

The
Majors

BROTHERHOOD

OF

WAR

BOOK

III

BY W.E.B. GRIFFIN



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HONOR BOUND

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The Majors

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THE MAJORS

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*For Uncle Charley and The Bull
RIP October 1979*

*And for Donn.
Who would have ever believed four stars?*

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I

(One)
Washington, D.C.
10 March 1954

The black, four-door Buick Roadmaster carried Virginia license plates. Attached to the plates was a strip of metal on which was stamped ALEXANDRIA 1954, as proof the owner had paid his 1954 Alexandria city automobile tax. The car showed none of the other decalomania, however, that many of the cars in the Washington, D.C., area showed, thus identifying them as military personnel attached to the Military District of Washington, or as employees of the federal government authorized to park in Section B, Parking Lot III, of the Department of Labor, or so on.

There was nothing about the car, in other words, that made it appear to be anything but the car of someone who lived in Alexandria, Virginia. But when it turned off Pennsylvania Avenue, the normally closed gates of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue were open, and the two guards on duty touched their caps in salute and waved it through without stopping it either to examine the driver's identification or to telephone to see if he was expected, though it was late at night.

The driver proceeded to the entrance nearest the Executive Office Building, the ornate old Army-Navy-State Department Building. Two marines, in dress blues, came out to the car before it had stopped.

"I'll park it for you, sir," one of them said to the driver.

"If you'll come with me, sir," the other one said.

The man who emerged from the car was a small, prematurely bald, rather skinny man wearing a baggy suit, white shirt, nondescript necktie, and black shoes. He was

the antithesis of memorable.

When the marine headed away from the elevator that went to the Command Operations Room, the small man asked him where they were going.

“To the quarters, sir.”

The small man did not reply.

When he got off the elevator which opened on the wide entrance corridor of the living quarters, the Secret Service agent on duty nodded to him.

“You’re to go right in,” he said.

“Thank you,” the small man said politely, as he passed through the double door the agent held open for him.

There were two men in the room. One of them, a brigadier general whose tunic was adorned with the heavy golden cord, the *fourragère*, identifying the military aide-de-camp to the President of the United States, was bending over the back of a fragile, gilt chair. In the chair sat a balding, bespectacled man wearing a tattered sweater. On the sweater was sewn a large “A.”

“That was quick,” the President of the United States said.

“There’s not much traffic this time of night, sir.”

“We’re drinking,” the President said, indicating a silver tray on which whiskey bottles sat. “Will you have something? Or coffee?”

“Coffee, please, sir, black,” the small man said.

The military aide walked out of the room.

“I spoke with John an hour or so ago,” the President said. “He sends his regards.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“I only recently learned that you were classmates and friends,” the President said.

“Acquaintances, sir,” the small man said. “And he is ’44. I would have been ’46.”

The President nodded, and then smiled. “He leads me to believe it can get a little chilly in Korea.”

“The troops call it ‘Frozen Chosen,’ sir,” the small man said.

A black man, a U.S. Navy chief steward, wearing a starched white jacket, came

into the room with a silver pot of coffee and two cups and saucers. He left, closing the door behind him. The aide did not return.

The President poured coffee into one of the two white china cups, and then said, "I think I'll have a little of that myself," and poured the second cup full. "Reinforced, of course," he said, splashing bourbon into the cup. He held the bottle over the second cup and looked at the small man.

"Please," the small man said.

"Help yourself, Major," the President said, and went to a table and opened a folder. He took from it a stapled document, the cover sheet of which was stamped, top and bottom, with TOP SECRET in inch-high red letters. Red stripes ran diagonally across the cover sheet.

He waited until the small man had seated himself, rather awkwardly, on a low, red leather couch and then he handed it to him. The small man put his cup and saucer down, held the cover sheet out of the way, and carefully read what the President had given him.

