you can see here on the map,” Commander Carlson turning to the big tactical map on the wall and pointing to the location.

Commander Carlson then continued, “Israeli Military Intelligence is telling us, there is a heavy Syrian Armor and Infantry build up in that area. They think it might be the beginnings of a full scale invasion, so, the F32’s will bomb the six primary targets around Al-Qunaytirah and the F30’s, well, --you’ll have your hands full, because the Syrian and some of the Egyptian Air Force will be there in force. Plus, don’t forget the ground fire, --it’s going to be very heavy. Now, are there any questions?”

One Pilot raised his hand; Commander Carlson pointed to him. “Yes Lieutenant?”

The Pilot then inquired as to whether the Israeli Air Force would be there to help, the Commander then replied, “Yes, there may be a small squadron of F30’s, but that’s it, the rest of the Israeli Air Force is in the south at Ramon, because they are expecting an attack from Jordanian Forces at Ash-Shawbak, so we’re basically on our own. We’ll be having some aircraft from the Kennedy and the Galaxy. Any more questions?”

No one else raised their hand so Commander Carlson said, “Good, --departure time is at o-nine-hundred this morning, --see you all up on Deck.”

As everyone got up to leave, Commander Carlson motioned for Brian and Dale to come over.

When they were standing in front him, he said to them, “You two are our newest Pilots, so I want the both of you to fly with Marine Captain Axelson (Wrench). He’s in command of Blue Squadron and he’ll try to keep you out of trouble, because it’s going to get very rough out there today.”

The Commander then motion to Captain Axelson to come over.

When the Captain came over to where they are, the Commander told him, “I’m assigning Marine Lieutenants Troff (Python) and Taylor (Barracuda) to your Squadron. They’re our latest replacements and they’re fresh out of Flight School, so keep an eye on em’, we wouldn’t want to lose them just yet.”

“Yes Sir,” the Captain replied.

“Python and Barracuda,” the Captain commanding, “come with me--we got some flying to do.”

Both Brian and Dale followed Wrench up to the Flight Deck, because it was just about time to take off.

Captain Axelson said to himself, “God, why do I always get stuck with all the kids. I already got six wet nosed kids and now Hacksaw gives

me two more.”

All eight of Wrench’s kids were in their aircrafts and were ready to taxi to the catapult; all of the F32’s were now in the air and on their way to their targets.

Wrench announced, over the radio, “As soon as you get off the Carrier, form up on me. Our job today is to locate the F32’s, fly with them to the target, and then try to keep the enemy fighters busy until the F32’s can knock out their primaries. I don’t need to tell you, it’s going to get very hot and dicey up there. For once we cross the over the coast, --the Syrian Fighters are going to be on us like flies. So always be sure to keep your wingman in sight, and for heaven sakes watch your six o’clock, the Syrian Fighters like to sneak up on you from the rear.”

Brian and Dale were the last two catapulted off the carrier; when they caught up with their squadron, they all flew in formation.

Wrench said, over the radio, “Ok, there’s the F32 Fighter Bombers and there’s the Syrian border, now let’s go and do some escort duty, and for heaven sakes don’t forget what I told you about the Syrian Fighters. There’s one other thing, and that is, Egyptian surface to air missiles, they are bad news and we should be coming into their range any minute now, so keep an eye open and good luck. I want to see you all back and safe on the Carrier.”

Four minutes later, Brian got a Radar indication on his instrument panel, and he was now getting a little nervous and scared, “Wrench, --this is Python. I’ve just got a Radar Detect.”

“So did I,” Wrench replied, “We’re now being tracked. So, watch your Radar for incoming Missiles or Aircraft. We’re now coming up on the targets.”

The F32’s had just started their bombing runs when the first wave of Syrian Fighters came at them from out of the Sun.

“Ok Blue Squadron, here they come,” Wrench announced over the radio, “now let’s keep em’ off the F32’s, watch yourselves and good luck.”

Wrench’s Kids were doing great, both Dale and Brian each knocked out two Syrian Fighters, but each time Captain Axelson’s Fighters would shoot down an enemy aircraft it would seem as if another one would take its place.

Dale felt something wasn’t right and said, “Wrench--this is

Barracuda. These Fighters are way too easy, and they keep replacing the ones we shoot down with fresh ones. I don't like this--it doesn't feel right. It's as if we're fighting green horns or students, where's the experienced Pilots?"

When Wrench realized what was happening, he radioed, "Blue Squadron, this is Wrench. Check your weapons stores and fuel. Anyone that is getting low in either area, report back."

One of the Pilots in the squadron replied, "Wrench, this is Musket. I'm getting low on ammunition."

"Musket, I want you to break off and head back to the Med while you still got fuel and some ammunition left, and that also goes for anyone else," ordered Wrench; Musket and Husky then broke off, turned and flew back to the Mediterranean and the Carrier Nimitz.

Wrench said, as he was now very worried, "Blue Squadron, we've been had. The Syrians are wearing us down with, as Barracuda puts it, green horns, they're saving their experienced Pilots for after we've used up our stores."

The F32's were now finishing their bombing runs and were joining the F30's in aerial combat, for they now had their hands full, because the experienced Syrian and Egyptian Pilots were now starting to arrive.

Brian was glad to have the F32's back to help, because now things were really getting bad.

Anaconda was Brian's Wingman, and covered Brian's left flank all through the fighting, when all of a sudden, a Syrian Fighter came from out of the Sun with Guns blazing; he crossed to the right while firing at Anaconda, and then Anaconda's aircraft suddenly pitch down.

Brian turned and went after the Syrian Fighter.

Anaconda coughing said, "Wrench, this is Anaconda. I'm hit bad--blood all over my instrument panel and I've got lots of electrical problems. I can't fly my jet much longer--the pain is real bad--I'm not going to make it back! Tell my family that I love them--bye," Anaconda then slumped forward as he died; his jet then nosed over, went into a tailspin and crashed.

Brian heard Anaconda's last transmission, and a tear ran down his cheek, he then said to himself, "Anaconda, --this one's for you."

Brian was now after this Enemy Fighter in earnest for he stuck to him like glue, and like Mike, Brian's natural flying skills were starting to show; he wanted this guy really bad, for Anaconda.

For the next few minutes they flew all over the sky, twisting and looping, but Brian just stayed right after him, hoping for the Syrian to make a mistake.

Then, just as Brian had hoped for, the Syrian did make a fatal mistake; he tried to pull the same maneuver on Brian that he had done on Anaconda, but Brian was waiting for him, and as he got ready to cross, Brian fired a missile and the Syrian exploded in a ball of fire.

Dale also lost his wingman to a Syrian Fighter and was on his way to help Brian when Dale's radar showed a Syrian pulling in behind him.

Dale tried to evade, and when nothing seemed to work, he called for Brian, "Python, this is Barracuda. Python help me! I can't shake this Syrian."

Brian replied, "Barracuda, just keep evading, I'm on my way."

Brian was ten miles away when he got Dale's call and he kicked in his afterburner, for he was on his way to help his friend.

Now each time the Syrian Fighter fired his guns, Dale would turned out and away from his fire; Dale now was beginning to get very scared, because he didn't know how much longer he could keep evading.

Dale tried as he might, but he just couldn't shake this guy; Dale then tried a fancy maneuver to pull in behind him, but it didn't work, the Syrian Fighter was just too good of a flyer for Dale to out maneuver.

Dale was now very scared and exclaimed, "Python please hurry! I just can't shake this guy! I think I'm going to die in my jet! Will you tell my parents that I love them? Python, --I don't think you're going to get here in time, so good-bye my friend, --take care now and good luck."

"Don't you talk that way and you're not going to die," Brian telling him, "just hold on and keep using those evasive maneuvers we were taught in school, --remember? I'll be there in twenty seconds."

Now the Syrian proceeded to setup for a missile shot at Dale; Dale's radar was now indicating a missile lock on him, from the Syrian Fighter.

Dale was now very frighten, and in a solemn tone, knowing the end was near, said, "Python, —good-bye my friend it's all over for me, --I'm finished! He's got a lock on me!"

The Syrian then fired his missile; Dale saw it coming right at him, a brief scream was heard on Brian's radio as Dale's aircraft exploded in a ball of fire.

Brian arrived just in time to see Dale's jet explode; all Brian then saw were fragments of Dale and his aircraft falling, burning to the ground. Brian then also screamed, "DALE--O' GOD NO!"

Now the American Pilots were joined by two Squadrons of Israeli Fighters, the Syrians then turned and flew away.

It was late that afternoon when Brian and what was left of the Fighters landed back on the Carrier Nimitz.

Tears were streaming down Brian's cheeks as he climbed down from his aircraft and he kept saying to himself, "If I wouldn't have gone after that Syrian, Dale would still be alive. It's all my fault, --I could have helped him."

Captain Axelson met Brian, as he was returning to the flight ready room.

The Captain now seeing how really upset Brian was, asked, "What's the problem Lieutenant?"

Brian then explained to him about how if he wouldn't have gone after that Syrian Fighter, Dale would be alive now.

"Now you listen to me Lieutenant," The Captain firmly telling him, "you did the right thing in going after that Syrian Fighter."

"There was nothing you could have done to save Barracuda. Your job is to engage and destroy the enemy and that is just what you did. We lost three good Pilots today and the next time we'll lose some more, that's the cost of going into combat. You're a very good Fighter Pilot. I saw how you went after and shot down that Syrian Fighter. You're going to become an Ace before this all is over. Commander Carlson told me yesterday, the Enterprise will be relieving us by the end of the week, and so, we're going to be heading back to Norfolk. I'm going to recommend you for The Advanced Fighter Training School at Miramar."

The next day, Brian was lying in his bunk, remembering the good times that he and Dale had together, and then he began to feel alone and sick, because he really missed his friend, Dale.

For the next couple of days, Brian just moped around.

He would go up on deck and look off into the horizon and dream of him and Dale flying together.

Now Brian didn't even care if he would ever fly again, because he just wished he could have helped Dale.

When Commander Carlson saw Brian moping around and not going out on any flights, he ordered Captain Axelson to his office, and when the Captain arrived, Commander Carlson inquired, “What’s wrong with Lieutenant Troff, and why isn’t Troff going out on combat flights?”

Captain Axelson informed Commander Carlson about how Brian had lost his best friend to a Syrian Fighter; Captain Axelson also went on to tell Commander Carlson how Brian had gone after and shot down several Syrian Fighters, and then he said, “He’s now one of my best Fighter Pilots. But I’m worried that Python isn’t getting over the loss of his friend, and if he doesn’t come around soon, then I’m afraid we may lose a good Fighter Pilot.”

Commander Carlson, now very concerned at the prospect of losing a top Fighter Pilot, issues an order to Captain Axelson, “The Enterprise is going to be here tomorrow to relieve us, so we’re going back to the States for a couple of weeks. As soon as we get out of enemy waters, I want you to start training flights again. I want you to start sending Python back up, because he’s got to start flying again. Barracuda is gone, and now Python must let him go and get on with his life as a Fighter Pilot.”

The Enterprise arrived the next day to relieve them, and now they were headed back to the United States.

Captain Axelson went and had a talk with Brian and told him, he had to let Dale go and he’s going back on the flight roster; he also told Brian, he was too good of a Fighter Pilot for them to lose, and so Captain Axelson told Brian, starting tomorrow, there would be training flights again, and he was to start flying again.

Several days later, Brian started flying again, and as soon as he got into the air, he forgot all about Dale.

Now Brian still loved to fly, and he knew Dale would have wanted him to continue to fly, so by flying, he had finally let his feelings about Dale fade.

It was the week before Christmas when the Nimitz docked in Norfolk Virginia.

Brian had now gotten new orders for The Advanced Fighter Training school (Top Gun) at Miramar California; just like the School Commander had told him when he graduated, he’s coming back and going to Top Gun.

Brian was now looking forward to being home with his Family for the Holidays, and he was especially looking forward to seeing Brenda again and was planning to ask her something important, something he had been thinking about since his combat in the Middle East.

CHAPTER 10 -- CHRISTMAS DAY

It now was three days before Christmas, Jeff had just arrived and was wearing his cadet uniform; Mike smiled when he met Jeff at the front door and turned his head and loudly announced, “Mom, Dad, the Air Force has arrived.”

Mike shook Jeff’s hand and then he gave him a warm Brotherly hug and said, as he was feeling good that his Brother was home, “Jeff, its sure good to see you again. God, --you sure do look good in that cadet uniform.”

Henry came into the living room from the den and said, as he also was very happy to see Jeff, “Merry Christmas Jeff, we’re sure glad you could make it this year.”

Jeff said, feeling good at being home again, “Merry Christmas to all of you too, I’m sure glad to be here. I suppose now I’ll have to call you Sir, like Brian,” looking at his Father and smiling.

“You sure do, but only when you’re wearing your uniform,” Henry replied with a smile and giving Mike a wink, “Hon, --now we’ve got two Son’s calling me Sir and it took the military to get them to do it,” they all laughed with Mike laughing the hardest.

Henry said, now looking at Mike still laughing, “Well Mike, have you given any thought of what kind of uniform you’ll want to wear, that is after you have graduated from High School in another year?”

Mike stopped laughing and smugly said, “Civilian, --I don’t plan on joining the military. I’m still planning on going to college after graduation in two years.”

“Well Mike, --there’s another war on the way, what if you’re drafted?” Henry asking.

“Well Dad, if I’m drafted, then I’ll go and serve my country.”

“I’m very glad to hear you say that, Mike,” Henry replied with a smile, “I was beginning to think, you were afraid to serve.”

“Dad, I’m not a coward, if I’m called, I’ll go” said Mike very solemnly.

Henry then took Mike and gave him a hug, because now he knew, Mike was going to turn out just fine, even if he couldn’t fly like his two older brothers; now this was just fine with Henry, because he knew, Mike was going to be the family intellectual.

On Christmas Eve, Brian's cab pulled up and stopped in front of the Troff residence; after Brian had paid the fare, he got out of the Cab with his duffel bag and presents, and then he walked up to the front door and rang the doorbell.

Mike goes and answers the door, and when he sees Brian standing there, he just about passes out.

"Merry Christmas Mike," Brian solemnly told him with a smile, and then asks, "Is everyone home?"

"Brian, --come in and Merry Christmas to you too," Mike said, returning the holiday greeting, "and yes we're all here, Jeff's even here."

When Brian entered the house, he was wearing his uniform.

Mike was very excited when he hollered, "EVERYONE COME IN HERE! YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHO'S HERE! THE MARINE'S HAVE LANDED, YOU'VE JUST GOTTA' COME IN HERE!"

Brian walks over and put his presents under the Tree; Maria comes in just as Brian had finished putting his presents under the tree, and when she saw Brian, she put her hands to her face and cried.

"Merry Christmas Mom," Brian solemnly told her.

Then Maria hurried over to Brian, kissed and hugged him tightly and softly said, "I got my baby back, he's now home for Christmas."

On hearing this, Mike smiled and said, "How about that, now Brian's the baby."

"So what," Brian retorted, "I'm glad to be home this Christmas," and then Brian smiled and kissed his Mother again.

Then both Henry and Jeff enter the living room.

"Brian, --how come your home?" Henry asked, "I thought you were on the Nimitz in the Mediterranean."

"I was. The Nimitz is now back at Norfolk and I'm been reassigned to Miramar. Dad, --I'm going to Top Gun for the next four months."

"Congratulations Brian," said Jeff, and shook Brian's hand exclaiming, "God, my big Brother is now an Ace!"

"No, --I'm not an Ace just yet," said Brian correcting, and then turning to look at Mike, he smiled saying, "but you know--they're going to teach me how to shoot down Helicopters," and now Mike was starting to blush, and then Mike wondered, was his secret out?

How much does Brian know, and who told him?

"What's all this about, shooting down Helicopters?" Henry asking

with a puzzled expression, “and the way you’re looking at Mike?”

“It’s really nothing Dad,” Jeff explaining, “it’s about the project that Mike worked on two summers ago. It seems that Mike was a little too proud of his handy work. So, we like to give him a little ribbing about it, and then he gets all hot under the collar.”

Mike relaxed, because his secret was still safe, and they still don’t know that he can fly Helicopters.

“Yes, --Mike did help produce a very deadly aircraft,” said Henry in a tone that showed he was now worried about his eldest son, “Brian, --I don’t know what they’re going to teach you, but please stay away from any EXCALIBUR class Helicopter. With the right Pilot at the controls, --I don’t know if an F30 can win in a dogfight.”

“Dad, --what are you saying, --you’ve got to be kidding!” Brian exclaimed, “A Helicopter out gunning an F30, in a fight!”

“That’s right Son,” Henry firmly replied, and then he explained, “I’ve seen some combat video from the Israeli Air Force. As you know, they have some of our EXR2’s. Well, --from what I saw in the video, two Syrian MIG 43’s didn’t stand a chance, the EXR2 downed them both before they knew what happen. The video showed the EXR2 engaged in a dogfight with the MIG’s, when it shot them down,” both Brian and Jeff were shocked when they heard this.

“Dad, --are you saying the F30 is now outdated?” Brian asked.

“No way, --not just yet,” said Henry reassuring them, “thank God that, what I saw was the exception rather than the rule. The EXR is a Helicopter and a very complex one, so it takes a very highly skilled Pilot to fly it, especially like what I saw in that video. So I don’t believe there’s going to be very many Pilots, who’ll be able to fly it that well in combat.”

Now Mike was feeling very good, because he knew he was fast becoming the kind of Pilot his Father was referring too.

Maria told them it was Christmas Eve and she didn’t want to hear any more talk about shooting and war.

Now with the entire family home, she had plans, and proceeded to set them in motion by telling everyone, “Brian’s home and just in time for Christmas Eve Services. Jeff, --why don’t you go and put on your uniform and the rest of you get cleaned up, because we’re all going to church tonight and celebrate Christmas.”

Henry, Brian, and Jeff were sitting there in church wearing their uniforms, and Maria thought how great they all looked.

Now Maria was very worried that this might be their last Christmas together.

She had a gut feeling that Mike would also be in uniform within the next three years, because she knew all about Mike's ability for flying the EXR2 Helicopter; Mike didn't even know she knew about him flying the EXR2.

She was now remembering back to a couple weeks ago, when Larry had told her about Mike flying the EXR2; Larry had told her that Mike was going to become a very deadly Pilot in the EXR2, and then went on to explain with Mike's extraordinary flying ability and his marksmanship he's going to be very hard for an enemy Pilot to shoot down.

Her thoughts now returned to the present with a tear running down Maria's cheek, because she was now afraid she could lose her entire family; Brian, Jeff, and yes even Henry and Mike, could all be dead within the next three years.

