

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *A TIME FOR PATRIOTS*

DALE  
BROWN



A NOVEL

TIGER'S  
CLAW

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TIGER'S CLAW

虎爪

**DALE BROWN**

*wm*

WILLIAM MORROW

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## DEDICATION

This novel is dedicated to my younger brother Ken, who passed away on July 31, 2011, after a long illness (you might remember the antagonist Kenneth Francis James in my third novel, *Day of the Cheetah*, who was named for Ken, my other brother, Jim, and my dad). Ken was my aircraft mechanic for seven years, a fellow soccer referee, a fellow volunteer for Angel Flight West, and my frequent copilot. He was a rather white-knuckle flier, especially in the bumps and clouds, but he never failed to do an Angel Flight West mission with me and was aboard every postmaintenance flight to make sure everything on the ship was okay after he was done working on it.

His short life only highlights the importance of family—not just the families we're born into but the families we accrue throughout our lives. We all make lousy decisions and catch some bad breaks. But if we celebrate with and support our families when times are good, and aren't afraid or ashamed to ask for help from our families when situations turn bad, we will never be alone.

Keep an eye on the family, bro, and fly safe on your new journeys.

To remind everyone: Angel Flight West is a real organization based in Santa Monica, California, that pairs needy medical patients and volunteer pilots together to provide no-charge air transportation for treatment or other necessary activities. Missions are flown by volunteer pilots and crewmembers who donate their time and the cost of their aircraft and fuel. Learn more about this worthwhile organization at [www.AngelFlightWest.org](http://www.AngelFlightWest.org).

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ALSO BY DALE BROWN

CREDITS

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# CAST OF CHARACTERS

## A

KENNETH PHOENIX, president of the United States

ANN PAGE, vice president

WILLIAM GLENBROOK, president's national security adviser

HERBERT KEVICH, secretary of state

FREDRICK HAYES, secretary of defense

THOMAS TORREY, CIA director

GERALD MURTH, undersecretary of defense for acquisitions

JOSEPH COLLINGSWORTH, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives

DIANE M. JAMIESON, majority leader of the U.S. Senate

U.S. AIR FORCE GENERAL TIMOTHY SPELLINGS, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

ADMIRAL EDWARD FOWLER, chief of naval operations

GENERAL JASON CONAWAY, chief of staff, U.S. Air Force

DR. HELEN KADDIRI, president and chairman of the board, Sky Masters Inc.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL PATRICK MCLANAHAN, USAF (ret.), vice president and COO, Sky Masters Inc.

DR. LINUS OGLETHORPE, chief engineer and scientist, Sky Masters Inc.

ED GLEASON, XB-1 chief instructor pilot, Sky Masters Inc.

SAM JACOBS, XB-1 aircraft commander, Sky Masters Inc.

LISA MANN, XB-1 Excalibur copilot, Sky Masters Inc.

KAREN WELLS, XB-1F Excalibur ground defensive systems officer, Sky Masters Inc.

GEORGE WICKHAM, XB-1 ground offensive systems officer, Sky Masters Inc.

U.S. NAVY CAPTAIN EDWARD TAVERNA, commander, guided-missile cruiser USS *Chosin*

U.S. NAVY CAPTAIN RICHARD AVERY, commanding officer, Naval Air Station (NAS) Fallon

U.S. NAVY LIEUTENANT COMMANDER CHRIS "NOOSE" KAHN, commander, VF-13 Fighting Saints, NAS Fallon

COMMANDER DOUGLAS SHERIDAN, commanding officer, Coast Guard cutter *Mohawk*

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER EDWARD FELLS, tactical officer, Coast Guard cutter *Mohawk*

LIEUTENANT ED COFFEY, HH-60 Jayhawk pilot, Coast Guard cutter *Mohawk*

LIEUTENANT LUCY CROSS, HH-60 Jayhawk copilot, Coast Guard cutter *Mohawk*

U.S. NAVY ADMIRAL ROBERT LUCE, commander, U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM)

U.S. AIR FORCE GENERAL GEORGE HOOD, commander, U.S. Air Force Pacific Air Forces (PACAF)

U.S. AIR FORCE COLONEL WARNER “CUTLASS” CUTHBERT, commander, First Expeditionary Bomb Wing (First EBW), Andersen Air Force Base, Guam

U.S. AIR FORCE LIEUTENANT COLONEL NASH HARTZELL, deputy wing commander, First EBW

LIEUTENANT COLONEL BRIDGET “XENA” DUTCHMAN, commander, Twentieth Expeditionary Bomb Squadron (B-52H Stratofortress)

LIEUTENANT COLONEL FRANKLIN “WISHBONE” MCBRIDE, commander, 393rd Expeditionary Bomb Squadron (B-2A Spirit)

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JUAN “PICANTE” OROZ, commander, Ninth Expeditionary Bomb Squadron (B-1 Lancer)

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JIMMY “JUJU” MAILI, commander, 199th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, Hawaii Air National Guard, Joint Base Pearl Harbor–Hickam (F-22A Raptor)

MAJOR ROBERT “BREWSKI” CARLING, F-22A Raptor pilot

U.S. AIR FORCE CAPTAIN ALICIA SPENCER, intelligence officer, First EBW

U.S. ARMY CAPTAIN JASON HARRIS, Patriot anti-aircraft missile battery commander, Guam

THOMAS HOFFMAN, president, Warbirds Forever Inc.

SONDRA EDDINGTON, chief pilot, Warbirds Forever Inc.

BRADLEY J. MCLANAHAN, instructor pilot, Warbirds Forever Inc.

