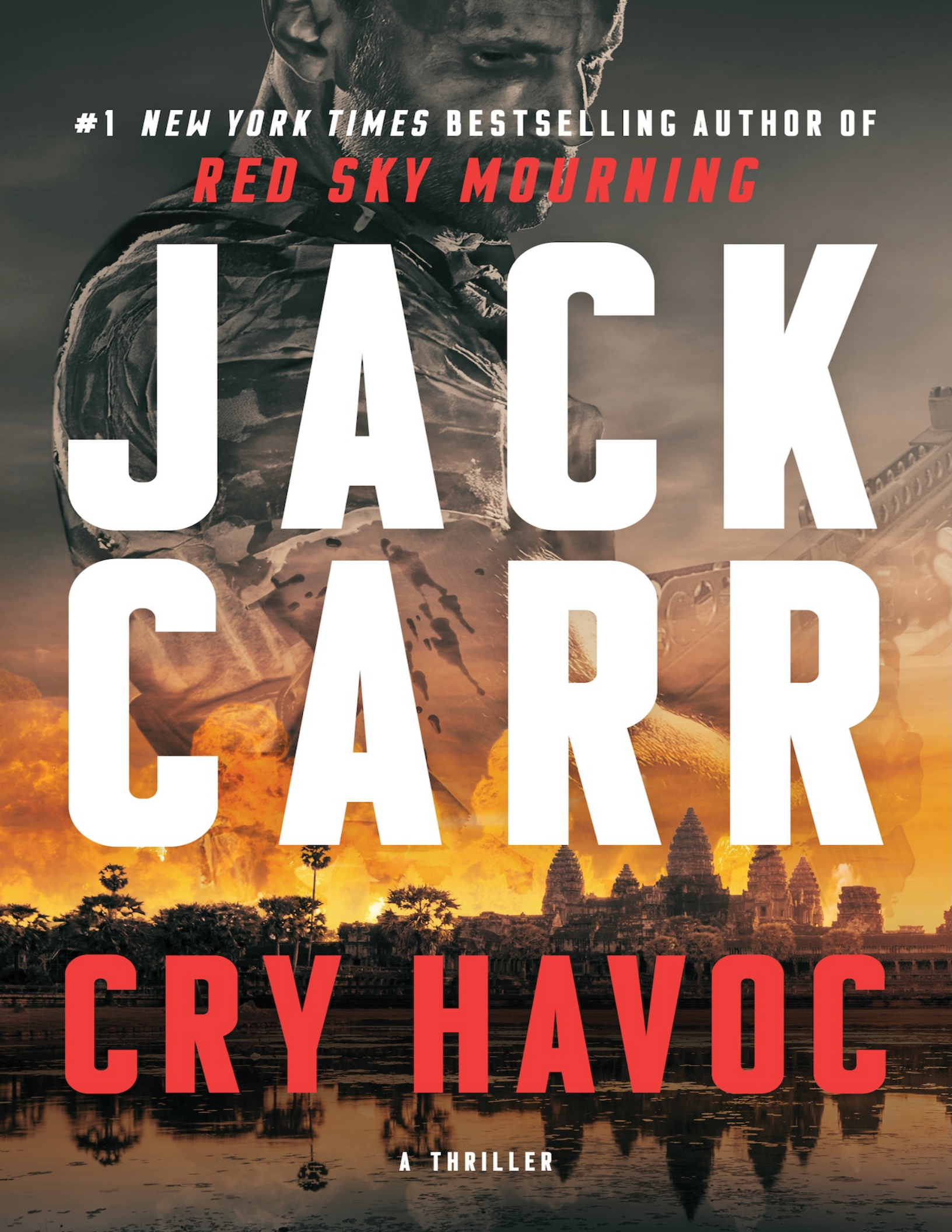


The background of the book cover features a composite image. At the top, a close-up of a man's face with a beard and a military-style helmet is visible. Below this, a large, intense fire or explosion dominates the middle section. At the bottom, the silhouette of the Angkor Wat temple complex is visible against a bright, hazy sky, with its reflection in a body of water.