Maria now prayed very hard, asking God to keep Henry and Her Sons safe.

Christmas morning came bright and early with a chill in the air, even in Roseville which never gets very cold.

Henry, Maria and the boys opened their Christmas presents and after they had finished opening their presents, they all sat down to eat Christmas dinner.

Henry said grace and thanked the Lord for all of them being together this Christmas.

After they were done eating Brian said, "I've got to go and see Brenda. Mike, --where's the keys to my car," Mike pointed to a series of pegs on a board mounted to the wall near the light switch which was holding several rings of keys; Brian went over and located his car keys and removed them.

On his way to the back door he passed by Mike and was just about to mess up Mike's hair again, when Brian stopped and exclaimed, "My God! You're too old for me to do that to you, what's happen to my baby Brother? Oops--I shouldn't have said that!"

"I grew up--and the hair--that's ok," Mike told him with a big grin, and then he added, "but you'd better watch out thought, because there just

might be a Helicopter that'll dust a so called Jet Jockey's tail," both Brian and Jeff look shocked.

"What do you mean, --a Helicopter dusting my tail?"

Maria then stepped in and said, "Brian, --why don't you go and see Brenda. Mike's just giving you a hard time, don't pay any attention to him," but she knew what Mike had meant, about a Helicopter dusting Brian's tail.

Brian then walked out to his car got in and drove off to see Brenda.

Brian pulled up in front of Brenda's home, got out and walked up to the front door and rang the doorbell; Mr. Gram answered the door and when he saw Brian standing there in his Marine uniform he said, "Brian please come in. Brenda will be very happy to see you."

"Is Brenda home? I would like to see Her."

"Yes," Mr. Gram replied, "She's in her room," he then called for her to come out into the living room, because there's someone here to see her. "I thought you were on the Nimitz, in the Mediterranean," Mr. Gram inquiring, making small talk until Brenda arrives.

"The Nimitz is now back at Norfolk and I'm been reassigned to Miramar, and for the next four months I'll be going through Top Gun training," Brian told him.

When Brenda walked into the living room and saw Brian standing there, She ran straight into his arms; Mr. Gram then smiled and said, "Why don't you two go into the Den, so you can be by yourselves," and so, Brian and Brenda went into the Den where they embraced and kissed each other.

Brenda with a tear of joy running down her cheek said, "Brian, I love you so much and I sure missed you, I prayed that you would be safe."

"I missed you too," Brian softly told her, "I've got something to ask you, and here's a Present for you," Brian giving her a small neatly wrap box; she unwraps the small box and opens it, and when she sees what is inside, she smiles and cries, because it contained a Diamond Engagement Ring.

Brian said, as he looked into her eyes, "Brenda, --will you marry me? I don't want to die and not have a baby. I love you so much that I want you to have our baby."

Brenda was smiling, and with tears running down her face she said, "Oh yes Brian, I will marry you and have your baby. O' God Brian, please don't tell me that you're going to die, Oh please don't," and then she went

and embraced him again saying, “Brian you just can’t die.”

“Now you stop worrying about me getting killed,” Brian trying to reassuring her, “I don’t plan on dying just yet. They tell me that I’m one of the best Fighter Pilots in the Marines. And after I finish Top Gun in four months, I’ll be even better.”

Then Brian took her hand and placed the ring on her finger telling her, “There--now in four months or so, I can put the other half on.”

Then Brian and Brenda embrace, and kiss again.

“Shall we go and break the good news to our families?” Brian asked with a smile.

Brenda smiling and wiping the tears off her face, nodded and said, “Yes, --let’s go and tell them.”

Mr. and Mrs. Gram were sitting in the living room, watching ‘The Christmas Story’ on their large screen TV, when Brian and Brenda walked in from the Den.

Brian holding Brenda’s hand politely said, “Mister and Missis Gram, we’ve got something to tell you, and that is, I’ve just asked Brenda to marry me, and she has accepted. We’ll be married at Miramar just before I finish training in four months,” Mr. and Mrs. Gram smiled and Mr. Gram shuts off the TV.

Mr. Gram got up and shook Brian’s hand saying to him, “Congratulations, I thought you would never get around to asking Brenda to marry you. I’m very proud to have you as a Son-in-law.”

Brenda went over to show the diamond ring to her Mother.

Mr. Gram asked, “I suppose you two would want a military wedding?”

Brian smiled and said, “Yes Sir. We’re going to be married in the military chapel at Miramar.”

Both Mr. and Mrs. Gram told them they were very happy for them, and for Brian to tell his parents they would like to help with the wedding arrangements.

“Now, we’ve got to go and break the news to my family,” Brian announcing, “I’ll bring Brenda back in a couple of hours,” and so, Brian and Brenda left to go an inform Brian’s family.

When Brian and Brenda pulled up and stopped, Jeff and Mike were in their rooms, Henry and Maria were in the living room, also watching that same Christmas program on their TV.

Brian and Brenda got out of the car, walked up to the house, and went in.

Brian said, as they entered the living room where Henry and Maria sat watching TV, “Mom, --Dad, --we got something to tell you.”

Brian was holding Brenda’s hand again, as he informed his parents, “Brenda and me—well, --we’re going to be married.”

Both Henry and Maria were totally surprised, because they didn’t expect any of this, Henry asked, shutting the TV off, “Brian, --did I hear you right? Did you just say that you and Brenda are engaged?”

“Yes Dad, --you heard right, --we’re planning to be married within the next four months, just prior to finishing training at Miramar. Brenda’s parents have already given us their blessing. Dad, --Mom, --we would like to have your blessing too.”

Henry got up, and walked over to Brian and said, “Why of course Brian, you defiantly have our blessings. Both your Mother and I are very happy for you, --congratulations Son.”

“Well Hon, we’re finally going to be Grandparents,” said Henry looking at Maria.

When Mike and Jeff came in to see what was going on, everyone was smiling, Brenda and Maria were hugging and Brian and Henry were shaking hands.

“Who died?” Jeff asked, wondering what all the mushy stuff and hand shaking was about; Brian, Henry, Maria and Brenda started laughing.

“No one has died,” Henry replied, and then he explains, “Brian and Brenda are engaged to be married,” Mike and Jeff just stood there looking at each other with their mouths open.

Jeff was the first to get his composure, walked over to Brian, shook his hand and said, “I don’t really know what to say, but congratulations.”

Mike followed Jeff, and walked over and offered his hand too, saying, “Congratulations. O’ God, I’m going to be an Uncle, and at my age!”

“At your age! I’m also going to be an Uncle and I’m not that old either!” Jeff exclaimed!

“What do you mean you’re not that old? Just look at you, --you’re old stuff,” Mike retorted looking at Jeff, “you’re old enough to be in the Air Force, so you’re old enough to be an Uncle.”

“Now look at me, I’m just a kid still in high school, I’m too young to be an Uncle!”

“Old stuff is it,” Jeff barked poking Mike in the chest so hard that Mike had to take a step backwards, “let me tell you who’s old. I’m nineteen, only two years older than you, --anyway, you’re a lot closer to eighteen then you are to seventeen.”

“Oh yeah, --so what! You’re also a lot closer to twenty then you are to nineteen, besides, you’re in the Air Force.”

“What has being in the Air Force have to do with being old?” Jeff asking.

Mike responds and pokes Jeff so hard that he just about fell backwards, “I’ll tell you why, it’s because they don’t let kid’s like me fly their Airplanes.”

Brian and Henry started laughing.

“My god,” Maria firmly scolding, “Two grown men fighting like kids. Now you two stop it right now, and you’re both old enough to be Uncles.”

“Dad, --remember a couple of years ago when Mike didn’t like to be called the family baby,” Brian recalling with a giggle, “well look at him now, he doesn’t want to grow old. Anyway, the both of you are not Uncles just yet. At least not until Brenda and I have our first baby, and that won’t be for a while yet.”

After supper that Christmas evening, Henry and Brian sat down in the Den to talk privately.

“Me and the Gram’s had talked about the wedding. They told me, they would like to help you and Mom to plan it, they’re going to be calling you in the next week or two.”

“Your Mother and I would be happy to have the Gram’s assist in the planning and we’ll be waiting for their call. Now Brian--tell me--what was it like on the Nimitz, --did you see any action?”

Brian replied with anguish in his voice, as he remembered his friend Dale, and how terribly quick he had died, “Yes Dad, --I saw some action. It was over Syria where we fought. Dale and I, we each shot down two Syrian Fighters,” and then he paused, when he remembered that day when Dale was killed, and with pain and sadness he cried, “O’ God Dad! Dale’s dead, a Syrian Fighter got him before I could get to him, --he died so terrible he just exploded in a ball of fire. There wasn’t anything left of him to bury, just pieces of him and his aircraft falling to earth.”

Henry said, seeing Brian's pain on the loss of his friend, "Brian, -- that's something you're going to have to deal with, the way Dale died, because that's the way a Fighter Pilot usually dies. I know this sounds terrible, but I think Dale wouldn't have wanted it any other way. He died as a Fighter Pilot, doing what he loved most of all, which is flying. So now Dale will always be remembered as a Fighter Pilot, flying with you up there in his F30."

"Yes Dad--I know what you mean. Dale did love to fly the F30 Fighter and he was good at it too. Dad, --I also know what I'm about to say, sounds morbid, but if I had a choice of how I was to die, well, I also want to die as a Fighter Pilot in my aircraft."

"I know just what you mean and that's not morbid," Henry softly telling him, "only another Fighter Pilot can understand what you're saying. I guess my greatest fear is to die in bed, in an old folks home, and no one will ever remember me as a Fighter Pilot, but as another old man who just kicked the bucket. If I also had a choice, then I too, would want to die in my aircraft in combat."

Then Brian changed the subject to Mike, "Dad, --what do you make of Mike? I think there's more to him than he's letting us believe."

"I don't quit know what you mean," said Henry looking a little puzzled.

"You know--like the sudden change in his attitude. It seems that ever since he started working at the airport, as a Groundhandler, he no longer has that shameful look when you tell someone he can't fly, he just look's right at you, and also, the smart ass remarks he's now making. Like this afternoon, when he told me a Helicopter was going to dust my tail. I just don't know Dad, but I've got this gut feeling that tells me--Mike's a Pilot."

Henry now looking puzzled and surprised said, "Mike, --a Pilot! Why, --you know that's impossible, because we all know he can't fly, and if he could fly, then what kind of aircraft? Then, --where would he get the money to pay for the flight lessons?"

Brian had a revelation and said, "Well, --he could work for the flight lessons, like being a Groundhandler. As for an aircraft, well, I think that I may have an idea. Just by the way he talks, --I think it's a Helicopter. Dad, --as you know, a Pilot has a way of knowing when he's talking to another Pilot, just by that persons demeanor. I can tell you, Mike sure fits the profile."

Henry was now even more surprised and exclaimed, “Helicopter! Now that’s even more of an impossibility, why, he couldn’t even fly a simple old Cessna! So, how could he possibly learn to fly a complex and difficult aircraft like a Helicopter? I think you’re making too much out of all of this, I think Mike’s just finally growing up.”

“Yes, I guess you’re right,” Brian responded with a sigh.

“But you know--wouldn’t it be wonderful if Mike could fly a Helicopter, then our dream of the entire family being able to fly would come true.”

Brian was now taken by surprise and said, looking at his Father, “Didn’t I hear you tell us that you didn’t want any of us to fly Helicopters?”

“Yes, I most certainly did, but only if it wasn’t your chosen aircraft, if Mike has a talent to fly a Helicopter rather than an Airplane, then he shouldn’t be prevented from flying them.”

“Well Dad, I think you should tell Mike, if he likes Helicopters, then it would be alright right with you for him to fly them. You know, --it’s now getting late and I’m tired, so I’m going to bed, I’ve only got a week before I have to report for duty and I want to make the most of it by being with Brenda. Good night Dad, see you tomorrow morning,” and then Brian and Henry both got up, walked out of the den, and went to their bedrooms.

Brian was on the way to his bedroom when he stopped by Jeff’s room and inquired, “Jeff, are you asleep yet?”

“No not yet, --come in,” Jeff replied in a low voice; Brian then entered Jeff’s bedroom and sat down on the edge of Jeff’s bed.

“What’s up?” Jeff asked.

“I was talking with Dad tonight, about Mike possibly being a Pilot.” Jeff sat up in his bed and exclaimed, “Mike, --a Pilot! That’s impossible, because we all know he can’t fly an Airplane.”

“That’s what Dad said, but I’m still not convinced. Mike not being able to fly maybe true for an Airplane, but how about a Helicopter?”

“A Helicopter!” Jeff exclaimed, as he was now very shocked, “what makes you think Mike’s a Helicopter Pilot? Didn’t Dad say he doesn’t want any of us to fly Helicopters.”

“Yes he did, but he told me tonight, that if our chosen aircraft was a Helicopter and if our talent was to fly Helicopters, then it was ok for us to fly them. I just don’t know how--I just know that somehow, --Mike’s a Helicopter Pilot, maybe it’s the way he acts and talks.”

Jeff remembering Mike's attitude lately said, "Yeah, --he's sure been acting cocky lately, especially when we're talking about Excalibur. I just thought it was, because he had worked on the EXR project."

"I think we'll just have to keep an eye on him for the next week or so," Brian suggesting, "the next time we play a Video Game, we'll just watch and see how he plays. If in fact he is a Helicopter Pilot, then he should be real smooth with game controls."

Jeff laid back down agreeing, "Yeah, --that's a good idea, and I know just the Video Game to play. Sometime this week, we will try that Helicopter Flight Simulator Game on him."

"Yeah, —that'll be a good one to try on him alright," Brian responds as he gets up and off of Jeff's bed, "well, —I've got to go to bed myself, I'll see you tomorrow, --good night Jeff."

Jeff said good night to Brian as he walked out of his room; Brian then went to his room to retire for the night.

CHAPTER 11 -- PEGASUS LEARNS TO FIGHT

On Monday morning, Mike caught Jeff following him to the airport, so then, Mike asked Larry if he could just work as a Groundhandler for that week.

Mike explained to Larry, that he couldn't risk being seen flying by his two older Brothers.

Mike also asked his other friends at Pegasus Aviation, not to tell his Brothers that he flies; for that whole week, Mike worked as a Ground-handler, he swept the hangar area, cleaned and refueled aircraft, and did other odd jobs around the hangar.

On New Year's Day, Jeff and Brian asked Mike if he would like to play a video game, and because both Jeff and Brian had to leave and return to active duty this would be the last time, for a long while, they could all play video games together.

"Sure," Mike responds, "it'll be fun to play video games again."

Then Brian got the Helicopter Flight Simulator all hooked up and ready to play, and then they began playing the video game.

Now Mike's skill as a Helicopter Pilot was really showing, because he won every turn of the game and was starting to get bored.

"I don't know about you guys, but I've had enough of this," Mike bemoaned with boredom, "strange, --this game isn't fun anymore."

Mike then got up, went to his room, lies down on his bed and starts reading one of his motorcycle magazines.

After Mike had left the Den, Jeff and Brian looked at each other and smiled.

"Did you see the way Mike handled the joy stick?" Brian asked.

"You bet I did, --his moves were way to smooth," Jeff replied, "He operated the joy stick just like a Helicopter Pilot would."

"Yes I agree, but we still need more proof, this isn't enough evidence to tell Dad that Mike can fly, we need to catch him flying a Helicopter."

"But, I followed him all week and he didn't fly anything," Jeff proclaimed looking perplexed, "I even talked to another Groundhandler, and he told me, Mike doesn't fly."

Brian said, as he was now very confused, because he has a feeling that Mike can fly, "I just know, Mike's a Pilot, but how can we prove it?"

We don't have enough time to catch him in the act. I guess we'll just have to forget about it until we come home on leave again."

"Yeah, --you're right. If you get home first and discover something," said Jeff, "don't forget to write and tell me."

Early Monday morning both Brian and Jeff were now in their uniforms again, because they were going back to their duty stations.

Mike was now feeling relieved, because he didn't have to be careful anymore about being caught flying.

After school that day, Mike walked into the office where Larry was working.

"Come in and close the door," Larry tells Mike, "first, as of right now, you're back on full flight status, it's time you started flying again, I've gotten behind last week when you played dumb so your Brothers wouldn't see you fly. I'm now booked up through the middle of January, so, no more messing around. Second, I've got a surprise for you on Saturday, so read the chapter on combat engagements, --now go and change into something that resembles a Pilot, because you have a passenger charter flight from Sacramento to Reno."

Mike went into the locker room, where he changed into his Pilot's uniform, and then he returned to the office; his uniform consisted of navy blue slacks, white shirt with shoulder epaulets, and on each epaulet there were two gold stripes, he also wore black socks, and oxfords for shoes.

A pair of silver metal wings was pinned to his shirt just above his left pocket; "Do I look like a Commercial Pilot now? Mike asked.

"Yes, --you sure do, and it's about time too," Larry replied looking up from his paper work, "I've gotten tired of seeing you in that Groundhandler uniform."

"Did I hear you say that I was to fly from Sacramento to Reno? How many passengers are there, and do I pick them up at the airport?"

"Yes, that's what I said, a Sacramento to Reno flight, and Reno is the one in Nevada. There's going to be three businessmen and their wives, so take the Aérospatiale Dolphin, it has room for eight. And no, you're to pick up the passengers from the rooftop heliport at Colgan Rensland Corporation, and then you're to fly them to the Ramada Inn North in Reno, after which you're to fly back, because they will be using the airlines to return."

Mike got home about ten that night and he was tired and hungry. His Dad looking at him asked, “Where have you been? You know that you have school tomorrow and schoolwork to do tonight. My god, -- you look like a Pilot who’s just came back from an eight hour flight.”

Upon hearing this, Mike perks up, he now wonders, does his Father know he flies, if so, who told him, and how much does he know?

“What did you mean by a Pilot coming back from an eight hour flight?” Mike asked, because he’s now worried that his Father has found out that he can fly.

“Well, --that’s what you look like,” Henry replied, “as for the Pilot and the eight hour flight, that’s just a metaphor, so tell me, where have you been all day?”

“Been helping Wayne and Scott with an Airplane, overtime you know,” Mike telling him, relieved, because his Father still doesn’t know he flies.

“Ok, but don’t do this too often. You tell Larry you’re still in High School and you’ve got homework.”

“Yes Dad, —I’ll tell Mr. Clark about your concern.”

Mike then ate dinner and went to his room to do his homework for school the next day; after he’d finished, he went to bed and fell right off to sleep.