COPY 1 of 3

*DUPLICATION
FORBIDDEN*

TOP SECRET
(QUINCY)
THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
THE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

8 March 1954

EYES ONLY

VIA FIELD-GRADE OFFICER COURIER

**TO: Commander in Chief
U.S. Forces, Far East
The Dai Ichi Building, Tokyo, Japan**

**INFO: The President
The White House
Washington, D.C.**

By direction of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the President concurring, you are authorized and directed to appoint Lieutenant General E. Z. Black, USA, as your representative to meet with the Commander in Chief, French forces in French Indo-China at Hanoi, as soon as possible. The purpose of the meeting is to determine if augmentation of French forces by American forces no longer required for operations in Korea would permit the French, in the immediate future, to sustain their operations at Dien Bien Phu, and ultimately to suppress Viet Minh/Communist insurgent forces currently threatening French control of Indo-China.

It is emphasized that General Black's mission is solely to evaluate the present military situation. He is *NOT* authorized to commit U.S. forces, of any type, for any purpose.

For planning purposes only, it is contemplated that the following U.S. forces might be made available for service in French Indo-China, should United States intervention be determined to be feasible and desirable:

Elements, Eighth U.S. Army, as follows:

- 1st U.S. Cavalry Division (Dismounted)
- 40th U.S. Infantry Division
- 187th Infantry Regimental Combat Team (Airborne)
- 8058th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital
- 555th Artillery Group
- Command and Support units to be determined

Elements, 20th U.S. Air Force, as follows:

- 433rd Air Transport Group
- 2055th Air Control Squadron
- 2057th Meteorological Squadron
- 271st Fighter Wing
- 107th Fighter Bomber Squadron
- 707th Bomber Squadron (Augmented)
- Command and Support units to be determined

Elements, Pacific Fleet, as follows:

Four attack transports

Fleet oiler

Task force, elements to be determined, but including:

Aircraft carrier with three fighter squadrons and
one fighter-bomber squadron aboard

Escort vessels

Ships of the line to be determined

Inasmuch as it is anticipated that should American augmentation of French forces occur, General Black would be placed in command, you are authorized and directed to designate such general or flag officers as General Black may desire, representing the forces named above, to accompany him to Hanoi, or such other place as he may deem necessary.

In view of the politically sensitive nature of General Black's mission, it is directed that his party travel in civilian clothing by chartered civilian aircraft. This letter constitutes authority for the expenditure of whatever discretionary funds are necessary. Waiver of normal passport and visa requirements has been received from the French Colonial Administration.

General Black will make a daily report, to be encrypted in French Indo-China, and transmitted via officer courier to Tokyo for radio teletype transmittal to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. 20th Air Force has been directed to make courier aircraft available.

On completion of his discussions with the French authorities, General Black will prepare a report, to be encrypted in French Indo-China, and transmitted in like manner. *NO*, repeat *NO*, copies of this report are to be retained in the Far East, and all notes and other material used in its preparation are to be destroyed.

General Black may select whatever staff he desires to accompany him.

FOR THE CHAIRMAN, THE JOINT CHIEFS:

Edmund C. Williams

Major General, USMC

Secretary of The Joint Chiefs of Staff

“Yes, sir?” the small man asked, when he had finished reading.

“You read that pretty carefully,” the President said.

“Yes, sir.”

“I was led to believe you wrote it.”

“I drafted it, sir, for the Joint Chiefs. They might have changed it.”

“Did they?”

“Not significantly, sir.”

“How’s your health, Felter?” the President asked.

“Fine, sir.”

“I mean, really. Not officially. Are you fully recovered?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I understand the only way you can get into Dien Bien Phu is by parachute. You feel up to that?”

“Yes, sir,”

“I want you to go to Indo-China with General Black,” the President said, “and then detach yourself, quietly, from the official party, go to Dien Bien Phu, see what shape they’re in, positions, supplies, morale, the whole business, and then come back here and tell me what you find.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I want you to take someone with you, sort of a backup. A soldier, preferably. Do you know someone like that?”

Major Felter thought a moment.

“Yes, sir, I know just the man. He’s at Fort Knox.”

“Tell me about him.”