## P

ZHOU QIANG, president of the People’s Republic of China

GAO XUDONG, vice president of China

TANG JI, foreign minister

CAO JU, defense minister

LI PEIYAN, Chinese ambassador to the United States

JIN YONGKANG, finance minister

SHÀNG JIÀNG (COLONEL GENERAL) ZU KAI, chief of the general staff, People’s Liberation Army

SHAO JIÀNG (MAJOR GENERAL) HUA ZHILUN, commander, Eleventh Tactical Rocket Division, People’s Liberation Army

SHAO JIÀNG (MAJOR GENERAL) SUN JI, deputy chief of the general staff, People’s Liberation Army

HAI JUN ZHONG JIÀNG (VICE ADMIRAL) ZHEN PENG, commander, South Sea Fleet, People’s Liberation Army Navy, Zhanjiang

HAI JUN SHAO JIÀNG (REAR ADMIRAL) HU TAN-SUN, commander, Second Carrier Battle Group (aircraft carrier *Zheng He*), People’s Liberation Army Navy, Juidongshan

HAI JUN DA XIAO (LOWER ADMIRAL) CHEN BOLIN, captain of the Chinese aircraft carrier *Zhenyuan*

HAI JUN DA XIAO (LOWER ADMIRAL) WENG LI-YEH, captain, Chinese aircraft carrier *Zheng He*

HAI JUN SHANG XIAO (CAPTAIN) ZHANG PEIYAN, commander of flight operations, carrier *Zhenyuan*

HAI JUN ZHONG XIAO (COMMANDER) HUA JI, JN-20 squadron commander, carrier *Zheng He*

HAI JUN SHAO XIAO (LIEUTENANT COMMANDER) WU DEK SU, JN-15 fighter pilot

KONG JUN SHANG JIANG (AIR FORCE COLONEL GENERAL) ZENG SU, chief of staff, People's Liberation Army Air Forces

KONG JUN ZHONG JIANG (AIR FORCE LIEUTENANT GENERAL) CHEN LI, commander, First Strategic Strike Division (Xian H-6)

## S

TRAN PHUONG, prime minister

*Thuong tá* (CAPTAIN) DANG VAN CHIEN, captain of the Gepard-class frigate *Cá map* (*Shark*)

## R

WU ANASTASIA, president

*Zhong jiàng* (VICE ADMIRAL) WU JIN-PING, commander, First Naval District South, Kaohsiung

*Shàngxiào* (CAPTAIN) YAO MEI-YUEH, captain of the Type 800 attack submarine *Fùchóu zhe* (*Avenger*)

*Zun Khong* (COMMANDER) CHEIN SI-YAO, executive officer, attack submarine *Avenger*

## C

MARK RUDDOCK, prime minister

## R

JUSUF SALEH, president

## R

PATRICIA CRUZ, president

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## **AUTHOR'S NOTES AND CHINESE WORDS**

**South Sea = South China Sea**

**Nansha Dao = Spratly Islands**

**Xisha Dao = Paracel Islands**

*Wúshēng Léitíng*—无声雷 = **Silent Thunder**

*Hu Zhao*—虎爪 = **Tiger's Claw**

**Chinese aviation assault carrier *Tongyi* = Reunification**

**CJ-20 *Changjian* cruise missile = Long Sword**

**Shenyang J-20 *Tiaozhàn zhě*—挑战者 = Challenger**

**JH-37 *Fei Bào* = Flying Leopard**

**JH-37 call sign *Qianfeng* = striker**

**JN-15 call sign *Ying* = hawk**

**J-20 call sign *Laoying* = eagle**

*Xiansheng* = **sir**

*Yèyīng* = **nightingale**

*Baohuzhě*—保护者 = **Protector**

*Qíyú* = **sailfish**

*Fùchóu zhě* = **Avenger**

*Jia* = **home**

*Yuyīng* = **osprey**

**BLU-89E—*Kepà de bō* = Terrible Wave**

*Lóng De hūxī* = **Dragon's Breath**

*ji huó* = **activate**

*Nèizài de dírén*—内在的敌人 = **Enemy Within**

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## WEAPONS AND ACRONYMS

**A&P**—Airframe and Powerplant Mechanic

**ABM**—Anti Ballistic Missile

**AC**—Aircraft Commander

**Aegis**—advanced shipborne radar system

**AGM-86D**—Maverick TV-guided missile

**AGM-88 HARM**—High-speed Anti-Radiation Missile, anti-radar weapon

**ALQ-293 Self-Protection Electronically Agile Reaction (SPEAR)**—advanced jamming and intrusion system

**AMRAAM**—Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile, radar guided

**APR-3E**—Chinese air-dropped rocket-powered torpedo

**ARCP**—Air Refueling Control Point, the rendezvous point for receivers and tankers

**AST**—Aviation Survival Technician, a Coast Guard rescue swimmer

**ASW**—Anti Submarine Warfare

**ATP**—Airline Transport Rating

**AWACS**—Airborne Warning and Control System

**Beak**—nickname for the B-2A Spirit stealth bomber

**bold-print items**—items in a checklist that must be committed to memory

**Bone**—nickname for the B-1B Lancer bomber (B-One)

**BUFF**—nickname for the B-52 bomber (Big Ugly Fat F\*\*ker)

**C-182**—Cessna 182 light single-engine airplane

**CAP**—Civil Air Patrol

**CFI**—Certified Flight Instructor

**CFI-I**—Certified Flight Instructor-Instruments

**CJ-20**—long-range air-launched cruise missile

**CJCS**—chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

**CNO**—Chief of Naval Operations

**COO**—Chief Operating Officer

**DEFCON**—Defense Readiness Condition

**DFAC**—Dining Facility

**DoD**—Department of Defense

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**Dolphin-class**—Israeli submarine