All week, Mike studied the chapter that Larry had told him to read.

When Saturday morning arrived, Mike walks to the office and there was Larry, waiting for him wearing his Army flight suit, and as soon as Mike walks through the door, Larry tells him, “Hurry up and get into your flight suit, that’s if you want to find out what the surprise is.”

Mike is now really excited, as he hurried into the locker room to change into his military flight suit; ten minutes later he returned, wearing his Army flight suit and holding his helmet.

“Why don’t you go out and preflight the EXR2T, while I make a couple of phone calls,” Larry tells him.

Mike goes and gets the keys, and then he walks out to do the pre-flight.

Meanwhile, Larry makes the two phone calls and when he’d finished talking on the phone, he walks out to see how Mike was coming with the pre-flight; Mike was just about done when Larry walked over to see how he was doing.

“Not to bad Mike, you did a good job with the preflight, now let’s get in and get her fired up,” Larry telling him, and then they both got into the aircraft.

“Ok now, fire her up and go through the run up checks,” Larry issuing orders to Mike.

When Mike had finished, Larry gave him a list of map coordinates to load into the NAV Computer.

“Wow, --where are we going?”

“We’re going to McClellan and stick you into an EXR Simulator,” Larry replying, “it has been temporarily installed there, that is, until the Army can find a permanent place for it at Fort Irwin.”

Mike said, now becoming very worried that someone would recognize him and tells his Dad, “Larry, --they’re going to know that I’m not an Army Pilot and tell my Dad. You know that he works there as a Flight Commander.”

“Don’t worry,” Larry reassuring him, “nobody is going to recognize you, because you’re wearing an Army Flight Suit. I have everything all setup so we’ll have the simulator and one operator for two hours. You’re going to need about a hundred and twenty hours of simulator time, and I have you scheduled for two hours on Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday, for the next five months. All right Pegasus, --now let’s pick this aircraft up and head for McClellan, you’re now an EXR Fighter Pilot and I’m going long for the ride.”

Mike picked the EXR2T up off the pad and got a departure clearance from the Tower, and then he departed the airport and headed to McClellan Air Force Base.

“Up to now, you haven’t landed at a Military Air Field,” Larry told him over the intercom, “so, when we get within five miles of McClellan, you’ll contact McClellan Approach and tell them you’re Army Training Helicopter, Zero-Four-Echo. They’ll ask you how you want to be vectored--you’ll tell them that you want a direct approach to hangar number eleven. That’s where the Army has a temporary EXR unit stationed, and that’s also where the simulator is located.”

Mike had no problem flying into McClellan and he landed right in front of hangar number eleven; Larry said, as Mike was shutting down the Helicopter, “You did just fine, --I couldn’t have done better myself. Now

let's go inside and get you started in the simulator.”

As they walked to the hangar, they passed a couple soldiers; both soldiers saluted Larry just as they did to Major Larson when Mike was at Edwards.

Larry returned the salute and they continued on to the hangar and the simulator room.

Hangar number eleven was a large building, and after they had walked inside, Mike saw Eight EXR2's all parked in two rows facing each other; Mike noticed these EXR's weren't trainers, but single seat fighters.

They finally came to a door that said, 'SIMULATOR ROOM'; Larry opened the door and they both walked in.

Inside, Larry and Mike met Sergeant Nordine, who also saluted and then shook Larry's hand.

“Sergeant, --this is Mike Troff and he'll be using the simulator today.”

“Hi, --pleasure to meet you Sergeant,” Mike giving him a cordial greeting.

“The pleasure is all mine,” Sergeant Nordine replied, “now if you're as good as the Captain here says you are, --then the simulator sessions should be very interesting.”

Mike looked at him surprised, and then he looked at Larry with a questioning expression.

“Yes, --they all know about you here,” Larry explains, and then Sergeant Nordine smiled and said, “Well Mike, --shall we get started?”

“Yeah, --I guess I'm ready,” Mike replied, as he was excited and a little apprehensive, and then they all walked into a small briefing room.

In the briefing room there was a round table with four chairs and it was located next to a white writing board, which was mounted on the wall; a cart with a videodisk player and monitor sat in the corner.

Mike was informed that in here, he would learn about each maneuver before he goes into the simulator.

Larry told Mike, he's to watch each of the maneuvers on the monitor, after which, they will then discuss the maneuver in detail.

“We'll start with the basic combat maneuvers and then progress up through the advanced maneuvers,” Larry explaining, “once you have seen each of the videos and had the maneuvers in each of the videos explained to you in detail, and when you have fully understood each one, --then and only

then, will you go into the simulator and practice the maneuver until you've got it down real good. Then after you have finished the lesson in the simulator, we'll come back in here to discuss the simulation. We'll discuss where your weaknesses are and try to find a way to improve them. Sergeant, you may load the player with the first disk. Mike, this will be the first combat maneuver. So, watch it closely."

Mike watched it very closely, for it showed an EXR2 in a dogfight with a MIG 43; after it was all over, Mike asked Larry where video was taken, and Larry told him it was an Israeli Air Force Video.

The three of them discussed the video that Mike had just viewed in detail, and after Larry was satisfied that Mike had understood every detail of the maneuver, then they went to the simulator.

The simulator room was very bright; on one side of the room, there was a large computer and it was even larger than the one he had used, when he was at Edwards, working on the EXR project.

On the wall to the left of the computer there was a large console with lots of push buttons, and indicators with solid and flashing lights of different colors, it also had several small displays including the computer display with its keyboard.

Right in the middle of the room was the simulator itself; it looked just like the front half of an EXR Helicopter, but it had no windows.

The Sergeant pushed one of the buttons and the top part of the simulator slowly opened.

"You can climb in now, and get ready for your first simulation," the Sergeant told Mike.

Mike climbed the three steps up to Pilots Cockpit, gets in, straps himself into the seat, puts his helmet on, connects the cable from the simulator to his helmet, and then the top slowly closes; once the top had closed, all of the cockpit instruments lit up.

The inside of the simulator looked just like the cockpit of an EXR2 Helicopter; even the instrument panel was the same.

Sergeant Nordine went and sat down at the control console and said to Mike, over Mike's headset, "Now get ready for you first combat simulation."

Mike spent the next two hours flying combat simulations in the simulator.

After he had finished, they all went back to the briefing room, where they discussed how Mike had done in the simulator.

After they had finished the discussion, the Sergeant said to Mike, “Well Pegasus, —that’s your call isn’t it?”

“Yeah, --but how did you know,” Mike asked looking surprised, and then turning to look at Larry; Larry just smiled back and pointed to Mike’s helmet, and with an embarrassed expression, Mike rolled his eyes and looks at the ceiling thinking, “Like duh.”

The Sergeant smiled as he continued, “If you keep doing as good in the simulator as you’ve done today. Well, --it looks to me like you’re going to be one hell of an EXR Fighter Pilot. I guess I’ll be seeing you on Monday at eighteen-hundred. So, --take it easy and don’t take out after any F30’s.”

Larry and the Sergeant then chuckled.

“No, —he’ll be good and leave the F30’s alone today,” Larry replied, giggling with Mike looking back affronted.

After they had left McClellan, Larry had Mike change course for the practice range and when they arrived, Larry had Mike practice on several different types of targets.

Every time Larry would tell Mike to knock out a target, Mike would take it out; Mike was now getting so good, he almost never missed, in fact, he was so good now, he would tell Larry just how many rounds it would take to destroy a target.

Mike was now getting to where he no longer would waste any rounds; for each time he fired, a target was destroyed.

“This Kid is unreal,” Larry thinking to himself, “When he finishes with the simulator and after some real combat flying, which I’ve got planed, he’s going to be one deadly Fighter Pilot. I sure hope that none of the Fighters from Miramar gets tangled up with him. Somehow, I’ve got to convince Mike to leave them alone, --otherwise we’re going to have a real bad incident.”

It was finally time to call it a day, so they headed back to Roseville, and after they had landed and secured the aircraft, they both headed for home.

Brian walked into the classroom at Top Gun with Bill Warfield (Javelin); Brian and Bill then took a seat next to Bob Smith (Hell Cat) and Jerry Baker (Ice Breaker).

Brian thought, while they waited for the Instructor to come in, “It’s now March and I’m half way through Top Gun, and so far, I and Bill are the top point leaders with Bob and Jerry next. If I can maintain the number one position, then I’ll be able to pick my next duty station.”

Attention was called when Major Whalen and Captain Olson walked into the classroom.

Major Whalen said, as he introduced the next instructor, “At ease Gentleman. I would like to introduce to you Captain Olson, his call is Scorpion and he’s going to be your instructor for the next two weeks. So, pay very close attention to him, because your lives and the aircraft you fly will depend on what you learn from him, --Captain Olson the class is yours.”

Captain Olson walked to the center front of the class and asked, “How many of you know what an EXR class aircraft is?”

In the entire class, only Brian raised his hand.

“I see only one man,” said Captain Olson, “Lieutenant Troff, may I inquire as to your call?”

“It’s Python Sir.”

“Python, will you please inform the class as to what’s an EXR class aircraft?”

“It’s a Fighter Helicopter.”

“A Fighter Helicopter,” Captain Olson slowly repeating, and then pauses for a second, and then he tells the class, “Python’s right, it’s a Helicopter and I’m glad he said Fighter Helicopter. I repeat, --Fighter Helicopter, --not an Attack Helicopter, because there’s a big difference. An Attack Helicopter is used mainly for ground assault on enemy forces, but a Fighter Helicopter can do everything an Attack Helicopter can, plus one other important thing, and that is, it can engage in aerial combat with a Jet Fighter, --in other words gentlemen, --dogfighting. Unlike any other type of aircraft that you have studied so far, this is by far the most deadly, so the name Fighter fit’s it perfectly. In the next two weeks, we’re going to learn all about it and the Pilot. Does anyone have any questions so far?”

Bill raised his hand; Captain Olson pointed to him and said, “Lieutenant Warfield, --and your call is?”

“My call is Javelin. Sir, --are you telling us that, it’s a dumb Helicopter? Why, ---they’re like shooting ducks in a pond. All you need is one Stingray Missile and puff they’re gone. You don’t even have to try very hard--they just sit there and ask to be shot down. Hell, --all you have to do

is make a pass at hundred knots and your jet wash will spin em' like a top. As for the Pilots, they're so dumb and uncoordinated, if you give em' a gun they wind up shooting themselves in the foot," the entire class broke into laughter, that is, except for Brian; now Brian didn't think it was funny, because his Brother, Mike, just might be a Helicopter Pilot.

After the Captain had regained order he said, "So Javelin, --you're telling us, --shooting the down an EXR Helicopter will be like a duck shoot. As for the Pilot, --you're saying he is dumb and uncoordinated. Now, you just keep thinking like that and we can write you off as another dead Pilot, along with losing another ten million dollar aircraft. I'm going to show you that, you're dead wrong, --like in dead duck," now the class was laughing again, but this time Bill wasn't laughing.

After the Captain had regained order for the second time, he then said, "I'm going to tell you why knowing about the Pilot is so important. I'm also going to tell you why this particular Helicopter is so deadly."

The Captain walked over to an easel with pictures of Jet Fighters and flipped the page to the next picture; this was a picture of a very sleek Helicopter.

The Captain said, as he was now pointing to the picture of the Helicopter, "Here we have a Soviet built MIG HX1. This aircraft is now being used by the Tehran Pack Powers. Its maximum airspeed, as far as we can determine, is about Mach one point six," now the class was in shock and very surprised.

"Sir, --did I hear you say Mach one point six?" Brian asked.

"That's right Python, --you heard right," Captain Olson replied, "I said Mach one point six. Our EXR2 Helicopter can go to Mach two point one. The MIG HX1 may even go faster than its observed Mach one point six, but so far, we haven't seen one flying faster than that. These aircraft do have one weakness--if you can call it one--and that is, --they can't go from a hover to top speed very quickly, because it must slow its main rotor speed to stay airborne. The fastest it can get to max airspeed, is twenty eight seconds. Now I'm quoting the specs on our EXR2, the MIG HX1 is a lot slower, like maybe forty to fifty seconds, so you've got from twenty eight to fifty seconds to initiate a maneuver and that's if the Helicopter is at a hover or on the ground. If it isn't, then you got less than two seconds to initiate a defensive or offensive maneuver. However, that's not true if you intercept it while it's flying, then it will depend on how fast it's going when you

intercept it, as to the amount of time you'll have in order to make your decision on the proper maneuver.”

The Captain walked over to the white writing board, picked up a marking pen, made two columns on the board, one for each type of Helicopter, and wrote the specs for both types of Helicopters in the columns; the class copied the specs down in their notebooks all the while whispering words like, wow, unbelievable, and incredible.

Then Captain Olson went over, tore off the picture of the Soviet Helicopter and pinned it to the corkboard; now there was a picture of the EXR2 showing.

“Now this is what our EXR2 Helicopter looks like,” Captain Olson said, now pointing to the picture of the EXR2, “there's no way you can win in a dogfight with an EXCALIBUR class Helicopter, because they're just to maneuverable. Remember, they can slow to a standstill and you can't. So, while you're coming around for another pass or trying to out maneuver it, he'll just sit there, and set you up for a missile shot. As for weapons, they carry the same armament as any MIG or F30. Ok, --does anyone now have any questions before we move on?”

This time no one had any questions, so Captain Olson walked back to the writing board and said, as he wrote, 'PILOT' in large letters and underlined it, “Up to now we only talked about the aircraft, but as you know the EXR class Helicopter doesn't fly itself, it needs a Pilot. The Pilot is the most important ingredient in the EXR Fighter, because it's the Pilot, that turns the EXR class Helicopter into such a deadly weapon. I just heard Javelin tell us a Helicopter Pilot is dumb and uncoordinated. Well, --I can surely tell you this was a very incorrect statement. Any Helicopter Pilot is about the most coordinated Pilot you'll find. It's the aircraft, not the Pilot, that makes it so easy to shoot down. I can surly tell you as I'm standing here, I've seen some pretty dumb and uncoordinated Fix Wing Fighter Pilot's in my life.”

Captain Olson went back to the writing board and said as he wrote, 'SKILL,' 'COORDINATION,' 'INTELLIGENT,' and 'AGGRESSIVE', “These traits are what makes a good Fighter Pilot, all of you have them otherwise you wouldn't be here at Top Gun. The EXR class Helicopter Pilot has them as well, but the most deadly of the EXR Pilots have four more traits, and it's these Pilots, you'll have to avoid at all costs, especially if

you're alone. Don't engage these aircraft unless there is at least three of you, and be sure to keep track of each other, because if he can split you up, then your dead meat."

The Captain now went and wrote the next four words under the other words, 'STEALTH', 'PATIENCE', 'CUNNING' and 'MARKSMAN'.

"The most important word here is MARKSMAN," said the Captain while tapping his marking pen under it, "these Pilots don't miss when they fire, and when I say they don't miss I mean never. The first thing you must do before you engage is to determine the type of Pilot you're going to be fighting. If he doesn't appear to have those last four traits that we just mention, then go ahead and engage, but watch yourself and think ahead," the Captain is now making several facial gestures in trying to decide on some percentage and finally says, "I would guess that you've got about a fifty-fifty chance to take him out, but if you've determined that, you have come upon one of those special Pilots, then kick in your after burner and get the hell out of there and do whatever is necessary to break off and evade fire," he lays the pen down in the tray below the white board and walks back to his podium.

"In the next few days we'll teach you the proper maneuvers to use in order to survive. My best advice to you now is, let our EXR aircraft engage the MIG HX1, because he has a much better chance of defeating him than you."

The Captain paused, looking at each student and when he figured his message had gotten through, he then asked, "Do any of you have any questions before we go to lunch?" Again, no one had any questions to ask.

"Ok, --everyone understands what was presented. So, if there aren't any questions, we'll break for lunch, but before you go there is one thing I need to make clear. Tomorrow we'll be going up and trying out some of the maneuvers that I'll show you after we return from lunch. We'll be having two Marine EXR2 Helicopters to work with, and we'll be flying in an area that the Air Force and Army also uses for target practice. When we go out as a class, we'll have the area reserved for us to use, when you go out there on you own, then it's first come first serve. You must always give way to any aircraft that happens to be there first."

With a slight smile, Captain Olson closed his book with a final piece of advice, "Don't go and mess around with any Air Force or Army EXR2 Helicopters. Especially the Army, because there's a new EXR2 Battalion

moving into Fort Irwin. They're very bad news, because they have a new type of missile and they won't hesitate to use it. The missile they have is called the Plug or PL9. It's a chemical weapon that when detonated in front of an F30, will cause the jet engine to flare out. So if you don't want to do a dead stick landing and take a long walk home, stay away from the Army EXR2 Helicopters."

Captain Olson walked over and sat on the edge of his desk, and continued, "One final word about the Army EXR2 Helicopter Pilots, if you hear about a group of Army EXR Pilots being referred to as Sky Bats. You heard right, they are the special Pilots that we just got done discussing. Actually, it's their group of Top Guns, so if you don't want to be walking home, then stay clear of em'. Anybody who thinks he's such a Hot Shot Pilot and has to hike home, just lost ten points, and then he'll be spending the rest of his life paying for the damage he done to his F30, by having to landed it in the desert instead of on a nice smooth runway. Ok, --does anybody now have any questions before we break for lunch?"

As before, no one had any questions to ask the Captain, so Captain Olson said, "Ok Gentleman, we'll see you all here after lunch. You're all dismissed," the class then got up and went to lunch.

CHAPTER 12 -- THE ENCOUNTER

On the second Saturday in March, Larry was in his office thinking to himself, "Mike has now received over ninety hours of EXR simulator time and I think he's about ready for some two up combat flying. I've now only have about two years left to finish his training, because we may now be in another war and I'm also hearing that I'm about to be transferred to active duty. I'll probably be going to Fort Irwin to join the EXR Battalion there. I'll also have to figure out, how to get Mike into the Army as a Pilot before he gets drafted."

Mike walked into the office and asked, "Larry, --are you asleep?" Of course, Larry had dosed off, waiting for Mike.

He then woke up and asked, "Where have you been? I've been waiting for you for about the last two hours."

"I'm sorry, --Dad was talking to Mom about all of us having to move. Dad's being transferred to George Air Force Base. He's to take command of two Fighter Squadrons there."

"How soon will it be, before you have to move?"

"Dad will be leaving next month. He'll live on the Base until I'm out of school in June, then Mom and Me will join him there, and then, he'll move off Base and live with us in Victorville."

