

Chapter 2

“Erm, excuse me sir but you mentioned ‘the squad’ but we haven’t seen hide nor fur of them” I looked at Mark and he nodded with agreement.

“Nor should you have, they have been in the northern forest in a war game with the other platoons, oh, by the way we have some American infantry and tank forces training to with us, but don’t hold being American against them” he produced a huge belly laugh and we did also, it was funny I never thought a General would joke with lower ranks, he was scary but he never showed he was a top ranking Fur, he was the normal Tommy, like Mark and Myself.

A deep rumble shook the tent and the General beamed “And here they are, follow me Sergeants” and he lifted the flap of the tent into the bright sunlight, and what was once silent, empty land was now filled with trucks and tanks, a rather scruffy band of Furs were standing a little distance from the rest of the hustle, and that was where the General was heading.

“Captain Barkley. A quick word please, and then I’ll be off”

“Of course, sir” the Bengal Tiger Captain replied with a crisp salute.

“I want you to meet the last two furs of your squad.” There was a muffled cheer from the group of odd looking soldiers; none had the same uniforms and a bear in the back row had a knitted jumper with no arms he was also wearing a cravat. Mark and I approached the group and they welcomed us all with paw shakes. The General kept talking to the Captain.

“The new uniforms are coming in about two hours, I made sure before I left”

“Thank you Sir the men have been asking after them”

“One problem the only dress uniforms for the dance resources could get hold of were American, I hope they don’t object, but its that or their underwear I am afraid” the General rolled his eyes as he explained it all to the Captain.

“We would need some way of telling the British from the Yanks” the Captain thought hard about this. “Why don’t we just sew Union Jacks on the right sleeve just under the shoulder?”

The General clapped his hands loudly.

“Excellent show Captain I will get the boys to do it before they bring them to the base, it may make them a bit late, about 20mins”

The general jumped into one of the many officers jeeps lined up along the path and speeded away. I looked around and he was gone, I didn't even have time to say thank you.

The Captain slowly walked towards the group, as he did so he lit a cigarette and threw the match down and extinguished it under his foot.

“Right-ho chaps you may not look like you are in a unit, but fall into line... NOW” we all fell into a shabby line, apart from one Fox, a tall Alsatian very grey and very fierce looking, he had a snarl and was showing his teeth, they were very sharp I didn't think I would like to have them bearing down on me. The Fox that was next to me whispered in my ear.

“That guy is a real bastard, when we were training he made us dig this huge trench and stay in the bloody thing, when it rained one night we were still in the bottom, I wish he's face was in that damn lake, slowly needing breath.”

As he was whispering the Captain was slowly moving along inspecting the troops.

“Who is he; I don't think I want to get on the wrong side of him”.

“He is our Sergeant Major, tough as a battleships hull with twice the rivets, but still a bastard” the Fox quipped.

“Names Jason Dunwell by the way, no jokes please I have had them all, I am the guy at the back with my Sniper Rifle, I will cover the advances that you guys make, also take out any Officers of my liking in the process”.

I glanced down and saw his Scoped Lee Enfield looking very tall and proud next to him, as I looked up he had a smarmy grin on his face, “so what do you do in this shambles of a unit?”

“I am the Squad's medic, so you'd better cover me well my friend”

“Ha-ha, you got a wit about you, haven't you” he spoke with a very heavy East End of London accent.

By this time the Tiger was only one man away from me, I stiffly stood to attention as he finally came to me.

“So this is the Fur that we are all trusting can save us if we get hit” he looked over me like a Doctor, it was quite ironic. “So what’s your name my friend?”

“David Shoulder Esquire. Sir” he continued to examine me I knew what he was pondering. “My family are Raccoons but my grandfather was a Red Squirrel” he looked right into my eyes and smiled.

“I can see you know how to tell peoples body language about that subject, sorry to intrude, was I that obvious?” he wasn’t ashamed that he did it but he was intrigued how I knew.

“When you have strange markings people tend to ask questions a lot, I just got used to it” he seemed to understand exactly what I was talking about, but I didn’t go into things he was the Captain after all... also I could feel the Alsatians breath behind me.

“Permission to speak sir” Came the all ready familiar voice of Mark.

“Permission granted.”