**E-3C Sentry**—airborne radar plane

**Eagle Eye**—unmanned remotely piloted reconnaissance plane

**EEZ**—Economic Exclusion Zone

**EGT**—Exhaust Gas Temperature

**F-15C Eagle**—American-made air superiority fighter

**F-22 Raptor**—fifth-generation American air superiority fighter

**FPCON**—Force Protection Condition

**GDP**—Gross Domestic Product

**HARM**—High-speed Anti-Radiation Missile

**IDAS**—Interactive Defense and Attack System, sub-launched attack missile

**JASSM**—Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile, medium-range cruise missile

**JH-37 *Fei bào***—Chinese carrier-based fighter-bomber

**Joint Tactical Information Distribution System (JTIDS)**—advanced military data-sharing system

**KC-10 Extender**—third-generation U.S. Air Force air refueling tanker and cargo plane

**KC-135 Stratotanker**—second-generation Air Force air refueling tanker

**KC-46A Provider**—fourth-generation Air Force air refueling tanker

**long legs**—able to fly long distances

**LORAN**—Long Range Navigation, ground-based long-range radio navigation system

**MAD**—magnetic anomaly detector, a system to locate submarines by aircraft

**Mjollnr**—space-based land or sea attack system

**Nansha Dao**—Chinese name for the Spratly Islands

**netrusion**—injecting false code or viruses electronically into an enemy radar

**NVG**—night-vision goggles

**OTH-B**—over-the-horizon backscatter ultra-long-range radar

**PACAF**—Pacific Air Forces

**PL-9C**—Chinese short-range heat-seeking air-to-air missile

**Preppie**—cadet entering the Air Force Academy who needs academic assistance

**RQ-4 Global Hawk**—long-range high-altitude unmanned reconnaissance aircraft

**RTB**—return to base

**SAM**—surface-to-air missile

**SAT**—Scholastic Aptitude Test

**SBIRS**—Space-Based Infrared Surveillance, new missile launch detection and tracking system

**Shaanxi Y-8**—Chinese medium turboprop transport plane modified for ASW patrol

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**shapes**—inert practice bomb with the same size, weight, and shape of a real bomb

**Shenyang J-20 *Tiaozhàn***—fifth-generation Chinese jet fighter

**sonobuoy**—floating air-dropped sensor to detect submarines

**StealthHawk**—stealthy long-range attack cruise missile

**Tank**—nickname of the Joint Chiefs of Staff conference room

**Thor's Hammer**—space-based land and sea attack weapon

**Tomahawk**—long-range ship- or sub-launched attack cruise missile

**UNCLOS**—United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

**UNR**—University of Nevada–Reno

**Wilco**—will comply

**XB-1F Excalibur**—refurbished B-1B Lancer bomber

**XF-111 SuperVark**—refurbished F-111 Aardvark bomber

**Xisha Dao**—Chinese name for the Paracel Islands

**Zhongnanhai**—Chinese government building complex in Beijing

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## REAL-WORLD NEWS EXCERPTS

PACIFIC POWER MAY SHIFT WITH NEW CHINESE WEAPON—(*The Washington Times*, August 6, 2010): Nothing projects U.S. global air and sea power more vividly than supercarriers. Bristling with fighter jets that can reach deep into even landlocked trouble zones, America's virtually invincible carrier fleet has long enforced its dominance of the high seas.

China may soon put an end to that.

U.S. naval planners are scrambling to deal with what analysts say is a game-changing weapon being developed by China—an unprecedented carrier-killing missile called the Dong Feng 21D that could be launched from land with enough accuracy to penetrate the defenses of even the most advanced moving aircraft carrier at a distance of more than 900 miles.

. . . The weapon, a version of which was displayed last year in a Chinese military parade, could revolutionize China's role in the Pacific balance of power, seriously weakening Washington's ability to intervene in any potential conflict over Taiwan or North Korea. It also could deny U.S. ships safe access to international waters near China's 11,200-mile-long coastline . . .

THE SIMMERING STRATEGIC CLASH IN U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS—(Stratfor.com, January 20, 2011): . . . Beijing is compelled by its economic development to seek military tools to secure its vital supply lines and defend its coasts, the historic weak point where foreign states have invaded. With each Chinese move to push out from its narrow geographical confines, the United States perceives its military force gaining in ability to block or interfere with U.S. commercial and military passage and access in the region. This violates a core American strategic need—command of the seas and global reach.

But China cannot simply reverse course—it cannot and will not simply halt its economic ascent, or leave its economic and social stability vulnerable to external events that it cannot control. Hence we have an unresolvable strategic clash; tempers are simmering, giving rise to occasional bursts of admonition and threat. Yet unresolvable does not mean immediate, and both sides continue to find ways to delay the inevitable and inevitably unpleasant, whether economic or military in nature, confrontation.

LEANING FORWARD, BUT NOT OVERREACHING—(AirForce-Magazine.com, January 27, 2011): Air Force will design its new long-range bomber by leveraging the best of today's technology and not trying to incorporate exceedingly risky approaches, USAF Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Philip Breedlove told lawmakers Wednesday. "One of the cost-savings approaches we have for this bomber is to not lean forward into technology that's not proven, but bring our aircraft up to the current day standards," he testified before the House Armed Services Committee. For instance, Breedlove said stealth technology has advanced much since the B-2 bomber came along through subsequent work on the F-22 and F-35. "So the new bomber will have better stealth capability, but not [by] making leaps forward that we can't count on," he explained. This same mind-set applies for the bomber's avionics, information-gathering systems, and so on . . .

**MORE FOR LESS**—(AirForce-Magazine.com, March 3, 2011): Air Force scientists aim to demonstrate a 2,000-pound-class penetrating weapon that packs the same wallop as one of today's 5,000-pound-class bunker busters, said Stephen Walker, who oversees USAF's science and technology activities. This work, occurring under the new High Velocity Penetrating Weapon initiative, is meant "to reduce the technical risk for a new generation of penetrating weapons to defeat difficult hard targets," Walker told House lawmakers Tuesday in prepared remarks. This weapon "will use a high-velocity impact to increase warhead penetration capability," he explained. "Advanced technologies," he continued, "will enhance weapon kinematics, ensure precision guidance in contested environments and dramatically reduce the size of the overall weapon." In fact, as a result, future fighters "will be able to deliver bunker-busting capabilities currently associated only with the bomber fleet," he said . . .

**WHAT WAR WITH CHINA WOULD LOOK LIKE**— (AirForce-Magazine.com, March 28, 2011): If China attacks Taiwan in 2015 and the United States comes to the island's rescue, the Air Force would have a tough fight on its hands, predict analysts with RAND Project Air Force. The "significant number" of modern fighters, surface-to-air missiles, long-range early-warning radars, and secure communication links that China is likely to have by 2015, coupled with Chinese capabilities to strike US bases in the western Pacific, would make the air campaign "highly challenging for US air forces," they write in *Shaking the Heavens and Splitting the Earth*, a recently issued RAND report. Improving US capabilities to attack China's aircraft on the ground, "may be the most effective way to defeat China's air force," it states.

**FORTIFYING GUAM'S INFRASTRUCTURE**—AirForce-Magazine.com, April 14, 2011): The Air Force has a number of initiatives planned to bolster the resiliency of Andersen AFB, Guam, one of its strategic hubs in the western Pacific, Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz told lawmakers last week. For Fiscal 2012, plans are in place to harden infrastructure there, Schwartz told the House Appropriations Committee's military construction panel. "That includes both facilities and, importantly, utilities," such as "making sure that we have some redundancy and resilience in the fuel supplies," said Schwartz. He said there also are plans to disperse Andersen assets "at outlying locations around Guam" in time of conflict . . .