"The Army is activating two EXR Companies at Fort Irwin," Larry announces, and then begins informing Mike about his new job, "That's where that new EXR Squadron will be located. I've also heard that Wayne, Scott, and I are going to be transferred to active duty. We'll more than likely join that new EXR Squadron there."

On hearing this, Mike exclaimed, "Larry what am I going to do? Now I won't be able to fly anymore! O' God Larry, --I'm now going to be grounded. I don't want to move to Victorville," Mike was now feeling so bad that a tear started to run down his cheek.

"Hey,--EXR Fighter Pilots don't cry," Larry told him after seeing the tear on Mike's cheek, "and you're not going to be grounded."

Then Larry explained to Mike that, Fort Irwin was only sixty-seven miles from Victorville, "In fact, its closer to Victorville than it's to Roseville. Fort Irwin is only one hour and fifteen minutes away by car and twenty

minutes by Helicopter. By EXR Fighter, --Fort Irwin is only five maybe ten minutes away. So you see Mike, you'll be seeing a lot of Wayne, Scott, and me. In fact, --you'll be seeing a whole lot of EXR Helicopters, flying around Victorville. As for you flying Helicopters--well, there's a real nice airport just three miles east of Victorville."

On hearing this, a smile came to Mike's face.

"I've got an old friend that runs a Helicopter operation down there," Larry explains smiling, "his name is Bob Manning, and he was my Flight Instructor. His Fixed Base of Operations (FBO) is called Manning Aviation and I'll call and tell him, you're going to be looking him up."

"What's Mister Manning like?"

"You're going to like him just fine," Larry replies still smiling, "he's just like me, and he likes Helicopters. In fact, I'm going to let him have all of my Helicopters until I get out of the Army. After I tell him how good a Pilot you are, I'm sure he'll be happy to have you fly for him, --and Mike, --guess what?"

"I give up, --what?"

Larry winked and said, "Just like you and me, Mister Manning can't fly a Cessna either," and then both Mike and Larry laughed.

"I've got another surprise for you out back," Larry hinting and glancing towards the door.

Mike was now getting a little excited, because he remembered the last time Larry had a surprise for him.

"What is it?"

"Well--hurry up and get into your flight suit, so I can show you."

Mike hurried to the locker room, got into his flight suit, hurried back to the office, and then both Mike and Larry went out to the tarmac where two EXR2B Helicopters sat.

Mike stopped and stared with his mouth open, because he couldn't believe his eyes.

"Mike, you had better shut your mouth, or something is going to fly in. Which Helicopter do you want to fly?"

"I think the one on the left would be fine," Mike replied and then asked, looking at Larry, "where's the trainer? You want me to fly a single seat fighter--solo?"

"Mike, --you have over ninety hours of simulator time and logged more than fifty hours of flight time in the EXR2T, I think you're ready for

some combat flying, --in another words dogfighting. A simulator can only teach you so much, what you need now, is some actual combat flying. Yes Mike, —you're going to fly that aircraft solo. Anyway, I'm going to be up there in the other one. Now, you just became a bona fide Fighter Pilot and there's your Fighter Helicopter. So now, go and do your preflight, then get in and let's do some real flying."

Both Larry and Mike preformed a preflight on their aircrafts, got in and fired them up.

Larry said to Mike over the radio, "That aircraft is going to handle a little different than the trainer, so take it easy for a while, until you get the feel of her. When we get to the practice range, we'll first do some target practice and when you feel that you're ready, we'll start doing some mock dogfights. Remember, after you've finished with the targets, put your weapons on safety and your weapons computer on simulation, I don't want you to shoot me down. I can't teach you how to dogfight when I'm dead. Anyway, these aircraft only have one seat and it's a long walk home."

"I'll remember," Mike told Larry over his radio.

"Ok, --let's get a takeoff clearance from the tower for a departure to the south," Larry told Mike over the radio, "you're Army Helicopter Zero-Three-Foxtrot," they then made their requests to the airport control tower and got their clearance for a departure to the south.

As Larry was watching Mike fly, he thought, "This Kid is one heck of a Pilot. If I can somehow get him into the Army when he graduates after another year, I just know he'll get a commission right out of High School. With his flight experience in the EXR2, he would then be assigned to an EXR Squadron at Fort Irwin."

When they arrived at the range, Larry told Mike, "Now use your HUD, and let's go do some target practice."

Mike and Larry spent the next hour destroying targets; Mike was still so sharp that he never missed one target.

Larry, now seeing how well Mike was doing, told him over the radio, "I see you don't need any more target practice. Ok Pegasus, now put your weapons on safety and your weapons computer on simulation, just like the way I told you back at the airport and remember, anytime you leave the target range be sure you always have your weapons set on safety and the weapons computer set to lockout."

“My weapons are now on safety and I’ve set my weapons computer to simulation,” said Mike on his radio, and then somewhat confused, he asked, “Reamer, --why do I have my weapons computer on simulation?”

“That’s because we are going to use the computer to simulate a kill,” Larry explained over the radio, “if your blue simulation light starts to flash, and you hear a buzzer, then you just got shot down. Now, for you to simulate a kill, you must have your target locked on your HUD for three seconds, and then push your fire button. Now you see why I want you to have your weapons set on safety.”

“Reamer, --my blue light is on steady and I don’t hear a buzzer,” Mike announced, noticing his blue light is not flashing, “am I alive or am I dead?”

“Pegasus, --unless you just had a heart attack or shot yourself in the head, you’re quite alive,” Larry replied laughing, “and one more thing--you must enter Zero-Five-Delta-Charlie into your weapons computer to reset it, and then you can try again to keep from being shot down. I think you’re going find that this is going to be lots of fun.”

For the next two and half hours, Larry and Mike went and flew around the sky dogfighting.

Mike’s blue light kept going off and he kept hearing the buzzer.

Mike discovered to dogfight with a real aircraft was a lot harder than it was in the simulator, and that Larry was a very deadly Fighter Pilot, and he was glad their weapons were on safety.

It was about four in afternoon, when Larry came on the radio and told Mike it was now time to head to McClellan for his simulator time.

“Reamer, --will I ever be able to dogfight like you?”

“Pegasus, --you sure will, this was your first two hours and you already show signs of improvement. I think after about twenty hours or so, you could be better than me,” they were both now headed to McClellan for Mike’s two hours of simulator time.

On the way to McClellan, Larry told Mike, if he keeps on improving through the week, he’ll have Wayne (Gremlin) and Scott (Lynx) join them at the range next Saturday, “So you can learn to fight with a Wingman and also learn to fight more than one aircraft at a time. In real combat, it’s very likely you will be attacked by more than one aircraft at the same time.”

They finally landed at McClellan, walked into hangar eleven and to the room where Mike had his hour of classroom instruction and two hours in the simulator.

When they had finished, they departed McClellan for home; after they had landed, Mike got into Brian's car, and as he drove towards home, Mike thought, "Boy, --there's sure is a lot to being a Fighter Pilot. So much to remember, I wonder if Brian had to learn all of this stuff too."

Larry received word on Monday he was going to receive his activation orders next month, so he now had to get his affairs in order, and that included shutting down his Helicopter operation.

Larry called his friend, Bob Manning in Victorville and asked, "Bob, --I'm being transferred to active duty, and I was wondering if you wouldn't mind taking my Helicopters?"

"Really sorry to hear you're being drafted—old boy, but I don't have the dough to buy your Helicopters."

"Bob, --I don't want to sell them to you, I just want you to take care of em' and maybe you can use em' in your operation, and by the way, —I'm not being drafted, —I'm already in the Army, I'm been called back to active duty."

"Well, --in that case, —sure, I'll be happy to take care of your Helicopters."

"There's one more small favor I need from you?" Larry slowly asking.

"And what would that be?" Bob grunted thinking, "here comes the attached string."

"I've got this young Pilot who needs a place from which to fly. He'll be moving to Victorville in June with his Parents. His name is Michael Troff, and he's still got a year of High School left."

"I don't know about having kids running around here," Bob replied, sounding a little apprehensive, "you know that I don't have any Airplanes for a Private Pilot to fly."

Larry explained to Bob that Mike is a Helicopter Pilot and has a commercial license with an instrument rating, "So he'll be happy to work for you, and he's also a good Groundhandler"

"I sure would like to meet him," Bob remarked.

"Well Bob, in June, when his parents move down there, I'll have him fly my last Helicopter down to you, and then you'll see for yourself that

he's one hell of a Pilot, and there's one more thing, and that is, --his Father must not know that he fly's, because his Father doesn't want his Sons flying Helicopters. Now his Brothers mustn't find out either, only his Mother knows, so keep it under your hat. One other thing, and I think you will get a kick out of this, and that is, like you and me he can't fly a Cessna."

"He sounds too good to be true," said Bob laughing, "I can't wait to meet him, and heaven knows I need the help. To be blessed with such a Pilot will be wonderful, but I don't have a lot cash to pay him."

"Hey, --don't worry about the money, because all he wants to do is fly," Larry explaining, and then notices the light on the second line is flashing, "I gotta' let you go, I've got a call on my other line--great talking to yeah, catch yeah later, --bye."

"Yeah, --nice chatting and we'll talk later, --bye," and both men hang up, then Larry connects to his other line and begins talking.

When Mike walked into the office after School that day, Larry was there waiting for him.

He told Mike he's definitely leaving, and he's now going to be shutting down the operation.

Mike asked, as he stood there in shock, "When are you leaving?"

"In about three months," Larry replied, "I had a long talk with my friend in Victorville, on the telephone today, and he told me, he'll take care of my Helicopters."

"When are you going to start sending you Helicopters down to Mister Manning?"

"Not until the middle of May, so, I'm not going to take on anymore new jobs. We'll finish the jobs we've already received, and then call it quits."

"I wish you didn't have to go," Mike bemoans feeling melancholy, "I'll miss flying the EXR's with you and the dogfighting. So, --what now?"

"Well, --like I've told you before," Larry reiterates putting both hands on Mike's shoulders, "you're going to be flying for Bob Manning--if you want too. I had a long talk with Bob today and I told him all about you. He told me, he couldn't wait until you can come down there to fly for him," Larry pauses, thinking of how to properly phrase what he wants to ask Mike next, when he thinks he's got it, he says, "there's one other thing that I want to talk to you about, --and it has to do with your future."

Mike was now wondering what Larry had meant about his future?

Mike asked, very puzzled, “What about my future?”

“Well Mike, I don’t quite know how to put this, but I think after you graduate next year, --well--I--I would like you to think about entering the Army.”

“You want me to join the Army! Good God, --my Dad and Brothers are just going to flip out,” Mike exclaimed looking bug eyed, “besides, I had planned on going to college after I graduate.”

Larry said, as he now got very serious, “The Army can send you to any college you want. Mike, --our country maybe in another war very soon and the other side now has Excalibur class aircraft. Think of your Brother Brian, having to go up against one, --he won’t stand a chance in his F30 Fighter, --he’ll be killed. Now, do you want to see your Brother shot down and killed?”

Mike was now thinking about how deadly an EXR Helicopter can be, and then he thought of losing his Brother, and this was way too much for Mike to bear; with a tear starting to run down his face, he asked, “O’ God Larry, I don’t want Brian to die, what can I do?”

“By becoming an Army EXR Fighter Pilot, just like you have been learning to. Mike, --the EXR2 Helicopter is an extremely difficult aircraft to learn to fly. There are only a few Pilots that can fly them in combat, like you and me, so if we don’t have enough Pilots to fly our EXR2 Helicopters in combat against the enemy EXR’s, then your Brother will have to fight them and you know what that means,” Mike then nodded that he knew.

Larry said, after looking at the clock, “It’s now starting to get late. I’ve got a few things to clear up around here before I can lockup for the night, so why don’t you go home and I’ll see you here after school tomorrow, and then we’ll go and do some more dogfighting.”

Mike then walks out of the office and gets into Brian’s car and drives home with a lot on his mind.

For the rest of the week, Larry and Mike flew mock dogfights; Larry’s business was now starting to wind down, so now he had more time to fly with Mike.

Mike’s dogfighting skills were now improving very quickly; his blue light and buzzer wasn’t going off, as often anymore, now it was Larry’s light and buzzer that kept going off.

All the simulator and flight time was beginning to pay off.

All Mike needed now was some time flying with a wingman and multi-aircraft combat.

On Saturday, Larry had Wayne and Scott join them at the range, where Larry taught Mike how to dogfight with a wingman, and then as a wingman.

Larry also showed Mike how to engage with several aircraft at the same time, then he showed Mike how to keep the enemy from splitting up, so they are now easy prey; Larry told Mike over the radio, “Pegasus, --you must learn to use stealth, cunning, and patience. For like a cat, you must pick your time to act, and not let the enemy force you into any unintended action.”

Mike, Scott, Wayne and Larry practiced all of that week.

Mike was now learning fast, and like a leopard cub, he was learning to hunt and kill by using stealth and cunning, until finally, his flying was starting to take on the precision that Larry was looking for in a EXR Fighter Pilot.

The last Saturday in March, and they were on their way to McClellan for Mike’s simulator time, when Larry said over the radio, “All I’ve got left to teach you now, is how to fly in formation and night fighting. We’ll start next Wednesday, that’s if I can get Scott and Wayne to help, so in the meantime I want you to go out to the range and practice stealth and cunning. Pick out some enemy targets and practice what I taught you, but the most important skill I want you to learn is patience, because without patience the other two skills, stealth and cunning, won’t mean a thing, for it’s with patience that will allow you to control the battle.”

For the first part of the week, Mike practiced at the range then on Wednesday, Wayne and Scott helped Larry teach Mike how to fly in formation; now Mike found that was easy, especially after learning how to dogfight.

Mike learned all the different types of formation flying, even the missing man formation.

Mike was told if a Pilot has been lost in action, then they would fly the missing man formation to honor him, as the lost Pilot’s place in the formation will be open, and that’s why it’s called the missing man formation.

After they had finish practicing formation flying, they once again practiced more mock dogfighting; Mike was now getting to be very good at

dogfighting and his blue light and buzzer never went off once, this time.

Now Larry's, Scott's and Wayne's blue lights and buzzers, were continually going off.

"Pegasus, --you don't need any more dogfighting practice," Larry told him over the radio, "and it's now getting time for you to take your next simulator lesson. We'll all meet back here on Saturday for more formation flying practice."

On Friday morning, Bill asks Brian, Bob and Jerry if they would like to go somewhere else to practice flying; they said sure, but where?

"How about going over to the range northeast of here," Bill suggesting.

"That's an Army range," Brian cautioned, "we had better stay clear."

"What's the matter Troff?" Bill teased, "You scared of a little Helicopter?"

"You heard what the Captain told us in class about the Army EXR Helicopters," argued Brian.

"Well, --I can't believe a stupid Helicopter can out fly an F30," Bill smugly said, "I think Python's scared of Helicopters."

Brian said, as he was now starting to get a little ticked off, "Javelin, you go right ahead and lose ten points after you have to walk home. As for me, --I'm number one in this class and I can't afford to lose any points. So, you just go on without me, I'm going over to our Marine range to practice. How about the rest of you, do any of you guys want to come with me?"

Bob and Jerry shook their heads, indicating to Brian that, they're going with Javelin.

"Fine, --have it your own way," Brian gruffly told them and he turned and walked away.

Mike didn't have any school on Friday, because all the High School teachers were attending meetings, so he thought he could go out to the Army range and do some practicing.

Mike got an early start that morning, because he wanted to have all morning to practice; it was eight o' clock, when he arrived at the range and he was all by himself.

Mike had just started practicing his moves, when Javelin and his two friends flew over; they were high enough that Mike didn't pay any

attention to them and figured they were just passing through.

“Javelin, --there’s an Army EXR Helicopter down there,” Hell Cat announced over the radio, “and it looks like he’s here first, maybe we should go elsewhere.”

“No way man,” Javelin responding, “we decided back at the Base we would practice here, and we are.”

“Javelin, --you know Hell Cat is right,” Ice Breaker declared on the radio, “the Army’s here first and we should go elsewhere.”

“Are you two getting cold feet on me? Now look, --there’s only one Helicopter and three of us. Now tell me, --how’s one stupid Helicopter going to out fly three F30’s.”

As they circled around to make a pass, Mike was now starting to wonder, what were they trying to do? “I’m here first,” he thought, “and anyway, this is an Army range,” he then figured they’ll see him and go elsewhere.

Javelin came back on the radio and said, “Just look at him, prancing around like a fairy. He’s probably some young Army Pilot just learning to fly. He’ll be a piece of cake, and after we make a pass and our jet wash catches him, —hell, --he’ll probably pee his pants and go home.”

Mike was now watching them on his radar, as they circled again for another pass, but this time Mike’s radar was showing them descending and coming right at him; Mike now knew they were going to buzz him, so, Mike got prepared for their jet wash, and as they passed over, Mike was ready for them.

As the three F30’s flew away to make another pass, Mike swung his aircraft around and faced them.

“God, --those stupid idiots would be so easy to take out,” Mike told himself, as he watched them on his HUD, “I’ve got all three of em’ locked on my HUD and all I have to do is push my fire button and poof, they’re gone —good-bye F30’s. I wonder what they would do if I would put a missile lock on em’. No, --I better not, they might try to engage and I promised Larry I wouldn’t engage in any dogfights with F30’s.”

“Javelin look, --he didn’t move one inch! I don’t think he peed his pants and I don’t think he’s going home,” Ice Breaker proclaimed on the radio in disbelief, “I also don’t think he’s learning to fly either, because he handled our jet wash without even budging. Any other Helicopter would

have been all over the place.”

Ice Breaker paused, as he thought for a minute and then he said, “What did the Captain tell us about those special EXR Helicopter Pilots? Yeah, --I remember now, he said they have cunning, patience, and what was that other trait? Oh yeah, --stealth. I don’t know about you, but to me--he’s showing a lot of patience and looks very cunning.”

Hell Cat said on the radio in an uneasy tone, “Just look at him looking at us, and the way he’s keeps facing us as we fly. Didn’t the Captain also tell us that, these guys don’t miss when they shoot? He might have PL9 Missiles. If I get a missile lock, I’m out of here--fast. I don’t want to do a dead stick landing way out here, because it’s going to be a long walk back to the Base.”

“Well, I read him different,” said Javelin in a very confident tone, “I still think we can make him leave. I’m going to threaten him on the radio, and see if he leaves. I still say, he’ll leave and go home without making a big deal out of it, besides, I still don’t think he’s got what it takes, to take us on.”

Javelin came over Mike’s radio saying, “Hey Army, --this is Javelin, --and if you know what’s good for you, --you had better leave and go home. If you don’t--you’re going to have a long hike home. You’ve got thirty seconds to make up your mind, otherwise prepare for that long hike.”