“With all due respect sir, his name is Racky sir” I could have killed him, the whole squad were laughing

“Shut up, YOU ARE IN THE STANCE OF ATTENTION!” I nearly yelled he was so loud, it was Sgtmjr. Barry.

“All right Joe, clam down, its ok they are not in uniform yet, we are just going through the familiars I would like this time to get to know my unit, not scare them into line” as he said this I knew that Captain Barkley would be firm but fair and nice to get along with, not how ever like Sergeant Major Barry.

“Yes Sir” he snarled.

“As I was saying they will call you Racky, ok that’s what it is from now on” he shook his head and laughed, in fact he still was laughing during the inspection of Jason my fox friend.

I looked down the line to my small companion he was giving me a thumbs up, his mouth was open with his tongue hanging out and his tail was wagging very quickly, he liked doing this to me.

“Now then little fur what is your name” I could have laughed very loudly at this comment the Capitan was only a few centimetres taller than Mark, but now I think about it he wasn’t talking about his stature in height.

“Mark Simons German and French Translator...Sir” he quickly added.

“What’s your accent like”

“Perfect und Wunderbar aber von Munchen”

Rough translation; Perfect and excellent but with a Munich accent.

He looked dead into the Captains eyes, even though he partly insulted him neither detracted from the positions or roles, the Capitan nodded he understood what he meant even though he only knew the phrases needed when fighting the enemy. He continued down the line, it seemed to go on for ever, all this time the huge dog behind me didn’t move a muscle, there he stood at still as a tree in summer, I thought he was getting ready to pounce any second now...

“Well I think that will do, you are dismissed, you may now welcome the two new furs to the squad, the uniforms and new equipment will be arriving in about 2 hours, so keep your eyes and ears open for the trucks.” as he walked passed me I heard him whisper to himself “I feel sorry for the poor sod, if this fur isn’t up to the task, then we’re all goners”

The line broke into a run towards a tent not too far from the HQ tent with me and Mark in tow, the entire line that is apart from a rabbit right at the end, and a rabbit who the rest seemed to ignore.

“Hay you, new guy, Racky, go back and get that rabbit, don’t worry too much about him though. It’s just Danny” a squirrel shouted back to me

I slowed, then stopped, about turned and walked back to the rabbit that looked slightly vacant as he ran his hands through his hair and scratched the back of his incredibly floppy ears.

“Excuse me? Danny? It is Danny, isn’t it?” He slowly turned his head and looked deep in thought.

“Umm..... Err..... Tch..... Yes, Danny, Danny Johnson, that’s me. Umm. Sergeant. Sorry. Staff sergeant, sir” It was quite amazing, he couldn’t remember his own name, yet managed to notice, without prompting my rank.

“Well, Corporal, we seem to have been dismissed, the rest have gone to that tent, are you coming?” He was too busy looking around trying to work out where everyone else was.

Still Silence.

“Do you want something to eat, sir? I’ve got some food hidden in my trench coat, but keep it to yourself, coming sir? I’m going to the mess”

I thought I just asked him that question, but it seemed better just to go along with him. Maybe it was a joke; maybe the other furs were trying to unnerve me.

I thought it better to go along with him, even if it did mean them laughing in the end I just wanted to get through the day. “Yes Danny I would love something” so off I went for the second time to the tent, as we were talking Danny said something to me that made me realise why I was in the squad.

“You know how far it is from that truck to the tent? 151 yards and 3 inches”. I stared, he couldn’t be correct, and then I thought he had pre-measured it.

“How did you know that?” this fur was getting more and more intriguing.

“Its obvious from here to there is 151 yards and 3 inches, you can’t tell that?”

“No, I’m sorry, I can’t”

He walked on looking even more baffled than before, “It’s strange, no one else can either, I’m getting worried, seems to me you’re all a bit odd in this squad, after you sir”... I SAID NOTHING.

We entered another tent, much larger than the HQ, I surmised that it was the operation and briefing tent, and there were four large tables with my squad sitting at a round conference-like table. At the back “wall” there

was a map cork board but with no map affixed.

“Nice of you to join us Danny!” bellowed a giant bear with the largest grin on his face that I’ve ever seen, and then he turned to me “you going to introduce yourself properly now? Racky, I am, and always will be Alex Howard, but enough about me and you”.