**USED USAF F-15S FOR ISRAEL?**—(AirForce-Magazine.com, April 20, 2011): Israel may seek to procure a squadron of used USAF F-15s to bridge the anticipated gap until it receives its first F-35 strike fighters . . .

Though Israel inked a \$2.75 billion deal with the United States for 20 F-35s last October—with an eye toward an eventual 75—delays in the overall F-35 program may push back the first Israeli deliveries by several years to as late as 2018 . . .

**THE LAST GUNSLINGER** (by Michael Behar, *Air and Space Smithsonian Magazine*, June/July 2010): . . . The economy is quashing spendy military ventures, and fifth-generation fighters are already suffering the wrath of the red pen . . . The ongoing F-35 development program, a relative bargain at \$155 million per airplane, is already over budget and behind schedule, causing Congressional colic. Cutbacks to its \$300 billion-plus program are virtually certain . . .

. . . "You don't want to make an airplane be the Swiss Army knife of a fighter," [78-year-old retired colonel Donn Byrnes, who got involved with the F-15 Eagle program in 1969] says. "I'm absolutely not in love with the idea. The F-35 is the worst nightmare of hardware idiocy. It does everything

wrong. You need a long-legged fighter, not a short, fat one . . .”

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**CHINA REVEALS NEW AMRAAM**—(by Wendell Minnick, *Defense News*, May 23, 2011): China has revealed a next-generation air-to-air missile (AAM) that the state-run *People’s Daily* called “trump card” and a “secret weapon for gaining air superiority.”

. . . The new Chinese PL-12D AAM might use a new active/passive guidance system, said Richard Fisher, a China defense analyst at the International Assessment and Strategy Center, an Alexandria, VA, think tank. “This kind of combined guidance system confers concealment/stealth advantage while the passive mode also uses less battery power, allowing the missile to achieve its maximum range,” Fisher said.

“ . . . It is a troubling development,” Fisher said. “That the People’s Liberation Army could field a AAM featuring an active/passive guidance system potentially before the U.S. deploys the AIM-120 is not where we want to be.”

**CYBERATTACKS CONSTITUTE AN ACT OF WAR**—(www.Stratfor.com, May 31, 2011): The Pentagon on May 31 adopted a new strategy that will classify major cyberattacks as acts of war, meaning the United States for the first time can respond to such acts with traditional military force, *The Wall Street Journal* and AFP reported. The Pentagon’s first formal cyberstrategy concludes that the Laws of Armed Conflict apply to cyberspace, according to three defense officials who have read the document.

**PRICE SMACKDOWN**—(AirForce-Magazine.com, June 1, 2011): Boeing on Tuesday challenged Lockheed Martin’s recent comparison of F-35 strike fighter and F/A-18E/F Super Hornet prices. Chris Chadwick, president of Boeing Military Airplanes, called a telecon with defense reporters to rebut last week’s *Daily Report* entry in which Lockheed’s F-35 business development lead Steve O’Bryan said the F-35 will cost about \$65 million in 2010 dollars, a figure that he said is “the same cost” as the Super Hornet. Chadwick said the F/A-18E/F actually costs \$53 million in 2010 dollars, and that includes an advanced targeting system, APG-79 advanced electronically scanned array radar, helmet-mounted cueing system, and external fuel tanks. He also said the Super Hornet’s lower costs for production and sustainment are based on actual data versus “estimates” for the F-35. “Lockheed needs to be a little more true with their facts,” asserted Chadwick. Lockheed is assuming volume efficiencies on “aircraft that may never be built,” he said. The two-seat Super Hornet F model also offers superior situational awareness compared to the single-seat F-35, Chadwick claimed, adding that the two independent cockpits mean Super Hornet aircrew can assess and attack more targets simultaneously.

**CHINESE WARSHIP INTERCEPTS INDIAN VESSEL**—(Stratfor.com, September 1, 2011): An unidentified Chinese warship intercepted Indian amphibious assault ship *INS Airavat* in international waters in the South China Sea near Vietnam in July, according to unnamed sources close to the event, the *Financial Times* reported Sept. 1. The Chinese vessel demanded that the Indian ship identify itself and explain its presence. The *Airavat* had recently completed a scheduled port call in Vietnam.

**LOOMING CUTS CAST CLOUD OVER AFA CONFERENCE**—(by Dave Majumdar, *Defense News*, September 26, 2011): . . . The U.S. Air Force will not push the envelope as it historically has when developing new technology for future weapons because declining defense spending will reshape the military’s purchasing priorities.

“ . . . Future development efforts will have to be less ambitious because we cannot assume the kind

of risk that past acquisition strategies have incorporated in their development plans,” Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norman Schwartz said Sept. 20. “While the Air Force has historically “advanced the state of the art” of technology, “we now must be more calibrated in pushing the technological envelope,” the general said.

“ . . . We must be ruthlessly honest and disciplined when operational requirements allow for more modest and less exquisite, higher confidence production programs,” he said.

**CHINA: MILITARY OPPOSED TO INTERNATIONALIZING SOUTH CHINA SEA ISSUE—** (Stratfor.com, September 28, 2011): China’s military authority reiterated Sept. 28 that attempts to internationalize the South China Sea issue would further complicate the matter, Xinhua reported. Any move meant to internationalize or multilateralize the issue will not help, a Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman said, adding that China’s sovereignty over the islands in the sea and the surrounding waters is incontestable.

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# PROLOGUE

## KAMCHATKA PACIFIC MISSILE TEST RANGE, EASTERN SIBERIA

SUMMER 2014

“Bridge, Combat, ballistic missile inbound!” the urgent call came. “Altitude six-seven miles, range three-three-zero nautical, closing speed eight thousand!”

The skipper of the USS *Chosin*, captain of an American guided-missile cruiser, activated a stopwatch hanging on a lanyard around his neck. “Sound general quarters,” Captain Edward Taverna said calmly. He glanced at the visitor seated beside him on the bridge as the warning horns sounded throughout the ship. Everyone on the bridge already had helmets and life jackets on. “Combat, Bridge, weapons tight, engagement as briefed, acknowledge.”