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
RED SKY MOURNING

JACK CARR

CRY HAVOC

A THRILLER

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CRY HAVOC

A Thriller

JACK CARR

EMILY BESTLER BOOKS

ATRIA

NEW YORK AMSTERDAM/ANTWERP LONDON
TORONTO SYDNEY/MELBOURNE NEW DELHI

To David Morrell, Rambo's father, master of the high-octane thriller, mentor and friend; this book, as the others that precede it, would not have been possible without you, and to the men of MACV-SOG and their Montagnard teammates, who plied their trade in Vietnam and across the fence in the Secret War into Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam, to those who disappeared, to those still unaccounted for, and to all those who fought and died in Southeast Asia from 1954 to 1975, I salute you.

"Cry 'Havoc!,' and let slip the frogs of war"

—THE FROGMAN VERSION OF THE LINE FROM WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *JULIUS CAESAR*, ACT 3, SCENE 1

You have never lived until you've almost died.
For those who have fought for it,
Life has a flavor the protected shall never know.

—UNOFFICIAL MOTTO OF MACV-SOG

"Lam Nut Bau troi, Rung chuyen Trai Dat"

—CODED MESSAGE FROM HANOI TO NORTH VIETNAMESE FORCES ON THE EVE OF THE TET OFFENSIVE IN JANUARY 1968. IT TRANSLATES AS "CRACK THE SKY, SHAKE THE EARTH"

I shall inflict so much personal pain and grief, suffering and outrage,
that as a person you shall have but two choices: SURRENDER OR DIE

—PORTION OF THE UNOFFICIAL VIETNAM-ERA SEAL CREED

Havoc (hāv'ək) n. Widespread destruction or confusion. To destroy or ruin.

THE AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY, 1969 EDITION

PREFACE

“JUST ANOTHER DAY IN SOG.”

Nineteen sixty-eight was the bloodiest year for Americans fighting in Vietnam. Of the 542,000 U.S. troops deployed to Southeast Asia that year, 16,899 were killed in action and 87,388 were wounded. Among them were a small number of special operators running missions “across the fence” in a secret war into Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam—the men of MACV-SOG.

Despite the innocuous name of “Military Assistance Command, Vietnam—Studies and Observations Group,” the organization and its members conducted some of the most audacious operations of the Vietnam War. SOG was a highly classified, multiservice U.S. task force established on January 24, 1964, to operate beyond the official boundaries of the conflict. Their mission was “to execute an intensified program of harassment, diversion, political pressure, capture of prisoners, physical destruction, acquisition of intelligence, generation of propaganda, and diversion of resources, against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) [North Vietnam].” Missions were undertaken by small teams, typically consisting of two Army Special Forces soldiers and six indigenous Montagnard tribesmen. In 1968, every MACV-SOG operator was wounded, many of them more than once. Close to 50 percent were killed.

And so, it is with the operators of MACV-SOG that *Cry Havoc* begins.

In his 1960 novel, *The Centurions*, a book that follows French paratroopers in counterinsurgency operations in Indochina and then Algeria, author Jean Lartéguy, who just might make an appearance in the pages ahead, writes: “I’d like... to have two armies: one for display, with lovely guns, tanks, little soldiers, fanfares, staffs, distinguished and doddering generals, and dear little regimental officers... an army that

would be shown for a modest fee on every fairground in the country. The other would be the real one, composed entirely of young enthusiasts in camouflage battledress, who would not be put on display but from whom impossible efforts would be demanded and to whom all sorts of tricks would be taught. That's the army in which I should like to fight."

Every time I read that passage, I cannot help but think of MACV-SOG.

Nineteen sixty-eight was also a year of turmoil in the United States. The USS *Pueblo* was captured by North Korean forces in January, President Lyndon Johnson announced that he would not run for reelection in March, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in April, and Senator Robert Kennedy was killed in June. Riots and protests erupted across the country, including at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Illinois. At the heart of those protests was the issue of American involvement in Vietnam.

The violence that year was not limited to North America and Southeast Asia. In Europe, President Charles de Gaulle's Fifth Republic struggled to survive in France while the Prague Spring set the conditions for a Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. In Africa, the Biafra War, Rhodesian Bush War, Angolan War of Independence, and Chadian Civil War raged.

The world was on fire.

Amongst the chaos, tensions between East and West, communism and capitalism, the U.S. and the USSR, built toward a breaking point. The divide was best illustrated by the cold concrete and sharp barbed wire of the Berlin Wall, a physical manifestation of the division between the world's two great superpowers, two empires with distinctly different governments and ideologies. On one side was the freedom of the Western Bloc. On the other, the oppression of the Warsaw Pact. Both sides were in possession of nuclear arsenals capable of destroying the world many times over.