“Major, Armor,” Felter said. “He had five combat jumps in World War II as a pathfinder. And was given the Medal. He wasn’t wounded in World War II.”

“MacMillan?” the President asked. “He was with you when you had your misfortune in Korea, wasn’t he?”

“Yes, sir.”

The military aide to the President of the United States returned to the room. Major Felter realized that there must be a hidden button somewhere that the President had pressed to summon him.

“Major Felter’s volunteered to go, Charley,” the President said. “Get the show on the road.”

“Yes, Mr. President.”

The President sat down at a table and took a sheet of notepaper and quickly scrawled something on it.

“This may come in handy, Major,” he said, handing it to him. Major Felter read it.

“Yes, sir, I’m sure it will.”

“Every soldier’s ultimate ambition, Felter,” the President chuckled. “Commander in Chief.” He put out his hand. “Go with God, Major,” he said.

(Two)

Hq XIX U.S. Corps (Group)

Kwandae-Ri, North Korea

12 March 1954

The air force C-47 gooney bird which touched down daily at the XIX Corps (Group) airstrip had six passenger seats. They were up front in the cabin just behind the bulkhead separating the cabin from the cockpit. The rest of the cabin was given to cargo transportation, and sometimes the sick, on litters. Not the wounded; they passed their way through a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) on their way to more complete medical facilities via a separate aerial evacuation system.

The gooney bird carried mail bags, and priority air freight, and milk. Fresh milk, from a herd of dairy cattle in Japan whose output had been contracted for by the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps, and was dispensed by the U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps at the direction of the U.S. Army Medical Corps to pregnant dependent women, dependent children under the age of five, and those soldiers whose gastrointestinal difficulties indicated a daily ingestion of fresh milk.

There were two means of aerial travel from XIX Corps (Group) in North Korea to Eighth U. S. Army Headquarters in Seoul, South Korea. One was by light army aircraft; Cessna L-19s, observation and liaison aircraft which would carry one passenger; and DeHavilland L-20s, “Beavers,” of Teeny-Weeny Airlines, which carried six passengers. In addition, there were two North American “Navions” at XIX Corps (Group), but these were generally reserved for the corps commander, Lieutenant General E. Z. Black, or one of the other five general officers assigned to the corps.

The second means of aerial transportation was the milk-run gooney bird, which stopped at XIX Corps (Group) as its last stop on a round-robin flight from K16 (Kimpo) in Seoul to the three corps (I, IX, and X) and one corps (group) (XIX) on the front lines.

The C-47 gooney bird was faster and more comfortable than the light army aircraft and thus popular with senior officers. Officers at I, IX, and X Corps, however, which were closer to Seoul, sometimes found that if they tried to get to Seoul on the milk-run gooney bird, they got no further than XIX Corps (Group) where they were bumped (Rank Hath Its Privileges) by senior XIX Corps (Group) officers and left to get to Seoul the best way they could. This was because XIX Corps (Group) was, in everything but name, an army, with an army-sized complement of senior officers. Consequently, the low man in a milk-run passenger seat was seldom any more junior than a lieutenant colonel.

There were three full bull colonels and three light birds in the seats of the milk-run gooney bird when it touched down at the XIX Corps (Group) airstrip. A young lieutenant, who looked as if he was torn between pleasure and worry about brass-hat wrath, climbed up the folding step to make his announcement.

“Gentlemen,” he said. “I’m sorry. You’ve been bumped.”

There was some grumbling, and after a moment, a full bull colonel in his late fifties asked incredulously, “Certainly, Lieutenant, not all of us?”

“Yes, sir,” the lieutenant said. “All of you.”

When they had collected their gear and climbed back out of the gooney bird, the three full colonels stood by the wing. They had each separately concluded that it was highly unlikely that there were six full colonels, each of them senior in grade to themselves.

