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"Drop us now. Then go do whatever you have to do. We're going surfing." The pilot shook his head and replied, "OK boss; it's your ass," and reluctantly followed his instructions.

The original plan was to find a good place to set the military Huey UD-D1 helicopter down and find a path back to the beach, but impatient surfers fueled by perfect waves changed all that. The helicopter hovered twenty feet above the colorful shallow reef, which because of its semi-horseshoed shape, produced flawless waves barreling both left and right.

This break was found by chance while Carver was hurrying via helicopter to his good friend Soy's wedding on Siargao Island, from a little fishing village on the north-east coast of Mindanao that also made beautifully carved wood figures, one of which he bought for a wedding gift.

To avoid a large, dark, menacing raincloud, the pilot had to veer around it farther into the Pacific Ocean, low enough to avoid the clouds. They flew over a small island that had the most perfect waves he had ever seen in the Philippines, and if it wasn't for the wedding, Carver would have had his pilot drop him into the surf. After circling the island once to view the breaks, he had the pilot mark the perfect break on his GPS; then they made a B-line to the church in General Luna, Siargao Island, forty-five minutes away.

After the congratulations were bestowed and general catching up, Carver, still excited about his find, shared the chance wave discovery with Soy. After much talk of the surf break over beers at the wedding reception that evening, a date was set for as soon as possible after Soy's honeymoon to fly out to the island.

Five weeks after Soy's wedding, the Capitan's voice came over the headsets announcing the target island was now in view. They all strained to look at the little remote island from the back seats. From that distance, they could see lines of white breaking waves circling most of the island – a great sign.

It was a small, almost round, lush island with a hill in the middle. They approached from the west and slowly flew over the center of the island to the north-east corner and scouted the target

surf break that had been marked on the GPS. The pilot was also scouting for a place to safely land the chopper as close to the surf break as possible.

They elected to drop their camping gear off on the beach near the area they would surf for the next three days so they wouldn't have to carry it through the thick jungle from the flat grassy area one hundred yards inland the pilot would use to set the chopper down.

It was a picture-perfect sunny day at the small deserted island surrounded by an aqua blue shallow reef that dropped into the deep dark blue water of the Pacific Ocean. The island was strewn with coconut trees and lush green jungle growth going down to the small strip of sandy beach with a few scattered white clouds in the background. The trio of excited surfers couldn't have asked for a better day to explore this new surf spot. Besides the wave being postcard perfect, it was so far from any inhabited land that the island was completely void of humans. Or so they thought.

They threw their backpacks and tents from the hovering chopper onto the sandy beach along with Carver's bodyguard, who jumped one meter onto the sand with his heavy bag of gear. Then they untied their surfboards from the custom board rack that was built onto the ceiling of the Huey. The pilot expertly walked the chopper sideways just outside of the wave's peak and lowered back down to less than two meters off the water.

Still complaining about not doing enough aerial recon of the small one-kilometer-diameter island before allowing his wards to debark over the headsets that they were all wearing, the pilot waited for the reply he felt sure was coming. Carver was too anxious not to get into the water and instructed the pilot, against the protocol of scouting the area first, "I've been waiting long enough; just drop us off." That's all the pilot heard in response, as he positioned the chopper behind the breaking wave.

Jake Steel, the only American and non-Filipino of the group of three surfers, removed his headset. When the co-pilot gave him the thumbs up, he jumped feet-first from the chopper, holding his surfboard to keep the prop wash from blowing it away, and hit the water. One by one, Soy and Carver jumped into the water holding their boards, and they waved the chopper off, wanting the intense prop wash that was blowing stinging saltwater onto their faces to stop.

When the copper slid away sideways and the prop wash abated, they climbed onto their boards and paddled the short distance to the peak of the wave. They regrouped there, watching the first set of waves come through, quickly learning the timing of the waves and the best position to line up to

catch the peak of the wave. Soy and Jake elected to give Carver the first wave out of their profound thanks for the helicopter ride out to this remote area.

They both watched Carver paddle into the eight-foot-faced, right-handed wave, effortlessly jump to his feet and carve a deep bottom turn, then disappear from their view behind the thin aqua green translucent lip of the wave. He was now riding in the "green room," a term surfers have given to the inside of the barrel. Both of them were excited to get their turn on the *Surfer Magazine*-photo-worthy waves. Jake looked over at Soy and gave him a thumbs up. Both were grinning from ear to ear, knowing the fun they were going to have with these dream waves all to themselves. For them, this was as good as it gets.

The helicopter was hovering perpendicular to the wave forty meters down the line from the peak to avoid the prop wash from deforming the face of the wave. The pilot had made the mistake of getting too close to the waves before and had been cautioned later by Carver. After over a year of piloting Carver from one tiny island to the next on surf expeditions, he knew to keep his distance from the wave.

"Hey Captain, hold her steady while I film this wave," Major Rudy Coloso said into his headset while hanging out of the rear door of the chopper. He added, "This wave is too good to pass up. The boss is completely inside the tunnel or whatever he calls it."

After a couple of seconds, he said into his mouthpiece, "This is great footage for the boss's birthday video; he's going to love it." Although they were seriously breaking protocol by not doing their recon first, he finished by saying, "Now hold this thing steady." The crew was getting complacent after a year's worth of uneventful surfing trips to remote islands throughout the Philippines's southeastern coast, and it was about to cost them dearly.

#### Roughly in the center of the island

His binoculars were powerful enough to see the expressions on the pilots' faces and the soldier hanging out the rear door using a video camera. The chopper was just over the treetops three hundred yards to the north. Clamping his legs tightly around the coconut tree trunk, he swung the

rocket-propelled grenade launcher over his shoulder, lifted the rear sight, placed the tube on his shoulder, took aim and fired.