“Bridge, Combat, weapons tight, engagement as briefed, aye,” came the response.

“Count it down, Combat,” Taverna ordered. He raised a pair of binoculars and scanned the horizon to the north, and the visitor did likewise.

“Impact in fifteen seconds . . .” The skipper couldn’t believe how fast this was happening . . . “Ten . . . five . . . zero.”

A tremendous geyser of water reaching hundreds of feet in the sky erupted on the horizon, just a few miles away. Through his binoculars, Taverna could briefly see the shape of a large vessel cartwheeling in the air. “Looks like a direct hit,” he said. “What’s it look like, Combat?”

“Direct hit, sir,” came the reply. Taverna knew there were multiple cameras recording this test, both on the surface and in the sky—he’d look at the video later with the Intelligence section, with the Pentagon and probably the White House watching as well.

“What speed was the target going?”

“The target was being towed at twenty-seven knots, sir.”

Impressive—and ominous, Taverna thought. He turned to his visitor and said, “Congratulations, Admiral.” Then, in the best and oft-practiced Chinese he could muster, he said, “*Gong ji, Shao Jiang*.” Sign of the times, Taverna thought—more and more senior officers in the U.S. military were learning Mandarin Chinese, much like many learned Russian during the height of the Cold War.

This was shaping up to be the new Cold War: America versus China.

One faint glimmer of hope for a nonconfrontational tone to U.S.-China relations was this very occurrence: an invitation for the U.S. Navy to not only observe this test up close and personal, but to have a senior Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) officer on board. It had several implications. Yes, China was being much more open about its military capabilities and intentions; it could also imply that, should there be a targeting error, a few Chinese officers would be casualties along with hundreds, perhaps thousands, of American sailors—faint consolation, but something. Also, this test was being run on a Russian ballistic missile test range, which implied a high degree of cooperation between China and Russia.

But this was obviously a warning to America as well as an olive branch. The message was clear.

your warships are no longer safe in the western Pacific.

“Thank you very much, Captain,” People’s Liberation Army *Shao Jiang* (Major General) Hu Zhilun said in excellent English. The thin, handsome admiral with the seemingly perpetual smile young for a Chinese general at age fifty-four, bowed, then shook hands with Taverna. General Hua was commander of the Eleventh Tactical Rocket Division, or *Ha Zhao*: “Tiger’s Claw,” the special division set up to deploy China’s antisatellite and antiship ballistic missiles. Hua’s division was part of China’s Strategic Rocket Forces, also known as the Second Artillery Corps, the branch of the army that controlled all of China’s land-based ballistic missiles, both nuclear and conventional. “I shall prepare a full debriefing and return in the morning to brief you and your department heads on the results of today’s test.”

“I’m looking forward to it, General,” Taverna said. Hua bowed deeply again, then followed his aide off the bridge, escorted by the *Chosin*’s executive officer.

“He’s got a reason to smile, the prick,” Taverna said under his breath after Hua had departed. It was not lost on Taverna, and certainly not on Hua or his contingent, that the cruiser *Chosin* was named for the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, in which a force of sixty thousand Chinese troops encircled a force of thirty thousand American-led United Nations troops at Changjin Lake in northeast North Korea. Although the Chinese lost nearly two-thirds of their attacking forces in two and a half weeks of fighting, it was the first major defeat of United Nations forces in the Korean War and was the beginning of a massive all-out Chinese offensive that nearly pushed American forces south right off the Korean Peninsula and into the East China Sea.

Taverna also knew that Hua was in command of the forces that attacked American Kingfisher antisatellite and antiballistic missile weapon garages in Earth orbit last year, causing the death of an American astronaut and the eventual suspension of the entire U.S. Space Defense Force program. There had never been any meaningful American response to those attacks or to other antisatellite attacks by Russia, something that really steamed Taverna. Chinese and Russian carrier battle groups were now everywhere, shadowing American warships and shipping—and still no response from anyone in Washington except more cutbacks. It was getting pretty pathetic.

Taverna shook himself out of his reverie and picked up the phone to the Combat Information Center. “Yes, sir,” Commander Ted Lang, the operations officer, responded.

“So how did it look, Ted?”

“Pretty awesome, sir,” Lang replied. “Direct hit from fifteen hundred miles away. I haven’t seen the slow-mo video yet, but judging by the effects it looked like a good penetration angle. Sawed the target ship right in half.”

“So you think it could penetrate an armored carrier deck?”

“If they use a nuclear warhead, it doesn’t need to, sir,” Lang said. “If it’s just a kinetic warhead, it has to hit almost perfectly vertical—if it hits at an angle it would probably glance off a carrier’s deck even going eight thousand miles an hour.”

“And the missile was directed by satellite?”

“That’s what they claim, sir,” Lang replied. “The Chinese have several radar and infrared ocean surveillance satellite systems in orbit. They certainly have the technology. They had lots of aircraft in the area observing the test, and one or more of them could have actually aimed the missile. The missile uses inertial guidance with GPS updates—our GPS satellites, by the way—to get within the target area. Then the warhead itself supposedly gets updates from outside sensors—satellites or aircraft, communicating directly with the warhead’s terminal guidance package—then uses its own on-board radar to steer itself in for the kill.”

“Big question, Ted: Could a Standard SM-3 have knocked it down if it was aimed at us?” Taverna asked. ~~The Standard missile was the carrier battle group’s primary antiaircraft missile, the SM-3 was an upgraded version designed to knock down ballistic missiles and even satellites in low Earth orbit.~~

There was an uncomfortably long pause before the operations officer replied. “Today, we had the advantage of knowing exactly from where and when it was coming, sir,” Lang said. “The SM-3’s auto-engage system is normally not activated unless we’re heading into a fight, so if it’s a ‘bolt from the blue’ attack . . . no, sir, I don’t think we’d have the time. If it’s engaged, I think the SM-3 would go for one warhead. If there are multiple maneuvering warheads . . .” And his voice trailed off.

“Got it, Ted,” Taverna said. “Let me know when Intel is ready to debrief.”

“Yes, sir.”

The skipper hung up the phone. The chill he felt just then was not because of the weather.