He gave another huge laugh.

“Meet the rest of the bunch, they’re the important ones. Now from what I’ve heard you’ve meet most of these people out and about but here goes. Daniel Jepson, get your hide over here, come on. This is our radio operator” he gave a huge pat on his back the poor fur nearly fell over.

“Hello” he said after regaining his bearings, he gave me a weak hand shake still trying to recover.

He was nearly as tall as Alex and very thinly built not a very imposing figure like some of the other squad members were, just a normal
“Tommy”

“From what the Captains told me you two have something in common.”

We did, he was the Red Squirrel that told me to get Danny, and Squirrel blood was in my lineage.

“This is our Lieutenant and second in command, Mark Berryman.”

“Hello Staff Sergeant” He bowed and sat across the table from where I was sitting, he was well spoken quite upper class and seemed to me quite the lady’s man.

“He’s a regular Rommel, aren’t you Sir”

I must have looked quite confused so he went on...

“I’m a Desert Fox, and to be quite odd I DID fight in El Alemein, but I was a regular infantry guy, still am, got a bit of a heckling from the guys, me being what species I am but I think that helps the process of becoming a unit” he gestured his arms around the table, who all were smiling the same smile, the smile of a comrade.

“This is the last of our lot. Richard Mott he is what you would call a

Quarter Master, if you ever need something ask him.”

Richard, a Ginger Tom looked up from his ammo cases, he was a square faced cat, like his face was chiselled from a piece of rock, he was a bit shorter than me 5ft 8 I would say.

“Hello, Nice day isn’t it” he was so softly spoken, that I barely made out what he said. “Sir Do you know what the supply trucks will be bringing? The ammo dump is full but I need some things I can have to hand right away”

The Lieutenant got up shook he head to Richard, tapped me on the shoulder and whispered.

“Welcome to your new life sergeant hope you do well.” Then he raised his tone addressed the whole squad “Looks like the Captain’s going to speak, come on furs quite down now”

The Capitan and Sergeant Major Barry walked in.

“Well I have a few announcements that have just come to our attention; the supply convoy is making good time and will be here much earlier than first noted.”

“Brilliant” exclaimed Richard

“SHUT IT RICHARD GOD THE CAPTIAN IS SPEEKING HOW DARE YOU”

“Joe please there is now need for any off this, we all know you have a job to do but please the shouting is not needed” the captain looked back at his notes.

“Sorry Sir” Richard blurted his checks were burning red with a mixture of embarrassment and contempt toward the Sergeant Major

“That’s quite alright Richard” again he went back to his notes. “There is to be a dance held in the base for all the soldiers in the advanced training... AND US” the last bit made us laugh and cheer in unison

“Will there any ladies at the dance or will I need to get Scotty here to wear a dress and ask HIM to the dance” Jason got this remark in as soon as he saw an opening in the Captains speech and as a result Mark quickly

stopped laughing.

At last I thought something to get back at him with “Scotty” why didn’t I think about that. Then I thought and got out:

“But he wouldn’t need to with that kilt on” howls of laughter emitted from the table, as I looked at the Captain he gave me a wink. I looked at Mark and he too was smiling I think he also knew I got him back for my nickname we were finally even.

“Quiet down furs, very good Racky, quiet now, where was I?” a slight pause then he remembered his train of thought. “There is a problem with the dress uniforms the Army couldn’t get 12 at such short notice for us furs so we had to look else were, I hope you don’t mind but the only ones we could scrounge where American Airborne you know the ones with the Green Jacket and Cap and the funny brown trousers that don’t really go with the green?”

The Squad looked at one another then back at the Captain we all cheered; we all thought that the Americans had a great style.

“Well that’s good to hear, I have requested that the Union Jack be sewn onto the arms to sate what country we are fighting for” a slight pause “Don’t want the ladies to think we are Yanks now do we, on your question; the wife’s and fiancées of the whole base will be there, NO FUNNY BUSINESS they will be here for the dance and that’s it, but I cant be every where at once can I though... hummm” he gave us a knowing nod, we all laughed again we WERE pleased to see our lady loved ones, not every Tommy had this privilege.