Rather than a direct confrontation between the nuclear superpowers, the hot wars between East and West were fought in the latter half of the twentieth century in Korea, Cuba, Congo, Nicaragua, Chile, Angola, Mozambique, El Salvador, Afghanistan, and a small country in Southeast Asia called Vietnam. Between 1954 and 1975, the United States would send a generation into the fray, first as advisors and then

as combatants. The war would span multiple administrations from both political parties and would scar a generation.

America's involvement in Vietnam ended in April 1975 with the fall of Saigon. An iconic photograph would come to symbolize the moment. Shot by Dutch photographer Hubert van Es on April 29—the day a complete American evacuation of South Vietnam was ordered—it captures a CIA Air America UH-1 on the roof of a building, one of the pilots assisting a group of refugees up a ladder. Often misidentified as being the roof of the U.S. Embassy, it was actually the Pittman Apartments, a CIA safe house on 22 Gia Long Street. The following morning, April 30, the CIA chief of station and deputy chief of station would send the final cable from Vietnam to CIA Headquarters in Langley, Virginia. It read: "... this will be the final message from Saigon... It has been a long and hard fight and we have lost." A helicopter would evacuate them from the embassy later that afternoon.

In the end, it was the Vietnamese people and the American service members who fought there who would pay the price for decisions made in air-conditioned offices half a world away. Decisions made in those same offices would impact another generation decades later, one that stepped up to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan.

From *The Terminal List* onward, I intentionally incorporated characters into the narratives that would allow me to explore multiple generations in the Reece and Hastings family lineages. *Cry Havoc* is the first and focuses on Tom Reece, the father of James Reece, the protagonist of my first seven novels. Tom has played an essential role in the previous books, guiding his son via memories and conflation from beyond the grave. *Only the Dead* in particular gives readers a glimpse into his later years at the CIA. *Cry Havoc* is the story of how it all began.

In *The Centurions*, a character is recalled to Paris where he is asked about the paratroopers, to which he says, "They're dangerous because they go to any lengths and nothing will hold them back... they are beyond the conventional notion of good and evil." That passage speaks to another conflict, one raging in the soul of young Navy SEAL Tom Reece, a man torn between survival, revenge, and the morality of choices, temptations, and trials that will forge his future.

Cry Havoc is a novel of brotherhood and betrayal, a novel of Cold War espionage set against the backdrop of a hot war in the jungles, mountains, deltas, and urban centers

of Southeast Asia, a war fought by the men of MACV-SOG. It is a tribute to those who answered their nation's call amongst the upheaval of the 1960s, to those who donned the uniform, picked up the rifle, and held the line.

Vietnam was a watershed moment in special operations history. Navy SEALs, Army Special Forces soldiers, and Marine Corps snipers would develop the tactics, techniques, and procedures upon which the next generation would build when the torch was passed in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.

This is also a novel of our collective responsibility to those we sent to Vietnam, our obligation to exhaust every effort to answer the questions that continue to haunt the families of those left behind.

There are 1,571 Americans still listed as Missing in Action from the Vietnam War. Most were declared "presumptively dead" by the United States government in an effort to forget, to move on, and to normalize relations with Hanoi. Among the missing are 58 MACV-SOG U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers—Green Berets—lost across the fence in Laos and Cambodia.

As of this writing, a full accounting of American POWs and MIAs from the war in Vietnam remains elusive.

Jack Carr

March 19, 2025

Limpopo Province, South Africa

PROLOGUE

Laos

May 1968

IT WAS THE ABSENCE of sounds that alerted him.

The jungle, itself a living, breathing creature, spoke to those who knew its secrets.

A pause in its natural rhythm was a warning; intruders had violated its sanctity.

The jungle is neutral.

That's what Dad used to say after he got into the brown water.

That was a different time. A different war.

The jungle remains neutral.