Javelin then told his two friends, he’ll throw a missile lock on the Helicopter to help the Pilot make up his mind, and then Mike got a missile lock indication from the F30’s.

Mike was beginning to get angry and said to himself, “Those ass holes. Don’t they realize if I were to push my fire button they’d all be dead! I’ve got a perfect shot on all three and I can’t miss. Well, --if they want this range so goddamn bad, then they can have it. Larry will be furious if I would happen to kill three stupid Marine Fighter Pilots, anyway, they’ll throw me in jail and throw the key away if I shoot down those three stupid Marines. I’ll tell Larry about this and see what he can do about it.”

So then, Mike turned his Helicopter around and flew off, leaving the range to the Marines.

“Look, --he’s just a stupid chopper Pilot,” Javelin happily announced when he saw Mike fly away, and with a snicker he added, “It’s just like I said in class. All you have to do is threaten em’ and they’ll go running

home like a scared dog with their tail between their legs. Didn't I tell you this would be a piece of cake? He's no special EXR Pilot either. Didn't I tell you I read him right, —didn't I?"

Mike was back at the airport by nine o'clock. Larry was surprised, when he saw Mike come walking in all hot under the collar.

"Why are you back? I thought you were going to practice all morning. Did you have some problems with the Helicopter?"

Then, Mike filled Larry in on the whole ordeal he just went through, "Didn't those stupid Marines know just how close they were from being shot down?"

"You did the right thing Mike, and I'm proud of you," Larry praising Mike, "those three Marine's did a very reckless and foolish thing. Mike, I'm real pleased at the way you handled the situation. You're finally learning the traits that make a good EXR Fighter Pilot, because from what you've told me, you had everything under control and did the right thing by leaving."

Larry called the Advanced Fighter Training School at Miramar and informed the School's Commandant about the incident.

Larry told the Commandant, that he could have lost three F30's today, because an EXR2 Army Pilot had all three F30's lock on his HUD for almost six minutes.

After Larry hung up the phone, he told Mike it wouldn't happen again.

After the Commandant had hung up his phone, he then called for Captain Olson to come to his office.

When Captain Olson walked in the Commandant told him to shut the door.

After Captain Olson had shut the door the Commandant said, "Captain--I just hung up the phone, and do you know who I was just talking to?"

"No Sir," replied Captain Olson looking puzzled and wondering what is this all about?

"Well Captain, --I will tell you," said the Commandant in a very harsh tone, "it was from the Army, and they tell me three of our Top Gun Fighters were over at their range today harassing an EXR2 aircraft, that was working there. Did you know the EXR2 Pilot had all three of the F30's locked on his HUD? My God man, --he had them targeted for almost six

minutes. If this would've been over in the Middle East, we would have lost those three Fighters. Aren't you training our Fighter Pilots about the dangers of an encounter with an EXR Class Helicopter?"

"Y-yes Sir," Captain Olson stammered, "we told them all about the EXR's and the Pilots that fly them."

"Well, --apparently for some it didn't sink in, I think this class needs more classroom instruction. Therefore, starting on Monday, I want you to repeat the whole course, because it is very important that they know about the dangers of an encounter with a EXR Helicopter, and what actions they must employ when they encounter one. Do you have any questions, Captain?" Captain Olson shook his head saying, "No Sir."

"Ok then, I have nothing further to discuss on the subject, --Captain, you're dismissed."

Captain Olson came to attention, saluted, turned and walked out of the Commandants office.

CHAPTER 13 -- EXR GRADUATE

On the second Monday in April, Brian walked into the classroom at Top Gun, sat down in his seat and waited for the Instructor to arrive.

Brian was now thinking, with only three more weeks to graduation, he would now make it as the top point leader in his class.

Brian was also happily thinking of his wedding in two weeks, and he couldn't help thinking how nice it would be to have Brenda here as his Wife; he also loved the thought of seeing her every night when he got home.

Brian's thought's return to the classroom when attention was called, as Captain Olson walks in.

"AT EASE," The Captain loudly announced, as he went straight to the white writing board on the wall and wrote in very large letters, 'EXR AIRCRAFT', and then he walked to the center front of the class and leaned on the podium there.

Brian thought why did he write 'EXR AIRCRAFT' on the board, because they had already gone through two weeks studying about EXR Aircraft, so why again?

"Let's take a minute to say a prayer for the three dead Marines from this class who were shot down and killed last Friday," The Captain expressing deep regret with bowed head in a reverent tone; the class sat in silence, everyone looking around to see who was missing.

But, there wasn't anyone missing, has the Captain lost his marbles?

Then Brian got an awful sinking feeling as he thought, "What kind of trouble did Javelin, Hell Cat, and Ice Breaker get themselves into last Friday? What kind of retribution will the Captain take out on the class, and with only two weeks before my wedding? Javelin and his two friends must have done something very bad for the Captain to tell the class they were all dead!"

The Captain now looked at the class, and then he spoke very loud, like that of a preacher in church, "There are three hot shot Marines in here who don't listen in class. They think I enjoy flapping my lips here. Well, --- I can surly tell you I would rather be out flying, then standing here preaching to all of you. Now my job is to give you the training to survive in combat, but some of you just don't listen, and it's those few, who will cost the lives of their fellow Pilots."

Now Javelin, Hell Cat, and Ice Breaker were starting to squirm in their seats.

Brian was now looking over at them and thinking, “Why those idiots, now we’ll all have to pay.”

Then the Captain said, “Last Friday, three of you, thought you could take on and defeat an EXR Helicopter. Well, fortunately for you, he didn’t have any PL9 missiles and he left. Now I can tell you on good authority, that if he would’ve been armed with PL9’s, he would have surely used them. Then there would have been three smart ass Marine Pilots, spending the rest of their lives trying to pay for the damage done to their F30’s, which they would’ve had to of set down in the Desert.”

Captain Olson looked over at Javelin and asked, “Javelin, --just what in God’s good name were you thinking? Tell me--just what class of Pilot did you think he was?”

Javelin now smiling and feeling very confident replied, “Sir, --I read him right. He wasn’t one of those special Pilots that we discussed here in class. He was just a stupid and scared Army Helicopter Pilot. You should’ve seen him skedaddle when I threw a missile lock on him.”

Then the Captain told him, “I’m going to prove you wrong, because I think you totally read him wrong. We’re going to use this incident as an example to show the class what an EXR Top Gun is!”

Everybody sat stunned after hearing those words as Captain Olson went back to the writing board and wrote in very large letters; ‘STEALTH’, ‘CUNNING’, and ‘PATIENCE’, and then he turned and said, “I’m leaving off marksmanship, because we already know these guys don’t miss when they shoot.”

He now looked at Javelin again, inquiring, “Tell me Javelin, --what did he do when you flew over him, for the first time?”

Javelin smartly replied, “Nothing, --he just kept prancing around like a fairy,” then everyone except Brian and Captain Olson started laughing.

The Captain was now watching everyone laugh, but Brian.

Looking at Brian he asked, “Python, --why aren’t you enjoying the moment?”

Brian firmly replied, “Because Sir, I don’t think he was prancing around. I think he was practicing like a cat, when it’s young. You know—like a young cub, when it’s learning the moves of stealth.”

The Captain smiled, turned to the white board and wrote under 'STEALTH' the words, 'PRACTICING STEALTH', and under those words he wrote, 'CAT' and 'PRANCING', and then he underlined the word, 'PRANCING'.

Captain Olson turned to the class and said, "Python is the man, I would want as a Wingman when I have to fly into combat. Now he's right--because that Pilot was practicing stealth just as a cat would. A lesson here--if you see an EXR Aircraft prancing around--as Javelin has so elegantly put it, --like a fairy. Then that should have been your first clue. The Pilot in that EXR Helicopter is one of the special deadly type."

The Captain asked, turning his gaze back to Javelin, "Javelin, --tell us, --what happen next?"

Javelin was now starting to blush as he recounted more of the event, "Well Sir, --we buzz him. We thought he would be so busy trying to recover from our jet wash, that he would get the massage and go home."

The Captain told Javelin, "I'll bet you he never budged an inch."

Javelin was surprised as he responded, "Yes Sir, --you're right, --but how did you know?"

Captain Olson turned again to the white board and wrote under the word, 'CUNNING', the words, 'WAS BUZZED, AND DIDN'T BUDGE FROM JET WASH', and then the Captain turned back towards the class and inquired, this time looking at Brian, "Python, --do you have any idea why he didn't budge after Javelin and his two friends had buzzed him with their F30's?"

"Well Sir," Brian replied, "I think maybe he somehow knew what Javelin and his two friends were going to do, so he then was prepared for them."

The Captain turned to the white board and spoke, while he wrote, 'KNEW, AND WAS PREPARED' under 'CUNNING', "You're right Python, this Pilot knew exactly what Javelin and his two friends were going to do and he was well prepared for their next move. He was now cunningly setting up Javelin and his two Friend's for the kill. Second clue, --if an EXR Pilot doesn't respond to a particular external stimulus the way you think he should, then you can be darn sure that he's now controlling the situation. And you can also be sure he's very cunningly setting you up for the kill."

Captain asked, after turning to look at Javelin, "After you had

buzzed him and saw he was still there under control. Then what happened?”

Javelin said, now starting to sweat, “We circled back around. I then got on the radio and told him to leave or be prepared to walk home. Then I threw a missile lock on him, to help him make up his mind. That’s when he left for home.”

The Captain said, as he once more wrote on the board under ‘PATIENCE’, the words, ‘NOW FACING PREY’ and ‘LEFT FOR HOME’, “Javelin, --I’ll again bet you that, he was facing you as you circled back?”

“Yes Sir, --he sure was, --and it was the strangest feeling too,” Javelin said, “for he was like a coiled snake, always looking straight at you,” and then the Captain said, as he underlined the words, ‘NOW FACING PREY’, “If he’d had been armed with PL9 missile’s, he would’ve fired, and then all three of you would’ve had a long walk home. Now this was your most important third clue. An EXR Aircraft just sitting there and always facing you, because now, he was Patiently waiting for the right moment to fire.”

Captain Olson put the marking pen, he was using, in the tray on the bottom of the white writing board, and then after he had walked back over to the podium he paused for a brief moment, and then he spoke, “If all three of you would have been in the Middle east, in a combat zone. You all would now be dead. You’re damn lucky that you’re here and he was one of us. That’s why he left. Not because you had thought you had beaten him, but because he wasn’t going to shoot down and kill a fellow countrymen,” the Captain then paused again, and then turning his gaze to Javelin he firmly tells him, “So it was the EXR Pilot who ended the encounter, --not you. It was the EXR Helicopter, that was always in total control, --not you. My God, --you three were locked on his HUD for almost six minutes. He could have fired at any time. So, --because of your major screw up, we’re extending this training session for another two weeks and you will now graduate in May, not on the last Saturday of April as was planned. It’s now time for lunch, --I want you all back here at thirteen hundred hours. You’re all dismissed.”

During the second week in April, Mike and Larry Practiced formation flying.

On Wednesday, Scott and Wayne joined them at the practice sessions.

On Saturday morning, Larry told Mike, all of the EXR Helicopters at McClellan are now going to be transferred to Fort Irwin and he will be receiving orders in the next few days, "I will be receiving orders any day now, to report to Fort Irwin for duty. You're now getting very close to becoming a real EXR Fighter Pilot, and if you were in the Army and going through Flight School, you would now be about ready to graduate as a Second Lieutenant. As for your remaining time in the simulator, you can finish it up at Fort Irwin."

For the rest of the day, Larry and Mike continued to practice all the maneuvers that Larry had taught him.

When they got back to the airport that afternoon, and after Mike had finish securing his aircraft for the night, he headed to the locker room to change out of his flight gear.

"Where are you going?" Larry asked.

"To get out of this flight suit. I'm not wearing it home."

"Come into the office," Larry firmly told him, "I want to see you while you're still in your flight gear."

"Ok, --if you insist," Mike meekly replied, and so, Mike followed Larry into the office.

Now Mike couldn't figure out what was so important that it couldn't wait until after he had changed.

When Mike and Larry walked into the office, there sat both Wayne and Scott; they also were still wearing their flight suites.

Wayne was smiling as he said, "Come in Pegasus, --have a seat-- you're not done flying for today yet,"

Larry walked in behind Mike and shut the door.

Looking surprised, Mike asked, "When did you two fly in?"

"About an hour ago," Wayne replied, "Reamer asked if we could help with your training tonight, so here we are."

Mike with a quizzical expression looked at Wayne and exclaimed, "Flight training--not done flying! What do you mean not done flying and why are you still using by my call?"

"The reason Gremlin had said you're not done flying--is because you're not," Larry replied, "you've got one more lesson to learn and that is night combat. In other words, dogfighting and target practice at night, in the dark. I have already called your Parents and told them, you will be working overtime helping me to prepare my aircrafts for the move to

Victorville, and you're going to be staying late tonight. They told me, because tomorrow was Sunday, it would be ok for you to stay."

Then Wayne explained to Mike why they're still using calls, "The reason we're still addressing you by your call is because you're still in your Flight Gear. When you're in your Flight Gear, you're then considered an active Fighter Pilot. So, as long as you're in your Flight Gear, you will be addressed as Pegasus and you'll please honor us by using our call's if we are in our Flight Gear."

"Pegasus, --after tonight you'll be a real EXR Fighter Pilot," said Scott, "up to now you were a Student and we didn't care, but from this night forward you should use a Fighter Pilot's call if he's in his Flight Gear and you know his call. If you don't know it, then ask him what it is and he'll tell you, and then you should use it when addressing him. Also, be kind enough to tell him yours, so he can address you by your call."

Mike thought, "Brian's now a Fighter Pilot, and I wonder what his call is. When I see him in two weeks, I think I'll ask him."

Larry got up and said, "Ok, --now let's go and teach Pegasus how to dogfight and shoot in the dark," then they all went out and preformed a preflight on their aircrafts and took off for the target range.

For the next several hours, Pegasus learned to dogfight and shoot in the dark.

Pegasus discovered that, by using the various computers and instruments in his aircraft, he could dogfight and shoot in the dark just as he could in the daytime.

It was nearly three o'clock Sunday morning, when they got back to the airport.

After Mike had secured his aircraft for the second time, he went back to the operations building, and when he walked through the door, Wayne and Scott grab him; they were waiting just behind the door.

They took him to the locker room and threw him into the shower, flight suit and all.

Mike came out of the shower, dripping wet, for the second time in two years.

"Look at me!" Mike exclaimed, "What gives? Why did you throw me into the shower again?"

"Tonight you had graduated, and now, you are an EXR Fighter

Pilot,” Wayne replies smiling, “now you’re as good as any EXR Pilot over at Fort Irwin, --I think maybe even better.”

Smiling at this young wet Fighter Pilot, Scott announced, “Pegasus, --now that you’re a Fighter Pilot, you have some responsibilities that come with the territory.”

Mike asked, while trying to take off his wet flight suit, “Responsibilities, --what responsibilities?”

“For one, how about defending your country, --and two, --how about fighting to protect your family and friends. And three, --how about helping you fellow Pilots, like your Brothers Brian and Jeff, me, Scott and Larry, who are in combat against our country’s enemies,” Wayne solemnly tells him.

“I’m not in the military, so how can I defend my county?”

“That’s right, you’re not in the military right now,” Larry declares, “but how about in another year after you finish High School?”

“Yeah, --I’ve still got one year of High School left,” Mike replies, “I promise that, after I graduate next year I’ll think very seriously about joining the Army.”

“That’s all we ask of you,” Larry tells him, “we don’t want to see a good Fighter Pilot go to waste, --because of all the sin’s that would be the worst.”

Mike now was having some trouble getting out of his flight suit, because it was still dripping wet.

“Pegasus, --before you take you flight suit off, we have something for you,” Larry tells him.

Then Scott gave Mike an olive drab patch with a pair of black wings on it.

“God, --thanks, but how do they stay on?”

Pointing to the fuzzy patch above Mike’s right pocket on his flight suit, Wayne tells him, “It supposed to stick there, but your suit is wet.”

Wayne took Mike’s patch and put it on the fuzzy patch and it stuck.

“There--that’s the way it’s supposed to work,” Wayne acknowledges with a big smile, “now when you have another suit, just peel it off and put it on your other suit.”

“Now you look just like us--wing’s and all,” Larry told him with a smile, and then Larry got very serious and declared firmly, “now don’t let me catch you wearing your flight suit without your wing’s on it.”

“I won’t,” Mike replied, and then he asked, “will you guys help me out this thing? I think the zipper is stuck and I’m still really wet and dripping on the floor.”

Wayne and Scott laughing helped Mike get out of his flight suit; Mike then went and got dried off and changed into his dry street clothes.

After Mike had said good-bye to Larry, he left and went home; it was five o’clock Sunday morning, when Mike finally got into bed.

It was noon when Mike’s Mother call for him to get up and come to lunch; Mike then got up, got dressed, and joined his Parents for lunch at the table.

Henry looking at Mike asked, “What time did you get in?”

“I think it was about five this morning.”

“I know we had said it was ok for you to stay late,” Henry remarks shaking his head disapprovingly, “but, --don’t you think coming home at five in the morning, is pushing it a little?”

“Yes Sir,” Mike replied, looking at his Father.

“So, --how’s Mister Clark coming with his move? You never did tell me why he’s moving.”

“We’re coming along just fine,” Mike answering, “he’ll be starting to fly his aircrafts down to Manning Aviation in Victorville any day now. And Dad, --like I had told you before, --Mister Clark is an Army National Guard Captain and he’s been transferred to active duty. He’s now waiting on orders to tell him where to report. So, he’s letting his old friend in Victorville, take care of his aircrafts until he gets out of the Army.”

Henry looked at Mike, and with a solemn tone of voice he said, “Mike, --I’m going to be leaving for my new assignment on Monday. So, you will now have to take care of your Mother until the both of you can join me in June. That is--after you have finished school for the summer. I’ll be seeing you both next week at Brian’s wedding, so don’t you forget.”

“I won’t, --and we’ll be there,” Mike replied.

On Monday, after Mike had left for school, Henry said to Maria, “Good-bye dear--I’ll see you at Brian’s wedding,” he then gave her a long hug and a kiss, got into his car, and left for his new assignment at George Air Force Base.

After school that day, Mike entered the Office at Pegasus Aviation; Larry was there waiting for him.