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## JACK'S VALLEY, COLORADO

### THAT SAME TIME

"What do you think you're doing, Basic?" the cadet technical sergeant instructor screamed. "Get moving, now!"

"Oh, Christ," Bradley McLanahan muttered for the umpteenth time that morning. The muzzle of his M-16 rifle had—again—snagged itself in the barbed wire under which he was crawling. He reached out to clear it, but only ended up puncturing his finger with a mud-covered barb. "*Shit . . . !*" he shouted.

"*You will not use foul language on my confidence course, Basic!*" the cadet instructor shouted. He was a tall, wiry, weaselly looking guy from Alabama with thick horn-rimmed sports glasses, and he definitely knew how to shout. "If you are having difficulties negotiating the course, you will resolve the obstruction or request assistance from your cadet instructors. Which is it, Basic?"

"I don't need any help," Bradley said.

"What? I can't hear you!"

"I said I don't need any help!" Bradley shouted.

"Are you dense or just feebleminded, Basic?" the instructor shouted. "When you address me, you will preface and end your reply with 'sir,' do you comprehend? Now state your deficiency to me properly, Basic!"

Bradley took a deep breath and fought to control his anger. This was the fourth week of Air Force Academy Basic Cadet Training, or BCT—known to all as "The Beast," and now Brad knew why they called it that. Six weeks of some of the most intense physical, psychological, and emotional cadet training in the U.S. military, the course was designed to teach military customs, courtesies, and culture to new candidates to the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and weed out those who didn't possess the physical conditioning, attitude, or aptitude to make it through the next four years of intense academic training to become career Air Force officers. In just two weeks, he would begin his military and professional education in one of the top ten colleges on planet Earth, completing a million-dollar education paid for by U.S. taxpayers . . .

. . . as some would say: shoved up your ass a nickel at a time.

Brad extracted his thumb from the barb, then shook the muzzle of the M-16 rifle free of the wire as well. Bradley James McLanahan was on his back slithering through four inches of mud and dust, just below several strands of barbed wire arrayed above him. On either side of him were other Basics—candidates for admission to the Air Force Academy—navigating the obstacle course of "Second Beast," the three-week field encampment that preceded the start of the freshman school year. Occasional explosions and firecrackers erupted all around him, especially around the cadets having any difficulties crawling under the wire. Bradley was tall and thin, so normally getting under the mesh of razor wires should be no problem, but for some reason those pesky barbs reached out and grabbed

anything they could latch on to—his uniform, his rifle, his thumb, his very soul.

“Sir,” Brad shouted, “I have extricated myself from the obstacle, and I am proceeding . . .”

“Don’t tell me—*show* me, Basic!” the instructor shouted. Cadet Staff Sergeant William Weber was a second-class cadet at the Academy and a well-seasoned and experienced instructor at Cadet Basic Training, his favorite summer assignment. Rather than going home or doing any other activities during the summer break, Weber always signed up for Cadet Basic Training so he could lock his claws into the very new, raw persons making their way into the Air Force Academy. No one proceeded past this point without getting past Weber . . . *no way*. Weber stepped over to Bradley and bent down, face-to-face to him. “*What are you doing, Basic?*”

“Sir, I am proceeding on the obstacle course and . . .”

“You aren’t doing *crap*, Basic!” Weber shouted. “Get moving! What are you waiting for?”

“Sir, I am . . .”

“Didn’t we teach you about controlling your muzzle and your trigger, Basic?” Weber shouted, grabbing Bradley’s M-16 before it could swing all the way toward Weber’s face. “You are *not* controlling *anything*! You get snagged with your muzzle and then you get snagged when you move to release another snag. Are you *dense*, Basic? Do you want to take all morning to complete this evolution, Basic? I’ll tell you right, now, Basic: I’m not going to wait around for you to finish this simple task. Now get your rear in gear and finish this evolution!”

“Sir, yes sir!” Bradley shouted.

Weber went off to yell at some other Basic, and Bradley was grateful for the break, but as soon as Weber was out of the way, some other second-class blasted a fire hose into the pit to maintain a nice deep level of mud. It was late July in Colorado, and even in early morning the air was warm and dry—the afternoon runs with full packs, with temperatures approaching ninety degrees, would be murder.

Bradley knew all about Basic Cadet Training, the Confidence course, and Jack’s Valley—all that was no surprise. Once he had been selected for admission—his appointment came from no less than then vice president Kenneth Phoenix, who was now the president of the United States—he had attend dozens of Academy prep courses taught by liaison officers, listen to guest speakers describing their adventures and problems, have his grades scrutinized constantly and schedule refresher and reinforcement classes with volunteer tutors, pass a grueling fitness test once a month even tougher than the one they would have to take every semester at the Academy, and watch hundreds of videos covering every possible aspect of life as a fourth-class cadet. The Academy and its graduates did everything they could possibly do to prepare a potential cadet for what he was about to face. None of the “Beast” was unexpected—in fact, they had built a “mini-Beast” Confidence Course near the youth correctional facility in Carson City, Nevada, so all the area Basics chosen to attend the Academy could practice.

The first three weeks of BCT were at the Academy, learning how to salute, how to march, how to wear a uniform, and basic military customs, along with intense physical conditioning. Since Brad had spent so many years in the Civil Air Patrol teaching all that to CAP cadets, he was way ahead of most other Basics, and he had a relatively easy time—he had even been asked by a few first- and second-class cadets to help a few of the other Basics. As a high school football player, Bradley knew how to stay in shape, so the long runs, rope climbing, and calisthenics were all second nature.

Maybe that made him feel a little overconfident, even a little cocky—because the second half of BCT, “Second Beast,” was in the field. No more dormitories, no more chow halls, no more comfortable PT outfits and clean uniforms—this was down and dirty in the woods and mountains for the final three weeks. Although Bradley was qualified in several CAP field emergency services, he

real soul was in flying. Let the nonrated kids do ground searches, first aid, and direction finding—~~l~~ belonged in the sky.

“State the Core Values of the United States Air Force, Basics!” the guy with the fire hose shouted.

“Sir, integrity first, service before self, excellence in all we do, sir!” Bradley shouted for the umpteenth time that morning. He finally wriggled clear of the barbed wire, but got his pants caught when he was trying to get on his feet.