Supposedly so did Laos, but only on paper. In reality, Laos allowed the NVA, the North Vietnamese Army, to resupply units in South Vietnam in direct violation of the 1962 Geneva Accords. To do so, they used the Truong Son Strategic Supply Route, known in the West as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. That was where MACV-SOG came in and why Thomas Reece, Gunner's Mate First Class, SEAL, United States Navy, lay sweating on the jungle floor in the oppressive humidity beneath the triple canopy that kept his world in a perpetual state of dusk. His ears, nose, eyes, and mouth were under attack by hungry malaria-ridden mosquitos while the leeches that had found their way under his clothing were swelling to the size of thumbs with his blood.

MACV-SOG was the rather innocuous name for Military Assistance Command, Vietnam—Studies and Observations Group. With operators selected primarily from

the ranks of the 5th Special Forces Group, MACV-SOG Recon Teams were tasked with prosecuting the secret war across borders in Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam. Though the team did “study and observe,” more often than not they brought death and destruction to the enemy on their home turf. They had become so effective that the NVA had deployed specially designated hunter-killer teams focused on neutralizing the SOG threat. Trained by the 305th Sapper Command, the NVA enlisted the assistance of expert local hunters and trackers, offering sizable bounties for any SOG personnel—dead or alive.

Tom ever so slightly tightened his grip on the chopped Soviet-designed Chinese-made 7.62 x 39 RPD machine gun. He had modified it by shortening the barrel and removing the bipod to give him a weapon that felt closer to Eugene Stoner’s famed Stoner 63 that Tom had carried on his last SEAL deployment in the Rung Sat Special Zone in the swamps of the south. Things were different in the mountains of Laos, but what remained the same was the need to unleash as much chaos as the gods of war would allow when there was no choice but to go kinetic.

A Montagnard mercenary lay an arm’s-length to his left. Another to his right. The name Montagnard came from the French and translated as “inhabitant of the mountains.” The indigenous fighters came from tribes of the Central Highlands and had formed a close alliance with American Army Special Forces teams.

The ‘Yards had sensed it too; the specter of death that hung over them in the perpetual mists of the highlands was descending. Once the rain started, it would make it hard for aircraft to identify the small element on the ground, a complication that meant no air support. They would be on their own. A benefit would be that the rain would allow them to move more quickly through the jungle, masking the team’s movement. As they were well aware, it did the same for the enemy.

At present, it was not the twenty-two varieties of poisonous snakes that infested the jungle that concerned Tom Reece. Neither was it the venomous spiders or foot-long centipedes and their toxins, nor the tigers that would trigger the ancient superstitions of his Montagnard teammates. It was not even the elephants that had once trampled a SOG hide site. Tom’s primary concern was the element of NVA soldiers converging on his team’s position.

Don’t fucking move.

The team was arranged in a tight circle facing outward. As the One-One, Tom was second in command. The leadership role landed on Frank Quinn—the One-Zero—a veteran SOG operator with Native American blood who had forgotten more about running ops across the fence than Tom thought he would ever know. Their fellow SOG brethren called them the Odd Couple after the recent Neil Simon film starring Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau, though none of them had yet seen it; new releases were hard to come by at FOB 1 in Phu Bai. Their partnership—one young Navy SEAL and one older Army Special Forces veteran—was unique in the annals of MACV-SOG, but it was hard to argue with their results. Quinn demanded the best, and Tom gave it. Even in the highly compartmentalized world of SOG, they had developed quite the reputation.

This operation was a typical wiretap mission to record transmissions along an NVA communications line. Upon returning to base, they would turn the physical recordings over to the intelligence analysts for exploitation. What made this task not so simple was that it was taking place across the border in Laos along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Though they had removed the tape from the recording device and respooled the wires from where they had attached them to what amounted to a phone cable, their scent lingered. That meant they could be tracked.

Nothing was overlooked or left undone when it came to blending in. They had only eaten Vietnamese food with no spices for four days prior to the op. In Indian Country one wanted to smell like an NVA soldier. The entire team was under a no showers, no soap, no deodorant, and no smoking order in the lead-up to a mission. Detergent was never used to clean their olive drab fatigues. They had worn their op uniforms for three days before insertion and even took constipation pills to stuff them up while they were across the border. *Leave no trace.*

The two Americans and six Montagnards all wore sterile uniforms—no name tags, unit patches, rank, or any other insignia adorned their clothing. No dog tags were worn around necks or attached to boot laces, though Tom wondered why they bothered; the NVA knew all about SOG Teams and was well aware of the impact they were having in Laos, which was why Hanoi had diverted critical resources to training the teams hunting them.