“I’ve finally received my orders,” Larry solemnly told Mike, “I’m to report to Fort Irwin on the third Monday in June. So, --starting next Monday, I’m going to start flying all but two Helicopters down to Victorville. I’ll keep the Aérospatiale and the Robinson until the last week. Then I’ll fly the Robinson down to Victorville and Scott will fly me back in an EXR2T from Fort Irwin. I’m been ordered to see Major Kitzman about a new unit he’s putting together.”

“What new unit?” Mike asked, “And when are you going to fly the Aérospatiale to Victorville?”

“You’re going to fly her down for me,” Larry replied, and then he explains, “On the last day I’ll drive my pickup down and you’ll fly the Helicopter. Your Mother will be driving Jeff’s car, and as for that new unit, well, it’s going to be made up of the Army’s best EXR Pilots. Now that’s all I’m going to tell you for now. If you want to know more, then join the Army after you finish High School next year.”

“Awe, --come on Larry, --you can tell me a little bit about it. I’ve got a whole year yet before I’m finished with High School,” Mike begging, because he was now a very curious,

“Nope, --you just have to wait,” Larry teasing, then he smiled and said, “I’ve got another surprise for you. So why don’t you go and get into your flight gear and meet me out by your EXR Fighter.”

Mike hurried to the locker room and got into his flight suit; he made sure his wings were on his suit, because he didn’t know what Larry would do if he didn’t have them on, maybe he wouldn’t let him fly the EXR2 anymore.

When Mike walked out to his aircraft, Larry was there waiting for him, but he wasn’t in his flight gear.

“Reamer, --aren’t you coming out to the range with me today?”

“Nope, --you’re a Fighter Pilot now, and you don’t need someone to baby-sit you,” Larry replied, and then he told him, “just keep practicing the maneuvers that I had taught you, until their automatic,” Mike nodded and asked, “Ok, --you told me you had a surprise for me?”

“I sure do. Come over here and I’ll show you,” Larry replied with a smile, and then they walked over to one of the rocket pods where Larry said, as he pointed to one of the missiles, “this missile is called a Plug Nine or PL9 for short. You have three in each pod and they’re for capturing enemy aircraft without destroying them.”

Mike asked very puzzled, “Why do I need them? There aren’t any enemy aircraft around here.”

“We also use them to simulate a kill,” Larry replied, and then he tells Mike, “When they’re used in the right way they won’t hurt anything, but a Pilot’s pride.”

Mike then asked Larry how they worked and Larry explains, “The PL9 Missile will cause a turbine or jet engine to flare-out, so then, the aircraft will have to make a power off landing. It works just fine with Helicopters, but be careful when using it on a jet fighter, because if a F30 or F32 has to make a dead stick landing in the desert it could damage its landing gear and the Pilot may get injured.”

Larry then told Mike about an old airstrip in the desert, “If you will follow me back to the office--I’ll show you where it is. Now if your three friends just happen to show up again, just lead them over to that old airstrip before you use your PL9’s. Now, --in order for the PL9 to be effective it has to be detonated just in front of the target, so the chemical cloud is then sucked into the engine intake. Then it will cause the engine to shut down and the Pilot will have to look for a place to land.”

Larry and Mike walked back to the office, where Larry showed Mike the location of the old airstrip.

“This is a good place for you to practice, because all of the telephones are still there and working, and if anything should go wrong, you can land and call for help.”

“What if I have to make a call--who do I call?”

“There’s a plastic card with phone numbers. One of them is for Fort Irwin,” Larry told him, and then he explained, “when you call, ask for Captain Mike Hayes, and tell him you’re Pegasus and you need assistance. Once he hears who you are, he will then get hold of me, Wayne, or Scott.”

“Then he’ll know I’m not in the Army!” Mike exclaimed, and became fearful that he’ll be found out.

“Major Kitzman and Captain Hayes already know all about you.”

“They know! Then Dad is going to find out and I’m so dead,” Mike exclaims with surprise and becomes very concerned.

“Your Dad isn’t going to find out,” Larry reassures to relieve Mike’s concerns. “Anyway, --how did you think I was able to let you fly a EXR2 Helicopter and let you use the simulator?”

“So, --how long have they known?”

“Ever since I let you fly in the trainer for the first time, because you see Mike, it was kind of a test. The Major was real interested in you, ever since I told him about how good a flyer you were. He wanted to see if you were one of the special Pilots he was looking for. And then, after you had demonstrated your uncanny ability to fly and shoot in the EXR Helicopter, he told me to recruit you into the Army EXR training program. But when I had told him you were too young and wasn’t through High School yet. He then told me to keep an eye on you, and to make sure once you have graduated from High School, you were to join the Army. He then got this idea about starting a Special Flight Training School. He thought if the Army could get a pool of young Pilots while their still in High School, then when the time comes, there would be EXR Fighter Pilots already trained. All they would need is some basic military training. Thus, cutting the time required to get EXR Fighter Pilots into the air. The requirements for this school would be very high, as only kids with a natural flight skills would be allowed to enter.”

Then Larry explained to Mike that, Major Kitzman wanted Larry to train him, because he wanted a test case to get his school approved. He figured that Mike would make an excellent first student and would be the first to enter the pool. Mike would then be commissioned, as a Second Lieutenant and begin flying immediately. The one thing Major Kitzman told Larry was, under no circumstances was Mike to drop out of High School. If Mike had dropped out of High School, then all EXR training would stop.

“So you see Mike, --both Major Kitzman and Captain Hayes think you’re a very special Pilot. They’re gambling that once you graduate from High School you’ll join the Army and fly the EXR2. The Major told me, it’s going to be hard to find men and woman who can fly an EXR Helicopter, and to not let one prospect get away, even if he or she was still in High School.”

Larry pause for a moment, and then he said, as he now started to smile, “So, --enough of this talk, --now get your butt out to that EXR2 Fighter, do your preflight and do some flying.”

“Yes Sir,” Mike said with a big smile on his face.

He then saluted Larry; Larry returned the salute and said, “Pegasus--get out to that Helicopter.”

Then Mike went out to his Fighter, performed his pre-flight and took off to the practice range.

CHAPTER 14 -- THE WEDDING

Every day after school, Mike went out to the gunnery range, near where that old landing strip was located, to practice; that was if Larry didn't have any work for him to do.

Mike was hoping those three Marine F30's would show up, because he would've liked to try out his new missiles and teach them a little courtesy to other aircraft, but alas, Mike never saw them again, so he never got to use his new missiles.

Brian's wedding is to take place on the last Saturday in April.

The day before the wedding, Maria departed with Mr. and Mrs. Gram in Mr. Gram's car and Mike and Brenda departed in Brian's car to the Miramar Naval Air Station where the wedding was to take place; the wedding is to be held in the Navy Chapel there.

Everyone was there, even Jeff, who flew in the day before.

All of Brian's relatives were seated on one side of the chapel and all of Brenda's relatives were seated on the other side.

Bill Warfield, Brian's friend, was his best man.

Brian and Bill were dressed in their formal Marine uniform's; both Henry and Jeff were also in their Air Force uniforms.

Brian was standing at the altar when the wedding march began to play.

As the wedding march played, Mr. Gram slowly escorted his Daughter up the aisle to the altar where Brian and the Preacher patiently waited.

Brian thought how beautiful Brenda looked in her long white wedding dress, as she and her Father slowly walked up the aisle to the wedding march; leading the way was Brenda's Maids of honor and flower girls.

When they all arrived at the altar, Mr. Gram departed, went and joined his Wife, who was sitting in the front pew sobbing with joy; she whispered to him how beautiful it all is.

The wedding ceremony took about forty minutes, ending with Brian kissing Brenda.

Then they quickly walked down the aisle to the back of the chapel and out the door, after which, everyone followed them out.

When the newlyweds got outside, they walked under an arch of swords, which was made by two rows of Marine and Navy Officers.

Then they hurried to Brian's car, which Jeff and Mike had decorated with ribbons; several lengths of cans on strings were tied to the bumper, and 'JUST MARRIED' was written in large white letters on the rear window, at the car they turned to face their family and friends.

Brenda threw the wedding bouquet into a group of young women for them to catch; as they entered Brian's car, they were pelted with rice.

Later that afternoon, both the wedding reception and the wedding ball, were held in the Officers Club Ball Room and everyone that was in the church, was there.

While Brian was introducing some of the Pilots from his class to his Father, across the room, Bill was talking with Jeff and Mike.

"Hey, Air Force--have you learned to fly yet?" Inquired Bill of Jeff in a teasing tone, "I guess not, --as I don't see any wings on your uniform."

"I'm a cadet in the Air Force Academy," Jeff replied with pride; sensing his bias he added, "I'll be flying soon enough and in a lot bigger aircraft than you--do I need say anymore."

Feeling a little out gunned, Bill was starting to get upset and barked, "I'm a Fighter Pilot, --and us F30 Pilots do a lot more fighting than everyone else, --we're the ones who win the wars."

Jeff didn't respond to this biased idiot, he just stood there and looked at him with a frown.

Mike also felt the same way; especially after the run in, he had with the three F30's several weeks ago.

Then Bob and Jerry joined Bill, Jeff, and Mike.

"Bill, --are you making trouble again?" Bob asks, as he walks up hearing Bill mouth off.

"No," Bill replied sharply, "I just asked Air Force here, if he could fly."

Now when Brian saw, what appeared to him as, Bill trying to pick a fight with his Brother, he hurries over to the group and tells him scolding, "Bill, what's going on here? Now don't you start a fight at my wedding reception with my Brother, and what's the big problem?"

"Bill called Jeff Air Force and said he couldn't fly," Mike speaking up, offering an explanation.

"Well, Jeff is in the Air Force," Brian declared looking at Bill, "and

yes, --he sure can fly, and he's a good Pilot too. Anyway, --he can probably fly a lot better than you, --at least he doesn't let a Helicopter get the best of him." Both Jerry and Bob now started laughing and Bill was now starting to get a little ticked.

"What are you two laughing for?" Bill retorted looking at Bob and Jerry, "you two were also there," they abruptly stopped laughing.

Brian now feeling a little proud of his Brother said, "Jeff is attending the Air Force Academy, and is to become a B80 Bomber Pilot. Now all of you shake hands and be friends, because we're all Military Pilots and someday we may need each other."

They then all shook hands and Bill said apologetically, "Air Force-- I'm sorry, I didn't mean any disrespect. Did I just hear your Brother say, you're training to be a Stealth Bomber Pilot?"

"Yeah," Jeff replied in a calmer tone, accepting his apology, "and no offense taken. I hope to graduate in about a three and half years and start flying the B80 Bomber."

"I remember a story my Dad had told me once, about a Fighter Pilot who had been saved by a B17 in World War Two," said Bill with a smile, as he began to relate the old story. "He told me the Fighter Pilot's plane had been shot up pretty bad and was having a hard time keeping up. So, he fell back, and then several German Fighters came after him. Well, --he knew he was just about done for and figured the end was near, when suddenly the German Fighters were fired at from above. He then heard on his radio to come up and fly just under our Bomber, and when he looked up and saw that big B17 flying there. Dad said that Fighter Pilot just about cried, so he then went and tucked his little shot up Fighter right under that Big Bomber. Now the guns from the Bomber protected him from the German Fighters and he was nice and safe. He stayed there until they got back to England, where he left the B17 and flew to his Air Field. Dad told me the Fighter Pilot never saw that B17 again, but from that day, he always had a warm spot in his heart for those big Bombers."

The Marines were now all looking at Jeff as if he was that B17 Bomber Pilot, and then Bob, Jerry, and Bill patted Jeff on the back.

"C'mon Air Force," Bill said to Jeff with a big grin, "Let's get some punch before it's all gone."

"Yeah sure," Jeff returned, "why don't you go and fill me a cup and I'll be right there. I want to talk with Brian first."

Brian and Jeff walked over to a quiet place in the room where they could talk alone.

“Brian,” Jeff began with concern, “I shouldn’t have worn my Air Force Uniform here.”

“What!” Brian exclaimed looking at Jeff, “are you ashamed of being in the Air Force, --don’t you like your uniform?”

“Ashamed, --no way,” Jeff retorted looking right into Brian’s face, “I’m proud of my uniform, and I like the Air Force, otherwise I wouldn’t have joined, but my uniform seems to be causing problems here. That Marine, I think his name is Bill, I don’t think he likes me being here.”

“Are you kidding,” Brian exclaimed smiling at Jeff, “did you see the way Bill and the other Marine Pilots with him looked at you, after he’d told the story about that Fighter Pilot in World War Two, they thought you were that Bomber Pilot. I think they imagined themselves flying tucked up under your big B80 Bomber--nice and safe. Bill’s ok once you get to know him, --and anyway, he’s a good Fighter Pilot, even though he gets into trouble now and then. So, you keep your uniform on--ok,” Brian taps Jeff’s left shoulder with his fist.

“Yeah sure,” said Jeff smiling while looking at the floor, “I don’t have anything to change into anyway.”

“Besides, you’re not the only one here in an Air Force Uniform,” Brian reminding him, “remember--Dad’s also here and he’s Air Force too. Hey bro’, I’m proud of you and remember--we’re it, until we can figure Mike out, because I still think, he’s hiding something.”

“Yeah, --and I’m also proud of my big Brother,” Jeff remarked with a smile, looking down at the floor again, “Besides, I think you’re right about Mike, he’s defiantly hiding something.”

“C’mon, let’s rejoin the reception,” Brian inviting glancing over at the gathering, “and remember--I’m a married man now,” and then they both laughed and rejoined the other guest.

Brian went and joined his new Wife and Jeff went over to find Mike; he found him at the punch bowl with Bill, Bob, and Jerry.

When Bill saw him coming, he said, “Hey Air Force--I’ve got a cup of punch for you. You’ve just got to try this--its good stuff.”

Jeff took the cup and drank.

“This stuff is good and my name is Jeff, and I wish you would use it instead of Air Force.”

“So-o-o you don’t like you branch of service,” Bill remarks with a lazy drawl, as he takes another sip of punch while eyeing Jeff.

“I like the Air Force just fine,” Jeff snapped back, “how would you like it if I kept calling you, ‘Hey Marine’. I just think it would sound better if you would call me by my name.”

“Ok, --Ok, --Jeff it is,” Bill humbly conceding.

“Say Jeff, --do you Bomber Pilots have handles?” Bob asks inquisitively, “you know--a call.”

“No,” Jeff replies, “we don’t use them, but our aircraft does, though.”

“Well I’ll be,” said Bill astounded, “can you imagine calling an Airplane Polecat. Well, --we do use handles, --my call is Javelin and you can use my call to address me if you like,” and then they all laughed, because who ever heard of a Bomber called Polecat.

“My call is Hell Cat,” Bob piping up.

“And you can call me Ice Breaker,” Jerry added next.

Mike now thought, “Maybe they will know what Brian’s call is--I think I’ll ask them. I sure wish I could tell them my call, but I can’t. How would I explain to them that I’m an EXR Fighter Pilot, --they wouldn’t believe me anyway and just laugh.”

“Say Bill, --do you know Brian’s call?”

“Yeah kid, --it’s Python.”

“Python, --huh’--cool,” Mike remarks, marveling at the call, “that’s a type of big snake, isn’t it?”

“Yep, --real big and nasty,” Bob replies with a chuckle.

“That’s a good handle for a Fighter Pilot,” Mike thought to himself, “I’ll try to remember it, and the next time I talk to Brian, I’ll use it.”

Brian and Brenda came over to the punch bowl, where Mike and the Marine Fighter Pilots were talking.

“Brenda, this is Bob Smith and Jerry Baker,” Brian introducing his two friends to her.

Next, Henry came over to punch bowl to get a cup of punch for himself and Maria, and then Brian introduced his friends to his Dad, “Dad, --these Pilots are friends of mine, --this is Bill Warfield, call sign Javelin.”

“Nice to meet you Sir,” Bill politely tells him, extending his hand and Henry taking it and shakes his hand.

“Bob Smith, --his call is Hell Cat,” Brian introducing Bob.

“Sir,” said Bob crisply extending his hand to Henry, and when Bob and Henry have finished shaking hands, Brian introduces Jerry, “and this is Jerry Baker--call sign Ice Breaker.”

“Sir,” Jerry replies also shaking hands with Henry.

“I suppose all of you are ready for graduation next week,” Henry remarked looking at the Marine’s.

Bill and his two friends were now humbly looking at the floor.

“Thanks to these hot shot Pilots, graduation has been moved back two weeks. So, we’ll now be graduating in May,” Brian declares with frustration.

Henry looking surprised asks, “What happen?”

“Bill and those other two, tried to take on and defeat an EXR Helicopter two weeks ago,” Brian explains, “anyway, the Helicopter left and nothing happened. Except our Instructor, Captain Olson, found out the EXR Fighter Pilot had all three of them locked on his HUD for six minutes. Well, --you can imagine what the Captain did when he found out.”

Mike choked on a cup of punch he was drinking.

“It’s a darn good thing that the EXR Helicopter was one of ours,” Henry pointedly told them, “otherwise you three would be dead now. I sure hope you all learned a lesson there. I saw an Israeli combat film, it showed an EXR class Helicopter take on and defeat four Syrian MIG 43’s.”

Now everyone, except Mike and Henry stood there stunned.

“Colonel Troff--Jeff,” Brenda breaking in, “I would like to introduce the both of you to my relatives. I think they would like to meet their new family members.”

Brenda, Brian, Henry, and Jeff went to look for her relatives.

Mike said teasing, while looking at the three Marines with a devilish grin, “Boy, --you guys were sure lucky that the EXR2 Helicopter wasn’t armed with PL9’s. For when you three started to circle back after you had buzz him, --all I can say is, --the three of you made beautiful textbook perfect targets. Couldn’t of missed any of you if he tried, --like shooting ducks on a pond,” now, all three Marines choked on their punch.

Bill, a little shocked and stunned asked, “How did you know what we did? Did Brian tell you about our little episode with the EXR Helicopter?”

“Nope,” Mike replied shaking his head, “he didn’t tell me anything, --I just knew--that’s all.”

“If you knew and if he didn’t tell--then how...?”

Bill was now beginning to realize the amazing reality and exclaims shaking his head, “No way--it can’t be! You’re too young to be in the Army!”

“You’re right,” Mike acknowledged with a smirk, “I’m too young and I’m not in the Army, --yet.”

“It was you--wasn’t it?” Bill announced totally flabbergasted, “but, --but, --how can this be?”

He pauses, and as they all stare at Mike, the astounding truth begins to sink in, and then he exclaims, “My God man, --you’re that EXR Fighter Pilot!”

Mike, now thinking it’s time to leave, turns and starts to walk away, he then looks back at them over his right shoulder, smiles, and then giving them a wink, he continues to walk away.