A jeep, top down, drove up to where the gooney bird sat at the extreme end of the narrow dirt runway. The jeep held four passengers, all enlisted men, one more passenger than regulations prescribed. In addition, there was a motley collection of luggage, some GI barracks bags, some canvas Valv-Paks, and three civilian suitcases. While authorities generally looked the other way at Valv-Paks, regulations proscribed civilian suitcases in Korea. They were supposed to be entrusted to the Quartermaster Corps in Japan for safekeeping.

The enlisted men—a middle-aged master sergeant, a sorrowful-faced technical sergeant, a baby-faced staff sergeant, and a buck sergeant—got out of the jeep, and with the driver, formed a human chain to load the luggage onto the aircraft. Buried under the personal luggage were several GI equipment cases. When all the luggage was on board, the enlisted men climbed onto the airplane.

When they did not emerge after sufficient time for them to have stowed and tied

down the luggage and equipment cases, one of the colonels, curiosity aroused, went to the aircraft door and looked inside. The enlisted men were seated in the seats the brass had just been ordered to vacate.

The colonel climbed aboard the C-47 and went to the middle-aged master sergeant.

“What the hell is going on here, Sergeant?” he demanded.

“Sergeant Greer is in charge, sir,” the middle-aged master sergeant said, nodding his head at the baby-faced staff sergeant, who, having taken off his stiff-crowned “Ridgeway hat” (after Gen. Matthew Ridgeway, who had found the issue fatigue cap unmilitary and stiffened his with cardboard), looked even younger.

The colonel went to Staff Sergeant Greer, whom he now remembered having seen around the general’s office.

“You’re in charge, Sergeant?” the colonel demanded. “Is that correct?”

“For the moment, sir, yes, sir,” Staff Sergeant Greer replied.

“Presumably you’re on orders?”

“Yes, sir.”

“May I see them, please?”

“No, sir.”

“What do you mean, ‘No, sir’?” the colonel demanded, furiously.

“We ready to go, Greer?” a voice called out. The colonel saw a full colonel, one he recognized, Colonel Carson Newburgh, officially the XIX Corps (Group) headquarters commandant, the man in charge of housekeeping. The colonel was also aware that Carson Newburgh was a good deal more influential than military housekeepers usually are. He was a reserve officer, a Texan, an Aggie, an oil millionaire. He had gone across Africa and Europe with E. Z. Black. E. Z. Black had gone into combat in North Africa with the “Hell’s Circus” Armored Division as a major. When Eisenhower had stopped Hell’s Circus on the banks of the Elbe, twenty-four hours—no more—from Berlin, E. Z. Black had been a major general, commanding. Carson Newburgh had been with him there, too, as a light bird. And he’d come back on active duty when Black had been given XIX Corps (Group) in Korea.

He was the only man in Korea who dared to call Ezakiah Zachariah Black “E. Z.” to his face.

“You got the boss’s bags,” baby-faced Staff Sergeant Greer called back, “then

we're ready."

The colonel made his way back down the cabin of the gooney bird. Colonel Carson Newburgh gave him a faint smile and a curious look. The colonel had hoped to avoid meeting General Black. He did not.

General Black got on the airplane, and then turned around. Leaning out the door, he pointed a finger at another master sergeant, this one enormous, black, and sad-faced. "Goddamnit," Lieutenant General E. Z. Black said, "I told you why you can't go."

"Yes, sir," the master sergeant said.

"Take a goddamned R&R," General Black said. "That's an order, Wesley, goddamnit, not a suggestion."

"Yes, sir," the master sergeant said.

"Greer, goddamnit, speaks French, and you don't," General Black concluded. "You'd be excess baggage."

"Yes, sir," the master sergeant said. "I understand I'd be excess baggage, sir."

"Oh, shit," General Black said. "Get on the goddamned airplane."

"Yes, sir," the master sergeant said, and with surprising grace for his bulk, climbed aboard.

General Black's eyes fell on the colonel. They were icy cold.

"Just debarking, sir," the colonel said.

General Black met the eyes of Colonel Newburgh.

"Wesley's been with me longer than you have," General Black said, defensively.

"Yes, sir," Colonel Newburgh said, smiling broadly.