In the jungle, one could *feel* an enemy before the other senses registered their presence, before one heard a twig snap, observed the unnatural movement of a branch or leaf, or smelled the dried hot peppers or strong nuoc mam fish sauce favored by the Vietnamese seeping from sweat glands. Sometimes an enemy element would patrol right through a SOG perimeter and continue on, never knowing how close they had come to discovering the teams that dared venture into denied territory. It was the smell of fear-laced sweat that could give one away in the jungle. You had to become a part of it and make it a part of you.

While Tom carried the RPD, Quinn armed himself with the CAR-15 as did each of their Montagnard teammates, aside from their point man who dressed like an NVA soldier and carried an AKM Type 56. Six members of the eight-man team carried three claymores each. The 'Yard point man and M79 gunner carried one. That gave Recon Team Havoc—as their FOB commander had designated the joint Frank Quinn, Tom Reece, Army-Navy team—twenty claymore mines, which was more than any other operational SOG element. Quinn had insisted on it. That standard operating procedure had allowed Havoc to chain-link seven claymores just 10 feet away, the bold FRONT TOWARD ENEMY emblazoned on their green fronts. They were set against thick tree trunks to protect Havoc from the violent back blast of an amassed ten and a half pounds of C4. The detonation would send a combined 4,900 steel ball bearings ripping through the jungle at 4,000 feet per second, turning any living creature on the receiving end into pink mist.

Another five claymores were arranged behind them in a layered defense pattern attached to time fuses that would be primed as they passed by, beating a hasty retreat. To their flanks, the team had put out four toe poppers and two frag grenades on trip wires. Tom had replaced their standard 4.5-second fuses with smoke grenade fuses that had a zero-second delay.

Best-case scenario, the NVA would pass by completely unaware. Countless times Havoc had remained motionless as enemy soldiers stepped within feet of the camouflaged team, never the wiser.

Tom used all his senses to filter and assess information, including the sixth sense that Quinn preached was the most essential of all. *If they can see you, they can hit you; if*

they can hit you, they can kill you. Don't let them see you. And if you see them, you better shoot first. Do not hesitate.

If this went to shit, Tom would clack off the seven linked claymores. Four of the seven had Willie Pete grenades attached to their fronts, which would disperse gobs of burning white phosphorus into the approaching enemy. Tom's element would then fall back, tapping Quinn as they passed. Quinn's squad would remain online while Tom set up his section of the team at a slight offset. Quinn would then light the time fuse that would detonate his five additional claymores three minutes later.

In the resulting chaos, Havoc would make their escape. That was the hope. But as they all knew, things in the jungle rarely went as planned.

Forty millimeter—or mike-mike—grenades from their M79s were to be used next, followed by hand grenades. Their rifles and machine guns were a last resort. As soon as they started shooting, the NVA would know their precise location and concentrate all their fire in that direction. Weapons like the claymores, grenades, and 40mm mike-mikes kept the enemy guessing and would be Havoc's primary means of deterrent until they had no choice but to go to the guns. They would then continue to fall back toward an emergency extraction point to be picked up by H-34 Kingbee helicopters flown by South Vietnamese Air Force pilots. If they could summon fast movers for CAS—close air support—they would bring down a world of hurt on their pursuers. *If..*

Tom remembered the days of his first deployment with SEAL Team TWO in the Mekong Delta where, as a new guy, he had carried the Ithaca Model 37 pump-action 12-gauge shotgun with duckbill attachment when walking point in blue jeans and Converse All Stars. That seemed like a lifetime ago when he and his fellow Men with Green Faces rained down hell on Viet Cong patrols from ambush sites in the mangroves along the River of the Nine Dragons as it meandered its way toward the South China Sea. The amount of firepower carried by his twelve-man SEAL Platoon caused the Viet Cong to think their force far exceeded their actual numbers. That was a different mission. Those were VC. In Laos they were dealing with the NVA, an army that had been trained by the Soviets.

Even at midday it was gloomy beneath the triple canopy. At night it would be pitch black. Tom felt comfortable in the dark. It provided a blanket of security. It also meant

that an extraction was highly unlikely, keeping them behind enemy lines until at least sunup.