Bill, he now went right after him, because he wasn’t going to let this incredible event escape without learning all of the details; the other two Marines were right behind, and when Mike saw them coming, he started to run for the door, but they caught up to him and grab him by the back of his neck.

Mike was now starting to get scared, because he didn’t know what these Marine Pilots were going to do to him, as they herded him out of the room, and then outside.

Mike was now afraid these Marines were going to kill him and dispose of his body by throwing it into the San Diego Bay, so no one would find it, because he had threaten to kill them with his Helicopter two weeks ago.

Mike was now shaking in fear as he weakly muttered, “What are you guy’s going to do to me? I didn’t shoot you down, --I left and went home. Please--don’t kill me and throw my body into the Bay!”

“Who said anything about killing you,” Bill replies laughing, and when he notices Mike shaking in fear he tells him softly, “don’t be afraid--calm down. For heaven sakes, we are not going to throw you into the Bay. We just want to talk with you in private--that’s all--it’s not every day we get to talk to an EXR Top Gun,” Mike now starts to relax.

Bill noticing Mike was starting to calm down puts his hand on Mike’s shoulder.

He smiled saying, “God, --we didn’t mean to frighten you and we

certainly aren't going to hurt you. Now tell me the truth Mike, --you were the EXR Fighter Pilot that we encountered two weeks ago, --weren't you?"

"Yeah Javelin, —it was me," Mike softly replied nodding, knowing the cat was out of the bag and called him by his handle, "I was the one flying the EXR2 Helicopter that you guys buzzed two weeks ago."

"After we had discussed the incident in class, I now know that you're a damn good Pilot," said Bill praising Mike, "Excuse me—EXR Fighter Pilot."

"Say," Bob broke in as a thought struck him, "If you're an EXR Fighter Pilot, then you must have a call."

Mike looks at him and slowly nods.

"Well I," Bob drawled looking at Mike, "what is it?"

"Pegasus..." Mike slowly replies in low tone, "my call is Pegasus..."

The three Marines whispered, Pegasus, while looking at each other nodding.

"Yes of course--the winged horse," Bill acknowledges impressed, "that's an awesome call and it fits an EXR Top Gun to a tee."

Mike now started to smile, and once again it felt good to be able to tell someone he can fly.

Then Mike got a little worried, because he knew Bill would tell Brian; worst then that, Bill might tell his Father he flies an EXR Helicopter.

Mike thought, "I've got to figure out a way to keep Bill and his friends from telling Dad and Brian," and then he remembered something he almost forgot.

"Thanks for the compliment," Mike politely acknowledges, "but you guys must promise not to tell my Brothers and especially my Father."

"I don't understand," Bill declared very puzzled, "I would think your Father and your two Brothers would be proud of you, --my god, --an EXR Fighter Pilot at seventeen--why that's incredible."

"Please Bill," Mike now pleading, "I'm begging you, --please don't tell. If you do, —my Dad will ground me for sure, because he doesn't want me to fly Helicopters. He thinks that they're dangerous and unsafe to fly—anyway, --if you do tell--I think he probably won't believe you."

"And why wouldn't he believe me if I told him about you being an EXR Helicopter Pilot?" Bill asking, a bit confused and wondering.

"You go right ahead and tell him," Mike tells him smiling, "He'll laugh you right out the door, because you see, --he thinks the EXR

Helicopter is the most difficult and complex Helicopter ever built, and after I couldn't learn to fly an old Cessna--you think he's going to believe you when you tell him I'm an EXR Helicopter Pilot."

"You can't fly a simple Airplane like a Cessna!" Bill exclaimed.

"Nope..." Mike softly replied with embarrassment, looking at the ground, and wishing he hadn't let it slip out, and then Bill and his two friends started to howl with sidesplitting laughter.

"God, --I can't believe that an EXR Top Gun like you can't fly a simple old Cessna," said Bill between laughs, as this was so humorous he couldn't help himself, "Why, --why, --any idiot can fly an old Cessna."

They were laughing so hard now, Bob was almost crying.

Mike was now getting mad, hotly retorts, "I would like to see you guy's try to fly a EXR Helicopter, and then we'll see who does the laughing." Then Mike walked away and went to the men's room and a few minutes later, he returned to the reception.

Captain Olson was talking to Henry and Jeff on the far side of the room and the three Marines, that were laughing at Mike, were there as well.

When Henry saw Mike walking on the other side of the room, he asked Jeff, if he would go and get Mike and bring him here.

Jeff walks over to Mike and tells him, "Dad wants you to come over--I guess he wants to introduce you to Captain Olson."

"Swell, --some more introductions, --this whole affair is getting to be so lame. I'm tired of explaining to military brass that I don't want to learn to fly their stupid jets," Mike complaining.

"Yeah, --I know," Jeff agreeing with him, "but Dad wants to see you just the same."

"Ok, --Ok," said Mike raising both hands sighing, and then they both walked back to where Henry and Captain Olson were talking.

When Mike and Jeff arrived, Henry said, "Captain, --this here is my youngest Son, --Mike."

"Colonel," The Captain said, as he starts to commend Henry, "you must be a very proud man, having three grown Sons and two of them already serving their country as Pilots."

Mike glances at the ceiling and says to himself, "Here it comes again--all the bullshit."

"Yes Captain," Henry replies smiling and feeling very proud, "I can't tell you how proud I am of Brian and Jeff."

“So young man, what type of aircraft are you going to learn to fly?” The Captain asked looking at Mike.

Mike says to himself, rolling his eyes, “Yep, --same old BS.”

“Maybe thinking of joining the Navy and learn to fly the F32,” the Captain suggesting, looking at Mike with a smile and waiting for his answer, but Mike just stands there looking at him in silence.

“Well Captain,” Henry breaks in, seeing Mike wasn’t going to answer him, “Mike’s the black sheep of the family. You see, --he can’t fly like his two older Brothers. I sent him to flight school to learn to fly a Cessna, so he could get his Private Pilot License, but he just wasn’t able to fly the Cessna, so then at the advice of the Instructor, I stopped the lessons.”

Mike glances over at the three Marines and they looked back, rolling their eyes, not believing what they just heard.

“Sir, --may we all be excused?” Bill breaking in and asking if he and his two friends could be excused, because he too, had enough of this stupid conversation.

“Yes Lieutenant, --you’re all excused,” Henry told them.

As Bill turns to leave, he pauses by Mike and whispers in his ear, “See ya’ upstairs, —Pegasus,” for a moment, Mike held his breath in fear, hoping his Father hadn’t heard while giving Bill a dirty look, but Bill just smiled and winked.

Bill and his two friends walked away shaking their heads.

Bill said quietly, as he was walking away with his two friends, “Black sheep of the family? I don’t think so--not that Kid. I’m telling you, when Mike’s old Man finds out that his Son, who he thinks can’t fly, is an EXR Fighter Pilot, all I can say is--he’s really going to be in for one hell of a shock. Mike joining the Navy, --no way man, --he’s Army material for sure.”

Later that afternoon Brian and Brenda cut the wedding cake, and then everyone had a piece of the cake.

Next, the band started to play and Brian and Brenda went to the center of the dance floor and began to dance; after Brian and Brenda had danced for a few minutes, then everyone joined the newlyweds and started dancing.

Now Mike, he danced with one of Brenda’s cousins and Henry danced with Maria; Jeff also danced with one of Brenda’s cousins.

It was about eleven o'clock in the evening, when the band finally stopped, packed up, and left.

Henry, Maria and Mike said good-bye to everyone; Jeff said he also has to go, "I have to catch a flight back to Colorado Springs."

It was early Sunday morning when Mr. and Mrs. Gram, Maria and Mike left for Roseville, but before Maria left, Henry told his wife he has a house in Victorville all picked out; also, there's a good High School for Mike to attend next year as well.

"Dear, I'll have everything ready when you and Mike come in June," Henry informing her.

It was three in the afternoon, when Maria and Mike got home.

Maria told Mrs. Gram, she'd call her later in the week, and then she said good-bye to the Gram's, and they said good-bye to her; they then drove off to their home, with Maria waving until they were out of sight.

After Maria had walked back inside the house, Mike informed her, "I've got to go and see Larry at the airport."

"Be sure you're home by six, because you've got your homework to do for school tomorrow," His Mother reminding him.

"Yeah Mom, --I'll be I'll be back by six," He told her as he walked out the door and got into Jeff's car, because Brian now has his car with him at Miramar.

As Mike drove to the airport, he was hoping, Larry would be there; Larry had just finished working on some logbooks when Mike walked in.

"Mike, I didn't expect to see you until tomorrow afternoon," Larry declared a little surprised.

"I just got back about an hour ago," Mike told him with eagerness, because he couldn't wait to fill him in on some important information, "I have to talk to you, because I found out who those F30 Pilots are, --you know, --the ones who buzz me a couple of weeks ago."

"You have!" Larry exclaimed with interest peaked.

"Yeah," Mike replied nodding.

"Well, --just don't stand there, --tell me what happened?"

"I think I really screwed up--big time," Mike proclaimed a little worried, "they now know it was me they buzzed."

"Why did you tell them it was you in that Helicopter?" Larry asked his curiosity peaked.

“Because they figured it out and I was scared when they grabbed me and took me outside. I thought they were going to kill me, so I told them it was me in the Helicopter.”

“Did they believe you, when you told them it was you they had buzzed?” Larry probing a little deeper, because he now was a little concerned, as he may be in deep trouble for letting Mike fly military aircraft.

“Yeah, --they sure did,” Mike replied, “Bill Warfield, --his call is Javelin, he’s the leader and he truly believes that I’m the one he had buzzed, but I don’t think he’ll tell my Father, --although I’m not too sure if he won’t tell Brian.”

“What makes you think he won’t tell your Father?” Larry asks with raised brow.

“Because I told him, I couldn’t fly a Cessna,” Mike replied, “I also told him my Dad doesn’t think I can fly at all and if he should tell, my Dad would laugh and not believe him.”

“Well, --what happen next?” Larry asked, as he’s very concerned and hoping this may work for the time being.

“They all laughed so hard, that Bob Smith, --he’s Hell Cat, --started to cry,” replied Mike hanging his head and looking down at the floor, “Javelin had said any idiot could fly an old Cessna. Larry, --is there something wrong with me, because I can’t fly a Cessna?”

Now seeing Mike was getting upset again, Larry said, “Now don’t let them get you all upset. Remember, --it was you who had them locked on your HUD for six minutes, and if you would’ve had PL9 missiles, then you could’ve made them all walk back to their base.”

Larry was now having concerns about Mike flying the EXR2 and he still hasn’t gotten any news about the special flight school getting approved, so he decided to play it safe. “I don’t know if they’ll tell your Father and Brothers, so we better play it safe and not fly the EXR2 until they graduate next week.”

“Larry, --are you grounding me?” Mike asked now stunned.

“Just in the EXR2--and only until the end of next week,” Larry told him, as he once again was seeing Mike getting depressed, “after those three Pilots leave, then we can resume flying. You can still fly the Robinson and the Aérospatiale, because I’ve still got a business to run and I need you to fly for me. Remember, --Wayne and Scott are both gone, and now it’s just the two of us to run the operation until June.”

“Sure Larry,” Mike tells him with a smile, “I’ll fly for you until you go on active duty in June.”

“Mike, --soon, --and it won’t be to long now, that you’re going to become one of our Country’s best EXR Fighter Pilots--if you aren’t already. That’s why I keep nagging you to think about joining the Army,” Larry said to Mike, as he was again worried about him, “I know that you’ve got another year of High School left, and I may not be around next year to help you get in. Mike, —there may be another war, --I just feel it, and I may be going overseas, so please remember what I’m telling you now, because when the time comes think about your special skill.”

“Yeah Larry, --I’ll remember,” Mike tells him, as it’s now getting to be old news, Larry looked pleased and he smiled.

“God, --look at the time!” Mike exclaimed glancing at the clock and seeing it was getting close to five forty, “I promised Mom I’d be home by six. I’ve really got to go, --I’ll see you tomorrow after school--bye now.”

Mike hurried out the door, got into Jeff’s car, and drove home.

Maria had dinner ready for him when Mike got home; after Mike had eaten, he went to his room to do his homework, and when he had finish with his homework, he got ready for bed.

Maria turned out the lights as she walked to her room, and when she arrived at his room she said, “Good night dear.”

“Yeah, --good night Mom,” Mike told her, as he rolled over, pulled the covers over himself, and sank his head down into his pillow; she then went to her room and retired as Mike fell asleep thinking about all that had happened to him this weekend.

CHAPTER 15 -- THE MOVE TO VICTORVILLE

Brian and his class finally graduated on the second Saturday in May; Bill behaved himself and didn't get into any more trouble.

Bill, Jerry and Bob never told Brian it was Mike, who flew the EXR Helicopter.

Brian as the class leader, with the most points, chose to remain at Miramar as an assistant instructor to help teach Advance Fighter Training.

Bill, Bob and Jerry received orders for duty on the Aircraft Carrier Saratoga.

On the Sunday afternoon before Bill, Bob and Jerry were to leave, Brian had them over to his house for a going away party; they played tennis, volleyball, ate snacks and drank beer.

After the Sun had set, Bill told Brian they had to leave, because they were to fly out to the carrier the next day and thanked Brian for the great time that they had; now what they didn't know was, for some of them, it would be their last time together.

"You guys be careful now and watch out for the EXR's," Brian giving Bill, Bob and Jerry a bit of advice, "be sure to stick together, because the Syrians don't fool around and also watch your six o'clock, because the Syrian's like to sneak up on you from the rear."

"We will," Bill assures him, as Bob and Jerry nod.

"You guys be very careful now, --you hear. I don't wanta' go to your funerals," Brian tells them as he shakes their hands for the last time, "When you all get back be sure to stop by and we'll play some more tennis and volleyball. I'll also have some beer cooling in the refrig."

They all said good-bye for the last time as Bill, Bob and Jerry got into Bob's rented car and drove away.

On Monday when Mike got out of school, he couldn't wait to get to the airport, because a whole week had passed without being able to fly the EXR2 Helicopter.

He went straight to the office; Larry was sitting at his desk doing some paper work as usual when Mike walked up and stood by his desk.

Now Larry knew what Mike wanted, so he played dumb and ignored him.

“Larry it’s Monday, and it’s been a whole week,” said Mike very anxious and suffering.

“So what else is new,” grumbled Larry kind of crabby like, not taking his eyes off his work, “tomorrow is Tuesday--that’s if the Sun comes up.”

“You told me last week, I only had to wait a week before I could fly the EXR2 again,” Mike reminding him and now starting to get worried.

“If you remember--I said after those Marines have graduated and left, then you can fly the EXR2 again and not before,” Larry told him looking resolute.

“Brian called home Sunday night and told Mom, he had already graduated, and those Marine Pilots that buzzed me--they just left for duty on the Carrier Saratoga,” Mike told him, as his excitement was now evaporating into disappointment, “He also told Mom, he’s now going to be staying on at Miramar, as a Flight Instructor...”

“There you see, not everyone is gone yet, --your Brother is still there,” Larry quickly barked back, almost before Mike had finished talking.

Mike was now getting very upset and a tear started to form in his eye as he slowly said, “O’ God Larry, --he’s going to be there for years, --I’ll never be able to fly the EXR2 again.”

Larry, noticing the tear in Mike’s eye and feeling he had caused the Kid enough anguish, reached under the desk and got Mike’s Helmet and said, as he handed it to him with a big smile, “Here’s your helmet and for Pete sakes wipe your eyes or you’re going to crash into the control tower, besides, you don’t want anyone to see you in this condition, --you’re supposed to be seventeen and a EXR Fighter Pilot.”

Mike quickly wipes his eyes and takes the helmet from Larry with a grin.

“Your EXR2 is out there, and has been waiting for you all week,” Larry tells him, “so go ahead and take her out for a spin. You shouldn’t have any trouble from the Marines, because they’re gone. As for the Army, --they know all about you and if you’re polite to them, they just might practice with you. Remember,” Larry emphasizing, “Wayne and Scott are now at Fort Irwin and you just might run into them out on the gunnery range. So, be polite and courteous and above all--have fun.”

“Thanks Larry,” Mike replies with a very big smile, “I sure do hope,

I'll see Wayne and Scott at the range, because it'll be fun to practice with them again."

Mike went into the locker room to put on his flight suit, and made darn sure, the patch with the wings was on his suit, because he didn't want to upset Larry now, just as he's letting him fly the EXR2 again; for some reason, Larry doesn't want him to wear his flight suit without the wing patch.

Mike went out to the EXR2, performed his preflight, got in and fired it up; when all the run-up checks were completed, he got a takeoff clearance from the control tower and departed for the Army practice range.

As he flew to the practice range, he sure was feeling good, because he really loved to fly this helicopter.

As May went by, Mike helped Larry in getting his business closed down.

Mike also flew the EXR2 Helicopter whenever he had time, as that was quite often now, because Larry's Helicopter operation was almost finished.

Larry flew the Robinson down to Victorville on the last Friday in May; later that day at the airport, Scott arrived with an EXR2T Helicopter and they both flew to Fort Irwin, because Larry and Major Kitzman had orders to see the new Commanding Officer.

After landing, Larry walks into the operations office where Major Kitzman was waiting for him.

"Sir, --I'm here to see the Commanding Officer," Larry announced as he saluted the Major.

"The Old Man wants to see me too, --so let's go Captain," Major Kitzman says returning the salute.

They both leave the operations office, get into a JLUV (Joint Light Utility Vehicle), and head over to the Headquarters building; after a short wait, they're told the Commanding Officer will see them, so they walk into his office.

Once inside, Major Kitzman introduced Larry to Lieutenant Colonel Howard Larson, their new Commanding Officer, "Sir, --this is Captain Larry Clark."

"Sir," Larry announces smartly, saluting, Lieutenant Colonel Larson returning the salute, "I'm looking forward to working with you, --Sir,"

Larry tells him.

Lieutenant Colonel Larson extends his hand and they shake.

Now Lieutenant Colonel Larson was once a Major, and after being promoted to Lieutenant Colonel he's been put in command of the new EXR Fighter Battalion at Fort Irwin; Major Kitzman has been assigned to command Alpha Company, with Captain Hayes in command of the First Squadron.

"Captain Clark," Lieutenant Colonel Larson begins, "the Second Squadron is in need of a Commander and I think you're just the man to fill the position."

"Thank you Sir, --I'll do my best," Larry replies.

"Yes Captain I know you will," Lieutenant Colonel Larson tells him with a smile, "you know Captain, --it's going to be very hard to find qualified Pilots to fly our EXR2 Helicopters."