“You will state the Core Values *together*, or don’t bother saying them at all, Basics!” the cadet trainer shouted. “You will learn to live, work, train, and fight *together*, or you do not belong at our beloved Academy! Now, again: What are the Air Force’s Core Values?” Bradley started to respond but he was hit in the side of his Kevlar helmet with a jet of water from the fire hose and was knocked off his feet again by the blast. He couldn’t hear anything except the hammering of the water against his head.

“I think Basic McLanahan here forgot the words to our Core Basics,” Weber shouted, materializing as if from nowhere. “Get on your feet, Basic McLanahan!”

That was the first time, Bradley thought as he struggled to his feet, that he had heard his last name here at the Beast while in field training—up until now, they were all simply “Basics.” His eyes were stinging from mud, but he dared not try to wipe them clear. He faced in the approximate direction of where he thought Weber was standing and brought his M-16 rifle up to port arms. “Sir!”

“The breech of your weapon is closed, Basic McLanahan,” Weber snarled. “You had better clear and check that weapon before you stand in front of me, and do it *now*.”

Now Bradley rubbed the mud out of his face, then made sure the muzzle of the M-16 rifle was pointed straight up away from the cadet instructor, pulled back on the charging handle, and peered into the chamber. He couldn’t see that well, so he wasn’t sure if there was anything in there, but they had been issued no ammunition so everyone was safe. He let the handle go, then went back to port arms. “Sir, my weapon is clear, sir!” he reported.

“Your weapon is a filthy *mess*, McLanahan, that’s what it is!” Weber shouted. He motioned behind him, and a split second later the fire hose was unleashed on him again. “Keep that weapon out of the water, McLanahan!” Weber shouted. “That weapon is your lifeline in the field!” Bradley raised it above his head as the water surged over his body, threatening to topple him in its powerful stream. “What is the Cadet Oath, Basic?”

“Sir, the Cadet Oath is: I will not lie, cheat, or steal . . .”

“*Wrong*, McLanahan!” Weber interrupted. “Try again!”

Bradley swallowed hard. “The Cadet Oath is . . .”

“You had better address me as ‘sir,’ Basic!”

“Sir, the Cadet Oath is: *We* will not lie, steal, or cheat, nor tolerate anyone among us who . . .”

“McLanahan, you are just plain dense this morning,” Weber said. “One more try, McLanahan, and if you screw it up, you go back to the beginning of the Pit to think about it some more. This is the most important phrase in the Academy, Basic, the very basis of who we are, the one thing that every cadet has sworn to uphold and protect. You’ve had three weeks to learn it. Go!”

Bradley’s arms, still holding the M-16 over his head, were beginning to shake, but he took a deep breath and uttered, “Sir, the Cadet Oath is: *We* will not lie, steal, or cheat, nor tolerate among us anyone who does.” Bradley saw Weber’s eyes flaring in anger and quickly added, “Sir!”

“About time,” Weber growled. He stepped closer to Bradley and said in a low voice, “Maybe you McLanahans have difficulties learning about lying and cheating.”

Bradley suddenly forgot about his aching, rubbery arms. He looked up at Weber, who was about

half head taller than Brad. "Sir?"

"Are you eyeing me, Basic?" Weber shouted. "Cage your eyes!"

Brad stared at a spot straight ahead, away from Weber's angry gaze. "Sir, begging the cadet instructor's pardon, sir?"

"What?"

"Sir . . . sir, did you say something about McLanahans, sir?"

Weber smiled evilly, then waved at the guy with the fire hose to turn it on someone else. "Look like I got a rise out of you, didn't I, Basic McLanahan?" he observed. In a low voice, he said, "Everyone here knows who you are: son of the great General Patrick McLanahan, the hero of the American Holocaust, space hero, the greatest strategic bombing expert since General Curtis LeMay—or so he thinks. You're the guy who got his Academy appointment from the president of the United States himself, served up on a silver platter, thanks to your daddy."

He stepped even closer to Bradley, then added, "But my father told me who your daddy *really* is: lying, cheating, thieving loose cannon, who flagrantly disobeys orders and does whatever the hell he feels like doing, and screw the chain of command and the Constitution. Now he thinks he can get his stuck-up son into the Air Force Academy with just a phone call to his pal in the White House, and you'll just sail right through because of who your daddy is. Let me be the first to tell you, Basic: that's not the way it's going to work. My mission, and the mission of most of the second- and first-class, is to see you get booted out *soonest*."

Weber stepped nose to nose with Bradley. "I worked my *butt* off for three years to get into the Academy," he growled in a low, menacing voice. "I broke my ass in stupid sports I didn't like, volunteered for the most ridiculous positions in the most ridiculous service clubs, took the SAT *eleven times*, and wrote dozens of letters to congressmen I didn't even know to get an appointment. After all that, I didn't get *one*, and I had to spend a year as a Preppie. And then, here you are. You go to just waltz in here and think you have it made." He lowered his voice even more. "Well, let me tell you, McLanahan . . ." Weber took three fingers of his right hand and punched them into Bradley's chest, ". . . you're *history* here. I'll see to it, *personally*."

Now Bradley's entire body began to shake, not just his bone-weary arms. That made Weber smile and nod in satisfaction. "I knew it," he said. "Your daddy never taught you how to deal with the *real* world, did he? That's because he never dealt with it himself. He had his underlings do all the *real* fighting for him while he just sailed away safe and sound high above the fighting in his supersecret bombers." He chuckled at his own insight, then said with a smirk, "Well, stop your crying and sniveling and go back to the beginning of the Pit. You still have . . ."

And to his surprise, Bradley let the M-16 rifle fall from his hands behind him into the mud.

"*Pick that weapon up, Basic!*" Weber shouted. "Are you *insane*? *Pick it up, now!*"

"Take it back, Weber," Bradley said flatly.

"What did you say, Basic? Did you just address me by my last name?"

"I said: take it back, Weber."

Weber's eyes were bulging in complete and utter disbelief, and he stuck his face close to Bradley's once again. "*You will address me as 'Sir,' Basic!*" he shouted, louder than Bradley ever remembered him doing so before. "And you will not direct me to do *anything!* *I* give the orders here!"

"I'll tell you once more, Weber: take back what you said about my father," Bradley said.