They traveled heavy, much heavier than Tom had when operating in the deltas of the south. Laos was an area that by international law was off limits, which meant it might be a while before they could contact the FOB through an overhead air asset or their top-secret Hickory radio relay site to request extraction. In these situations, extra magazines and grenades were more useful than anything out of a C-Ration. As Quinn was fond of pointing out: *I'd rather be hungry than dead.*

Tom's first-line gear consisted of a Browning Hi-Power 9mm pistol in a black leather holster on his right side, and an integrally suppressed .22 caliber High Standard H-D semiautomatic pistol on his left. A Randall Made Model 14 knife with its seven-and-a-half-inch blade and black Micarta handle in a weathered brown leather sheath was on his right hip behind the Browning. Bo Randall's company in Orlando, Florida, had been crafting knives since 1938, blades that had accompanied U.S. servicemen into the Second World War, Korea, and now Vietnam. The base tailor had modified Tom's fatigues and added extra pockets specifically sized for his signal mirror, notebook and pen, maps, morphine syrettes, a pen flare, whistle, compass, and his URC-10 emergency radio along with a frequency and code book. A fluorescent orange marking panel to signal aircraft and mark landing zones was stashed in one of two large cargo pockets on his pant legs. He wore black gloves with more breathable cloth on the tops and leather under the fingers and palms. The thumb, index, and middle fingers were cut off at the first joint. A Swiss Army Knife in his right pocket was tied to a belt loop with green parachute cord. Everything had a purpose.

Tom didn't dare look at the watch on his left wrist, a Rolex Submariner on a black nylon strap with two marine-grade snaps to which a leather cover was affixed to prevent reflection. A small Waltham compass was attached to the band just below the stainless-steel case of the timepiece. The watch reminded him of Saigon, of the CIA... of Ella.

Not now, Tom. Stay focused.

Like most SOG operators, Tom's second-line gear was attached to modified World War Two-era BAR—Browning Automatic Rifle—web gear. In Arctic canteen covers attached to the belt were his four additional RPD drums lined with strips of linoleum

to prevent the open-link metal non-disintegrating belts and rounds from rattling. He had increased the length of each belt from their standard 100 to 125 rounds per drum—every round mattered and could mean the difference between life and death for the entire team. A cut-down M79 was secured with a D-ring through the trigger guard on the left side of the harness. Additional BAR pouches carried two high-explosive 40 millimeter rounds, two flechette 40mm antipersonnel rounds filled with steel darts, four frag grenades, two smokes, and a white phosphorus grenade. A canteen and a gas mask were situated behind the ammo pouches. An extra claymore was attached to his chest—blasting cap removed. Also on the web belt was a Frank & Warren Survival Ax Type II, which he thought was superior to a machete due to its sharp hook that allowed him to cut vines regardless of which way it was swung. Anything that shined was covered with black tape. Anything that rattled was modified to keep unnatural sounds to a minimum. Of primary importance was a 12-foot section of green rope, coiled and attached to his web gear. It would be used to tie a Swiss Seat harness to clip into a rope, the operators called strings, dropped from a helo to hoist them out of the jungle. Then it was a freezing ride at 7,000 feet for the hour-long flight back to Phu Bai.

Quinn was similarly outfitted but ran his CAR-15 with thirty twenty-round magazines, each loaded with eighteen rounds. For his secondary he opted for the 1911A1 .45 pistol, one of only a few SOG pistols customized by gunsmith Armand Swenson. Instead of the Frank & Warren Survival Ax, Quinn carried a Special Forces-issued Peter LaGana hatchet from the American Tomahawk Company as a nod to his heritage, and because it was more effective than a blade for dispatching sentries.

A specially designed Indig Ruck, the brainchild of Conrad Bennet “Ben” Baker of the obscure Counterinsurgency Support Office hidden away in Okinawa, Japan—SOG’s own Q Branch from the popular James Bond films—held Tom’s third-line gear. In it, he stowed an extra canteen with water purification tablets taped to the outside. They supposedly killed whatever microorganisms lived in Laotian streams, and he hoped counteracted the Agent Orange defoliation chemical the U.S. blanketed over the jungle from the air. The pack also contained a medical kit, six extra grenades, three more smokes, eight M79 rounds, additional claymores that now lined the perimeter, and a small plastic tube of indigenous rations also developed by the ingenious Ben