"Yes sir," Larry replies nodding, "I know what you mean."

Larry paused, and then he said, "Sir, --I've got this young Pilot that I've been training. Well Sir, --he's incredible and you just won't believe how he can fly and shoot. When he shoots--well Sir, --he never misses and when I say never I do mean never, --for every shot's a hit and you should see him fly the EXR2, why he can out fly me now. He even had three Marine F30's from Miramar, ---you know, --from the advanced fighter training school there, lock on his HUD for six minutes!"

"Well Captain Clark, --why isn't he here? You know how badly we need Pilots of that caliber."

"Well Sir," Larry replies, now a little apprehensive, "he's not in the Army, because he's only seventeen and he's got one year of High School left."

"Captain Clark, --you know the Army frowns on letting kid's and civilians fly military aircraft. You can get into very serious trouble if you continue to ignore Army Regulations," Lieutenant Colonel Larson scolding and getting angry with Captain Clark.

"Yes Sir. But, --Major Kitzman had told me, because Mike's so special it would be all right to let him fly, and I was told no one has to find out about Mike. So we all kept it a secret, no one knows about our special EXR Fighter Pilot."

"Major Kitzman, how dare you bend Army Regulations to suit your needs. This must stop and right now, I want no exceptions, --do you both

understand?” Lieutenant Colonel Larson barked now very angry with both men; Larry looks at Major Kitzman as he nods.

“Sir,” Major Kitzman begins in a firm voice and very concerned, “I think you’re making a big mistake. Sure, --he’s still in High School, but he’s one of the best EXR Fighter Pilot’s I’ve seen. After next year, he’s going to be out of school and if we don’t keep him under our wing, then we’re going to lose him for sure. Sir, --you know all about Army red tape, and if he doesn’t join with our help and gets drafted, well, --you know the rest. I don’t see the harm in letting him fly with Larry and a couple of other Pilots he knows. Then, when the time comes, we’ll have him here with us and not marching around with a rifle and sleeping in a foxhole, because that would be one terrible waste of a good Pilot. There’s one thing more, --I have this idea about a special flight school to get these kid’s and train them, because I know there has to be other kids out there just like Mike with the same skills. And with a war on the horizon, we could have a pool of Pilots just waiting to fly. Think of the time and money that can be saved, because as you know, Sir, in war time, it could mean the difference between victory or defeat.”

“Have you submitted your idea through the proper channels for consideration and approval?” The Lieutenant Colonel asked with furrowed brow.

“Yes Sir, --last fall.”

“And--did it get approved?” Lieutenant Colonel Larson asked with an inquisitive look, “Because I’ve heard nothing of any special flight school for kids.”

“No Sir, --I’ve heard nothing neither,” Major Kitzman remarks with exasperation, and still holding out for the possibility he adds, “but it could be any day now when I hear from them.”

“I don’t think you’re going to hear back, otherwise you would’ve heard by now,” Lieutenant Colonel Larson surmising, “it’s probably buried in Army red tape and lost. What’s this Kid’s name?”

Larry is now thinking that maybe the Colonel will make an exception and is now smiling as he answers, “His name is Michael Troff--Sir.”

“Not the same kid who had worked on the EXCALIBUR Project, at Edwards two years ago!” Lieutenant Colonel Larson exclaimed looking quite surprised.

“Yes Sir, --the one and same,” said Major Kitzman nodding.

“I remember him well,” The Lieutenant Colonel muttered, thinking

back to the project days, “rather bright too, if I remember correctly.”

“Do you remember Sir, --when he wanted to fly the first EXR,” Major Kitzman relating that moment, “you had told him that, someday he’ll be flying the EXR to its limits. You also had said, he would take her into combat and bring her back in one piece. Well Sir, --like any of the best EXR Helicopter Pilots on this Post, --he can do it.”

“Ah yes Major, I do remember,” said Lieutenant Colonel Larson smiling, as he recalled those days, “I even gave him a couple Helicopter manuals to read, because he took a liking to Helicopters. I also remembered his Father didn’t want any of his Sons to fly Helicopters, and Mike was worried that, his Father would find the Helicopter manuals I had given him. Boy, --I sure hit that nail on the head, when I said, he would be flying before he’s seventeen.”

“Now Gentleman,” Lieutenant Colonel Larson getting serious again and emphatically emphasizing, “the Army has rules and they must be followed. Mike can’t fly anymore military aircraft, that is, until after he joins the Army. I know this will be hard on the both of you, and especially on Mike, but Army rules must be followed. Now that’s a direct order, --do you both understand?”

Both Larry and Major Kitzman reluctantly chorused, “Yes Sir.”

“Is there anything else I should know?” Lieutenant Colonel Larson asked; both Larry and Major Kitzman shook their heads.

“Ok then, --that’s all I have at this time, you both may go,” Lieutenant Colonel Larson dismissing them; they then saluted, made an about face, and walked out of Lieutenant Colonel Larson’s office.

Scott and Larry flew back to Roseville in a EXR2T Helicopter and landed, Larry got out, and then Scott took off and flew back to Fort Irwin.

The next morning, Wayne and Scott flew in with a EXR2T Training Helicopter; Scott got out, went over to the EXR2B and performed a pre-flight, and then got in, fired it up and took off for Fort Irwin with Wayne following him in the EXR2T.

Mike arrived just as Scott and Wayne were leaving.

When Mike saw the EXR2B leaving, he rushed in to see Larry, asking, “Who’s flying the EXR2B and where is it going?”

“Scott’s flying it back to Fort Irwin,” Larry tells him nonchalantly, and then explains why the EXR2B was leaving, “the Army needs it back--and besides, --we’re leaving in two weeks. So, they came and got it and flew

back to Fort Irwin.”

Larry now knew, he had to tell Mike the bad news, “Mike, --why don’t you sit down, --we need to talk,” as he motion for Mike to sit down.

Mike was now wondering as he sat down next to Larry, what could be so important that he had to sit down to hear what Larry had to say.

“Mike I’ve got some very bad news for you,” Larry began, as he was now feeling bad, because he didn’t want to do this to Mike, “that is, --you can’t fly any more military aircraft, and that includes all of the EXR2 Helicopters. Orders from the top, Mike. You don’t want me to get into trouble, --now do you?”

Mike just sat there, his whole world had collapsed and he was about to cry, but he didn’t, because he felt betrayed and angry.

“I’m real sorry Mike,” Larry sadly tells him, as Mike just stares at him expressionless.

“Myself and Major Kitzman tried everything we could to convince them to let you keep flying the Army EXR2 Helicopter,” Larry explaining, “but the Old Man said no and we had to follow Army rules,”

“Does that mean I will never fly an EXR2 Helicopter again?” Mike asked crestfallen.

“Yes, --I’m afraid for now it’s all over,” Larry replies with a sigh, “that is, --until after you graduate from High School and join the Army, --and who knows, maybe by then, there will be an EXR3 for you to learn to fly.”

“What about the special flight school you had told me about?” Mike asked intently.

“I’m afraid it didn’t happen. Both me and Major Kitzman were really hoping the Army would give the Ok, but they hadn’t.”

“Then the hell with the Army,” Mike suddenly declares, as he was now very upset and angry, “if they want me, then they’re now going to have to draft me, because that’s the only way I’m going to join the Army! If I’m drafted, I’m not going to tell them that I can fly. I’ve never told my Dad or my Brothers and I’m sure as hell not going to tell anyone in the Army. I’ll still fly your Helicopters for you and for Mister Manning, because I owe you and you’re my friend, but I’m not flying anymore Army EXR2 Helicopters---and that’s a promise.”

Larry was now very shocked by Mike's reply and was now very upset, so he pleaded, "Mike, --please don't do this, because our country is going to need Pilots like you. When the time comes, --please come and see Major Kitzman or me. So we can get you into the Army, --please Mike, --do this for me."

"I've got my rules too," Mike retorted, his heart now harden, "I'm going to college, and when I graduate from High School and if the Army wants me, then they'll have to draft me. When the Army changes its rules then I'll change mine, --not before."

"Ok Mike, --if that's what you want," Larry sighing, seeing that Mike is very upset, "I'm real sorry to see our country lose a good Fighter Pilot." "I'm not a Fighter Pilot anymore," Mike gruffly tells him, "you can take my flight suit and helmet with you to Fort Irwin, --there might be an Army Pilot who could use them, --I don't want or need them anymore. And one more thing, --don't call me Pegasus, --my name is Mike Troff and I'm through with this Fighter Pilot crap. I'm done talking, --now if you've got something for me to do, then tell me what it is, otherwise, I'm going home."

"No Mike, --I don't have anything for you to do right now," Larry replied affronted, and seeing that he can't get anywhere with Mike in this mood, he tells him, "If that's how you really feel and what you really want, then you can go home."

Mike intently looks at him for a moment, and then he gets up and walks out the door, leaving Larry sitting there, watching him leave in disgust.

After Mike got in Jeff's car he drove home, and now it was Larry's turn to cry, because he and the Army had just lost one of the best Fighter Pilots, to come down the pike in a long time.

Larry was very upset and felt dejected as he said to himself, "Somehow, someway, I'm going to get Mike back into an EXR2 Helicopter and I'm also going to get him into the Army as a Pilot."

Mike didn't show up for work that whole next week, and when Mike didn't show up on Saturday, Larry was now beginning to get worried, because next Saturday is when he'll need Mike for one last job, which is to fly the Aérospatiale down to Mr. Manning in Victorville.

Wednesday was Mike's last day of School, so he spent the rest of the week with his friends dirt biking.

He didn't go to work at the airport for that entire week, because he

figured what's the point; there wasn't anything left for him to fly anyway, so why bother going there, anyway, airports now made him depressed, so he stayed away.

On the second Thursday in June, the moving van arrived to load up all of their furniture and personal belongings, because on Saturday they will be leaving for Victorville to start living in their new home.

Larry drove up to see Mike just as the moving van pulled away, because now, he was very worried about Mike.

Larry walks up and knocks on the door; Mike answers the door, and when he sees Larry he gruffly asks, "What do you want?"

"Mike, --don't you want to work for me anymore?" Larry asked, feeling a little hurt, "I need you for one more job. I thought we were friends. I know the Army has dealt you a low blow, but just look at what they did to me, --they just ruined my business for good, but I'll survive and so will you."

"O' God Larry, --I'm really sorry, --I didn't mean to hurt you," Mike humbly apologizing with a sorrowful expression.

And seeing how he's hurt his best friend he asked, "Yes, --I'll help you again, --what do you want me to do?"

"I need you to fly my last Helicopter down to Mister Manning in Victorville, --like we planned. You'll do that for me, --won't you?"

"Yes Larry, --I'll be happy to fly for you again," Mike tells him smiling, "So, --when do you want me to fly it down to Victorville?"

"This Saturday, when you leave Roseville for the last time," Larry tells him.

"This Saturday?" Mike asks making sure, "what about Mom and Jeff's car?"

"You can fly yourself down to Victorville in the Aérospatiale. I will follow your Mom in my truck, as she drive's Jeff's car to Victorville," Larry explaining, "then I will go to the airport and pick you up and drop you off at your new home, after which, I will go to Fort Irwin and report for duty."

"I guess it sounds like it's going to work out just fine," Mike remarks with a grin, "ok then, --I'll see you at the airport early Saturday morning."

As Larry was getting ready to leave, he noticed the house was now empty and exclaimed, "You can't stay here--there's no furniture left in this house! Where are you going to stay now?"

“It’s Ok, --really,” Mike tells him with a smile, “we’re staying with Mister and Missis Gram until we leave on Saturday.”

When the second Saturday of June arrived, Mike rode his Bike out to the airport for the last time; Larry was already there taking care of some last minute details before he closes the doors to his business for the last time.

Mike walks into the now empty office, as Larry was just finishing packing the last box of papers; Larry looks up and asks, “Hi Mike, --are you ready to fly this morning?”

“Yeah, --you bet,” Mike smartly replied, his voice echoing in the empty room, “I rode my bicycle, because Mom has Jeff’s car, so, --can you find room in you truck for my bike?”

“Sure, --there should be some room left,” said Larry, as he picked up the last box, “this is all I have left to put into the back of my truck. Now why don’t you go out and preflight the Aérospatiale and I’ll put your bike in the back of my truck.”

Larry went and put the last box in the back of his pickup, and then got Mike’s bike and put it in the back of the truck too.

After making one last tour of the place, to make sure he hasn’t forgotten anything, Larry walks out of the building satisfied that nothing was left.

Next, he went to see how Mike was coming with the preflight.

Mike was just finishing with the preflight when Larry walked up and remarked, “I see, you’re about done with the preflight. I’ve already put your bike in my truck, so I guess I’ll head over to the Grams to see how your Mother is coming. I don’t think you’ll have any problems with the Helicopter, but if you do, then you can contact me on the Helicopter Communications Radio. Tune the radio to frequency one-twenty-one-point-zero-seven-five. I’ve got an aviation transceiver in my truck, so we can talk to each other. Now when you’re finished with the preflight, fire her up and head out to Victorville. When you get close to the airport, which is eight miles east of Victorville, use the radio and on frequency one-twenty-two-point-nine-five, ask for Manning Aviation and they will tell you where to go. I think that should be about it, --I guess we’re all set, so good luck and have a good flight. Any last minute questions before I leave?”

“Nope, --I’ve got everything covered and I’ll be just fine,” Mike tells

him confidently, “see you at Manning in Victorville.”

“Yeah, --ok then, I’ll see you in Victorville, --bye now,” says Larry with a wave, and then he turns and walks out the airport gate, goes over and gets into his pickup and drives over to the Grams.

When Mike had finished with the preflight, he gets in and starts up the Aérospatiale.

He performs the run up checks, then contacts the control tower, and requests a departure to the south; the control tower gives him the takeoff clearance, and then Mike takes off and heads southeast to Victorville.

It was a little after ten that Saturday morning, when Maria had finally said good-bye to Mr. and Mrs. Gram, and drove off in Jeff’s car with Larry following her in his pickup to Victorville.

Mike didn’t have any problems with the Helicopter and he found Manning Aviation without any problem; it was after eleven that morning when he landed at Manning Aviation.

Mike had just shut down the Helicopter, when a short, stocky, white haired man came out of the building and walked over to the Helicopter.

As Mike was getting out of the Helicopter, he walks up to Mike and introduces himself, “Hi--I’m Bob Manning.”

Mike looked at him with an inquisitive smile.

He said, “I’m looking for a Kid by the name of Michael Troff. Larry Clark told me, he would be flying his last Helicopter down to me.”

Then Mr. Manning poked his head into the Helicopter, looking for him.

“I don’t see him,” Bob mutters shrugging his shoulders, “I guess Larry must have decided he was too young to fly this Helicopter down here.”

“Pardon me Sir, --what does he look like?” Mike asked, leading him on with a smile.

“A Kid, about this high I guess, and sixteen or seventeen,” Bob answered, indicating with his hand at about shoulder height, “Larry had told me, he was a Pilot, but I figured he was just pulling my leg. I told Larry I didn’t need any kids running round here. I’m kinda’ glad he went with Larry and didn’t show up here.”

“How old do you think I am?” Mike asked, smiling.

Bob replies, as he now eyes Mike up and down, “You, --I think

you're about twenty--or twenty one."

"So, you think I'm twenty one--eh'," Mike says starting to giggle, "I sure do thank you, but you know I'm not old enough to drink yet."

"Ok, --so I'm off by a year or so," Bob conceding, looking a little surprised.

"Mister Manning," Mike says with a big grin, finally coming clean, "you're off by at least four years, because I'm that Kid, --I'll be eighteen next month, and as you can see I'm also a Helicopter Pilot and I can fly all of Larry's Helicopters."

"You! I can't believe you're only seventeen!" Bob exclaimed, as he was now shocked and embarrassed, "Why, --you're so grown up, you don't even look like a kid. Now, I can see why Larry had said you were a Commercial Pilot. He told me you would fly for me, and I sure could use the help."

Mike then held out his hand and said, "Mister Manning, --I'd sure would be proud to fly for you, that's if you don't think I'm too young."

Then Bob took Mike's hand and said, as he shook it, "Just call me Bob, --Mister Manning is too formal and you're hired. C'mon, I'll show you around the operation, and then we'll go into the office and talk about your wages."

"Don't worry about the money, because I work real cheap," Mike told him, as they walk to Bob's office, "I don't need much money, because I live at home with Mom and Dad, --all I want--is to keep flying Helicopters, but there's one thing that you must promise me before I will work for you, and that is, --you must not tell my Dad I Fly."

"No problem, --Larry had already informed me about your problem with your old man. I'll keep it under my hat as long as you want," Bob tells him with a wink and mimics tipping his hat.

"You ready to see my operation?" Bob asked.

"Yeah, --lead the way," Mike replied with a big smile.

Mike was now feeling good as he follows Bob to see his base of operations, because, Mike now knows, he can fly for as long as he wants.

It was almost six that afternoon when Larry pulled up and parked at Manning Aviation.

"Larry's here and I've got to run, --I'll see you Monday, --Ok," Mike tells Bob.

"Yep, --that'll be just fine Kid, --see ya' then," Bob replies with a

grin.

“Bye Bob,” Mike shouts waving, as he hurries to Larry’s waiting pickup and gets in with Larry.

As they drive away, Mike gives Bob a hardy wave out the open window as he stands in the doorway; Bob gives a short wave back and as the truck turns the corner, he turns and walks back into the building.

As they were driving to Mike’s new home, Mike remarks to Larry, “I like Mister Manning, --he’s a nice old man.”

“Yes, --that he is,” Came the reply from Larry as he looked over at Mike and smiled, “so, --is everything is going to work out ok for you?”

“Yeah, I think I’ll like it just fine here,” Mike replied happily, because now he’ll be flying again and now for Mr. Manning.

Larry smiled, as he looked straight down the road as he drove, because he was glad Mike and Bob were going to be working together.

Larry finally pulled up, and parked in front of Mike’s new home; Mike got out, and got his bike from the back of Larry’s pickup.

“Well I guess this is good-bye,” Mike says holding his hand out to Larry, “I don’t know when I’ll see you again, but good luck to you.”

“We’ll be seeing each other again, remember what I said about how close Fort Irwin is by air,” Larry remarking shaking his hand with a smile.

“Yeah, --until later then,” Mike bidding farewell with a smile.

“Bye for now, Mike,” Larry tells him and drives away with Mike waving until he drives out of sight.

As Larry drives to Fort Irwin to report for duty, Mike slowly walks up the sidewalk to his new house, pushing his bike; leaving the bike leaning against the steps, he goes inside.