

The flashback begins like most of them do. I'm running into the convenience store that night so long ago. I should have stayed in the car like I was supposed to. This time I couldn't. I had to see what was going on. I remember how cold it was in the store that night. So cold I could see my breath. I saw my parents lying on the floor. The clerk is slumped over the counter. Everyone around me is dead. My eyes are so wide open they hurt, but I can't close them or look away. It felt as though someone was holding my head, forcing me to look at the horrific image just in front of me. It was searing a permanent place for itself in the region of the brain that torments us with nightmares and cold sweats. The silence was deafening. I fell to my knees and covered my ears. Crimson colored blood was inching towards me like a river spreading over a flood plain. It was slowly turning to the color of death. I wanted to run away, but I couldn't move. I tried to scream. I tried as hard as I could to scream, but there was no sound. I was paralyzed by the fear.

The appearance of the general in the crosshairs of my scope ends the flashback as quickly as it arrived. I noticed a slight shaking in my hand as I whispered into my headset.

"Charlie Bravo Six to base, I'm in position. Are we good to go?"

"Roger that, Charlie Bravo Six. You are cleared to engage."

In a few seconds I'm going to take a man's life. I think to myself, *I should feel something, shouldn't I? A normal person would feel something.*

But then again, my target isn't a normal man either. Serbian General Orlaf Stravensky is a cold-blooded murderer of men, women, and children. He uses war as a façade for ethnic cleansing. I'll save my sympathy for the thousands of innocent civilians he executed over the last two years. His reign of terror is about to end. He has no idea the last few seconds of his life are ticking away.

The muffled sound of the silenced, high-powered rifle is nearly inaudible as I squeeze off one round. In an instant the back of the general's head exploded like a soft melon. Brain matter and pieces of his skull splattered the officers standing around him.

The soft point, fifty-caliber round arrived unannounced and filled with bad intentions. No one heard a thing. One minute his officers were standing there conversing with him, and then, BAM, the general's head exploded. Now, it's time to get the hell out of here.

The diversionary explosions send the startled officers running in all directions. The ensuing confusion will provide me with just enough time to reach the extraction point where the chopper will be waiting. Running double time through the forest, I called in to confirm a successful mission.

“Charlie Bravo Six to base, mission accomplished. The target is down.”

“Say again, Charlie Bravo Six, say again.”

“The target is down. The mission is confirmed.”

“Roger that, Charlie Bravo Six, your extraction coordinates are confirmed. The bird is waiting.”

As the black ops chopper whisked me away, the scene below became surreal. From up here the forest reminded me of the hunting trips I used to go on with my uncles in the Ohio Valley. We'd sit for hours in our camouflaged cover waiting for wild boar or deer to make an appearance. My targets now are much different, and sometimes they shoot back.