"That will be twenty dollars, thank you kindly, Colonel Newburgh, sir," baby-faced Staff Sergeant Greer said.

"Goddamnit, Greer, did you actually bet I'd bring him along?" General Black asked. "Am I that goddamned predictable?"

"To those of us who know and love you so well, sir," Staff Sergeant Greer said, unctuously.

"Go to hell, Greer," General Black said. "Well, what are we waiting for? Let's get

the show on the road.”

The enormous black master sergeant was waiting impatiently at the door for the colonel to get off the aircraft. When he did, he effortlessly pulled the heavy door closed and then settled himself on the floor for the takeoff.

(Three)
K16 Air Base
Seoul, South Korea
12 March 1954

The milk-run gooney bird from XIX Corps (Group) came in low over the Han River bridge, which had been dropped into the river in the early days of the police action and which the engineers had subsequently repaired so that it was partially usable, and touched down at K16. The pilot contacted ground control. Instead of being ordered to proceed down the taxiway to the terminal, he was ordered on a roundabout trip around the airfield, up and down taxiways and across runways, and finally ordered to stop before an unmarked hangar on the civilian side of the field.

“What the fuck are they doing?” he asked of his copilot. The copilot didn’t reply. Instead, he pointed out the windshield to a man in a light gray flight suit who was making the standard arm signals (a finger pointing, and a hand making a cutting motion across his throat) ordering him to shut down the port (passenger door side) engine.

Unless the pilot’s eyes were failing him, the man performing this buck-sergeant, ground-handler operation wore the star of a brigadier general and the wings of a master aviator.

The pilot cut the port engine.

Lt. General E. Z. Black and his party debarked the aircraft and disappeared through a small door in the huge hangar door. The buck general ground handler made a get-it-out-of-here signal with his hand.

“Air Force 879,” ground control said in the pilot’s earphones. “Take taxiway eleven to base operations.”

Inside the hangar was a China Air Transport (CAT) DC-4. The pilots, standing by the wheels, were American. General Black was not surprised. CAT was an offspring of American involvement with Chiang Kai-shek’s China, starting with the American Volunteer Group (the Flying Tigers) before the United States was officially involved in World War II.

The air force brigadier general came in from outside and walked to General Black and saluted. Black shook his hand.

“We about ready to get this show on the road?” General Black asked.

“No, sir,” the air force brigadier said. He handed General Black a sheet of yellow teletype paper.

URGENT

HQ USAF WASH DC

TO: CG K16 AFB

DELAY DEPARTURE CAT SEOUL-HANOI CHARTER FOR TWO ADDITIONAL PASSENGERS ENROUTE VIA MIL AIR. AUTH: WILLIAMS, MAJ GEN USMC JCS.

“Jesus H. Christ!” General Black exploded. “I should have known goddamned well those bastards would send somebody from the Pentagon, or the goddamned State Department, to snoop.”

“I don’t have anything else, General,” the air force brigadier said. “No names. Not even an ETA.” (Estimated Time of Arrival.)

“What the hell,” Black said. “I don’t have anything better to do anyway than sit around a goddamned hangar with my finger up my ass.”

“Would the general like a little belt?” the brigadier asked.

“The general would dearly love a little belt,” Black replied. “But I don’t think this is the time or place.”

The enormous black master sergeant whom Black had taken along at the last minute came up.

“General,” he reported, “I’ve got your civvies unpacked. They’re kind of messed up.”

“Isn’t everything?” General Black replied. “Where are they, Wes?”

“On the airplane,” the sergeant replied.

“Everybody else is here?” Black asked the air force brigadier.

“Yes, sir,” he replied. “Here and in civvies.” He pulled the full-length zipper of his flight suit down, revealing a shirt and tie and brown tweed sports coat.

“I will change clothes,” General Black announced. “And if the goddamned snoops haven’t shown up by the time I’m finished, then I *will* have a little belt.”

General Black boarded the DC-4 and walked up the aisle to the front, where his orderly had unpacked a footlocker rushed priority air freight from the United States.