"Incoming," was the last thing Major Coloso heard over the headset before the impact. The Major had just zoomed in on Carver as he was riding deep within the barreling wave using his small digital camera. He was sitting in the open rear door with his feet on the chopper's skids, when a thin, wobbly streak of smoke shot up from the jungle towards the chopper and exploded with a loud concussing blast, hitting the choppers tail rotor, disintegrating it and sending the chopper into spiral, mercilessly throwing the Major out the door and into the sea.

The helicopter seemed to jump upwards while starting to rotate uncontrollably to the left, and then, in concert with the loud clanking noise, it lurched to a downward attitude, still spinning out of control, and slammed into the shallow reef at a forty-five-degree angle. Instantly, the freshly topped-off fuel tanks of JP-4 erupted into a giant fireball, sending flaming chunks of the rotor and debris slashing across the water in all directions.

Steam boiled from the ocean where the burning chopper body hit the water. The fireball went skyward a few hundred feet. After the second wave washed over the burning chopper, a final cloud of black smoke wafted up and defused into the air, and all became silent. It seemed like an eternity, but in reality, it was all over within less than half a minute.

The sea went back to normal, with the waves carrying random burning pieces of the exploded helicopter parts towards the shore, while scattered pieces of fiery debris littered the area, still burning. The burnt fuselage barely showing above ocean surface looked like a charred mechanical whale carcass that had washed ashore. Just like that, the chopper was down, and the two pilots were gone with it.

Jake and Soy watched the whole surreal scene unfurl before their eyes, completely mesmerized by the suddenness and violence of the event. "Holy shit!" Jake said, as he snapped out the shock of the moment and turned his board towards where Carver was treading water behind the waves, holding onto the board that was floating beside him, glaring at the fallen chopper. Jake yelled, "Soy! Go find the guy thrown out of the chopper, hurry!" as he paddled as fast as he could to Carver. Without a word, Soy started hurriedly paddling out to sea towards where the soldier was thrown into the water.

Jake paddled as fast as he could up to Carver and, with urgency in his voice, said, "Get on your board and let's get to the shore fast," as he firmly pointed Carver's board towards the shore. Carver climbed onto the deck with a shocked expression on his face, shaking his head in disbelief and uttering, "What's happening? What's going on?" Carver was clearly in shock. The worst violence he had ever seen in his thirty-two years was the few fist fights he had witnessed in college bars, but nothing like this.

Jake's mind went into combat-survival mode, and it became all too clear to him that Carver could very well be the primary target. He just wasn't sure if the attackers wanted him dead or alive. The only thing Jake did know for sure was that he had to protect his new friend at all costs. His death or capture would be a disaster for the government, not to mention the nightmare the unknown attackers could be for him. Jake had himself been captured once behind enemy lines. Something he tried not to remember.

He flashed back to the days he had spent in a Special Forces recon team. He had seen choppers go down before, and this brought back bad memories from his time spent behind enemy lines in Iraq and Afghanistan. It reminded him in particular of the time in Afghanistan when his recon team was inserted into a small valley near the eastern border on a cold, snowy morning. They had just repelled down the ropes to the ground and ran to the cover of a cluster of boulders, when their chopper was hit with an RPG, blowing it up in a fireball and killing the two pilots and door gunner instantly.

Jake's team would have been caught in the fireball explosion had they not been protected by the boulders. At the time, Jake was in full combat gear, loaded with weapons and survival tools - not with just a surfboard and a partially used bar of surfboard wax. He felt naked.

Now, while paddling through the burning debris littering the water, Jake was thinking about the three Heckler Koch MP5 machine guns in the bodyguard's bag with thirty loaded clips that he had seen placed into the large canvas bag the bodyguard went to shore with. As Jake was paddling to shore positioned directly behind Carver, he could see the bodyguard sprinting down the beach towards them with one of the MP5s ready for action, while climbing into a bandolier with ten spare clips and a couple of grenades, slipping it over his head onto his shoulder.

His name was Major Juvendetta Soliosos, but he insisted that everyone not in the military call him Juvy. The president, then mayor, had personally selected Juvy for his son's head of security after seeing him in action near his hometown. He was then in charge of an elite squad of US-Ranger-trained commandos that had quelled several of the Abu Sayyaf aggressive actions in and around the Philippines' third largest city and home of the president, Davao.

Juvy had caught the president's eye with quick thinking, changing tactics on the fly, and effective use of his men to quickly end all the contacts made with the enemy. He had also heard that the Major loved to get into the ocean to fish and dive every chance he got, earning him his nickname "Aqua Man."

The then mayor knew that if he were to win the presidential election, he was going to have to find someone special to guard his free-spirited son. Someone unique, that could bare the outdoor-oriented lifestyle of a surfer gallivanting around the Philippines following his passion for surfing, which he had been doing for the last decade. Aqua Man seemed to be the best choice, so he was assigned with the task of keeping his son safe without restricting him too much by heading up his security detail. A very delicate balance for someone that was so important.

Jake hurriedly ushered Carver out of the water with their boards under their arms, up the short, inclined sand beach to a large fallen coconut tree, on the fringe of the vegetation. They crouched down, and he told him to keep his head down. Carver was still in shock but followed the orders blindly. He noticed Jake peeling off his Velcro ankle leash and tossing his board aside, so he followed suit.

Juvy skidded to a stop and crouched with them behind the coconut tree, his machine gun facing the jungle while scanning the thick bush for signs of movement. Juvy turned around and took a moment to inspect the wreck site, looking for the co-pilot and pilot. All he could see was the burnt black cockpit of the chopper rocking gently with each passing wave. He knew they had perished.