"Getting rid of you is going to be easier than I thought, McLanahan," Weber said, his incredulous expression replaced by a broad, satisfied smile. Bradley's eyes met his, which turned Weber's expression back to one of red-hot rage. "You're one step away from a board of review, maybe even a

on-the-spot dismissal. *Get your eyes off me, Basic!*” But Bradley didn’t look away. “How dare you talk your mouth off to a second-class, Basic? How dare you look *me* in the eye? Who do you think you are? You’re nothing but a candidate here, McLanahan, a *wannabe*. The only way you survive to attend my beloved Academy is to obey your superior officers, and that’s *me*.” And he punctuated that last sentence with another punch in Bradley’s chest with three fingers of his right hand . . .

. . . except the jab never landed, because Bradley swatted his hand away.

“You just laid a hand on me, Basic!” Weber shouted, his voice just now beginning to grow hoarse. “That’s an automatic trip to the squadron commander. You’re one step away from going home to your daddy. *Get your eyes off me, Basic!*”

“Take back what you said about my father, Weber,” Brad repeated, then added, “or you’ll be sorry.”

“You’re *threatening* me now, Basic?” Weber exclaimed, his eyes bulging in anger and disbelief. “You want to go home to your daddy so bad, McLanahan, why don’t you just ring out? It’s easy. I’ll take you to the squadron commander, and you tell him you want to go home, and that’s it.” Bradley said nothing.

Weber moved face-to-face with Bradley. “But if you want to stay—if you’re afraid of getting rejected by your own daddy by going home before you even begin fourth class—then this is what you have to do: you apologize sincerely for touching me; you promise to uphold the basic principles of the Academy; and you agree to assist me in all my additional duties for your entire fourth year, in addition to all your other requirements. If you agree to all these things, I’ll omit filing a report on you for your breaches of conduct in this evolution, and you can continue Second Beast.” Weber nodded. “You did very well in First Beast, McLanahan, and even though your M-16 is lying in the mud right now, you haven’t done anything more egregious than what a lot of dipshit Basics do in Second Beast. You can still pull this out of your ass if you choose to do so. What say you, McLanahan?”

Bradley didn’t take his eyes off Weber, but looked him straight in the eye . . . for just a few moments, before caging his eyes, looking straight ahead at nothing, then said, “Sir, Basic McLanahan begs the cadet sergeant’s indulgence and sincerely apologizes for his inexcusable insubordination. Basic McLanahan was completely out of line, promises never to touch or threaten an upperclassman ever again for any reason, appeals to the cadet sergeant’s mercy to allow him to continue the Second Beast, and humbly requests the cadet sergeant’s permission to be his undergraduate assistant during the fourth-class year. Basic McLanahan also promises to completely honor, uphold, and defend the principles of the Air Force Academy to the complete satisfaction of the cadet sergeant.” Bradley closed his eyes, filled his lungs, then shouted, “*Sir!*”

Weber nodded and smiled with smug triumph. “Very good, Basic,” he said. “We might make a fourth classer out of you yet. Now pick up your rifle, then return to the beginning of the Pit. On the double.”

“Sir, yes sir!” Brad responded. He turned and stooped down to pick up the M-16 . . .

. . . and as he did he heard Weber say in a low voice, “Now if we can just get your whack-job daddy to apologize for the mess he’s caused our country, we’d all be in real good shape.”

Brad couldn’t describe what he was thinking about at that moment, or why he did what he did. All he knew is in a split second he had tackled Weber and was on top of him in the mud. He remembered getting two good punches in on Weber’s face before he heard several whistle blasts and shouts and felt hands reaching for him from behind . . .

. . . and he knew those whistle blasts signaled the end of his attendance at the U.S. Air Force Academy, and probably the end of any career in the military as well.

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# ONE

## THE SOUTH CHINA SEA, TWO HUNDRED MILES SOUTHEAST OF HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

### THAT SAME TIME

The American survey ship *Lady Garner* had been at its assigned search area for five months. From its home port in Long Beach, California, the ship had been hired by the Vietnamese oil company Petrolimex to map out an area of its economic exclusion zone and explore the possibility of setting up oil rigs. Displacing almost three thousand tons, the *Lady Garner*'s profile was dominated by the 150-foot-tall oil derrick in the center of the ship, which steered drills and pipes through the hull down through thousands of feet of seawater. Even through thousands of feet of seawater and earth, the boat could be steered by the geologists with incredible precision—one nudge of a joystick thousands of feet away from the objective could mean success or failure. There was also a large helicopter platform at the nose able to recover helicopters as heavy as thirty thousand pounds even in rough seas. The *Lady Garner* was serviced by strings of supply vessels from the United States, Australia, Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines that carried extra fuel, pipe, provisions, and relief crews for the expected nine-month deployment to the search area.

But the low-tech derrick was not the ship's main tool. The *Lady Garner* was one of the most sophisticated offshore exploration ships in the world, able to perform several different methods for searching for oil, natural gas, and other minerals. Although most of the men and women on board ran the ship, the most important persons were the geologists, chemists, and computer technicians who operated the seismic generators, gravity survey equipment, sonars, chemical analysis laboratories, and other high-tech systems.

The objective of their five months on-site was just being laid out in front of the captain, project manager, chief engineer, and chief geologist and simultaneously transmitted to officials at Petrolimex in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and the *Lady Garner*'s headquarters in Long Beach. "Good evening everybody," said Gary Boudrain, the project manager, into the video teleconference camera. Boudrain was a big man from Louisiana with deep wrinkles on his weathered face, the result of over thirty years at sea all over the world. "I'm Gary Boudrain, the project manager aboard the *Lady Garner* survey ship, on station in sector twenty-seven in the South China Sea. With me is the chief geologist, chief engineer, chief chemist, and of course Captain Victor Richardsen. I trust everyone has received the Traffic Light Map."

Heads nodded on the ship and on the video teleconference screen. The Petrolimex officials were smiling broadly, and that made Boudrain feel very good. "We have good news: it looks like we have a good cluster, and my team and I recommend dropping an exploratory well."

He hit a button on his laptop computer, and the image on the screen changed to a map of a section of the South China Sea with hundreds of green and red dots on it. This was the product of their five months at sea: the Common Risk Segment Map, known as the Traffic Light Map. The green dots

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