Baker that consisted of precooked lightly seasoned rice with fish, shrimp, or meat laced with vitamin B. Though most recon teams carried a single large man-portable radio, Tom and Quinn both carried PRC-25s, hefty, unwieldy communications devices that were their lifeline. They both believed it was worth the extra weight to have a backup. The PRC-25 was the most essential piece of equipment in their arsenal, capable of connecting them to A-1 Skyraiders, F-4 Phantoms, F-100 Super Sabers, A-6 Intruders, and AC-130E gunships. To prevent the radios from falling into enemy hands, a thermite grenade was taped to the sides to melt them into oblivion if the team was about to be overrun.

Each team member also carried handcuffs. They were always ready to grab an enemy combatant for their intelligence value. A live prisoner also meant five days of R&R in Taiwan or Thailand and one hundred U.S. dollars as a reward. Someone higher up the chain of command had figured that operators on the ground needed an additional incentive to carry an unwilling captive soldier out of the jungle when it might be much more efficient to simply slit their throat. Higher had been right. Instead of money and a vacation, the little people, as SOG affectionately referred to their Montagnards, on a successful prisoner snatch op would be honored with a new Seiko watch from supply.

If rain didn't ground the aircraft, Havoc would make contact with the Air Force FAC aircraft overhead—call sign Covey—in a low-flying O-2A Cessna Skymaster or possibly with a C-130 command post high above southern Laos. Coming over the radio with Prairie Fire Emergency would shift priority for all aircraft in the AO to the SOG Team under fire. Next to the pilot was a Special Forces MACV-SOG soldier, a Covey Rider, who could speak directly with the unit in contact on the ground, help direct strikes, and guide the recon team to their LZ for pickup.

A favorite aircraft amongst all SOG Teams was the slow and highly maneuverable A-1 Skyraider, a venerable single-prop plane of Korean War vintage that could carry more than its own weight in ordnance. While jets typically had about fifteen minutes of loiter time and had difficulty dropping ordnance closer than 250 meters to a team in contact, the A-1 could provide support for over an hour. It had an array that included cluster bombs, napalm, 250-pound white phosphorus munitions, and a 20mm cannon that could cut down the enemy within 5 meters of a SOG Team in contact. This was

extremely helpful as most contacts in the heavy jungle took place at distances of less than 20 feet. All SOG operators at one time or another had prayed to hear the distinctive growl of a low-flying Skyraider screaming in just above the canopy. Recon Teams out of FOB 1 were usually supported by A-1s from the 56th Special Operations Wing in Da Nang. They were the best in the business.

Havoc had made contact in eleven out of their last thirteen missions as a team. All of them had been wounded, but, so far, they had not had any fatalities. Tom knew that one day his Frogman luck would run out. All he could do was hope that day wasn't upon them.

Did Dad ever feel like this, Tommy gun in hand, battling the Japanese in World War Two?

Dad didn't have claymores.

Tom shifted his eyes to the right. Even though he was less than four feet from Mang Hai, their Montagnard team leader, Tom couldn't see him. Mang was Tom's age but looked younger. He had been a replacement for Amiuh. Tom missed Amiuh. Quinn still carried the Montagnard's rosary in his pocket. Amiuh's wife had insisted upon it. His death had hit Quinn particularly hard.

Mang lived for one purpose: to kill NVA. The AK round that had grazed Mang's scalp on their last mission only added fuel to his fire. The Montagnard hated the North Vietnamese more than the Americans did. Truth was, the 'Yards hated all Vietnamese. They had history.

Rain began to fall through the mist.

A part of the SEAL prayed they would continue on, none the wiser. Another part was itching to cut them all down. This was war, a war that had claimed too many of his friends.

It took all of Tom's strength not to wipe away the sweat that crept down from under the green cravat do-rag that obscured his dark blond hair. The salty liquid traversed over his camouflage face paint to sting his eyes. He found that the cravat worked better for him than the boonie hat favored by Quinn. He also liked the fact that the prop wash of an approaching helo wouldn't blow it from his head.

Maybe we're going to get lucky.

Then he heard the clacking.

NVA trackers would signal each other and the main element by tapping two pieces of bamboo together.

Perhaps the trackers didn't have dogs.

Then Tom heard the barking.

Shit.

This is about to get western.

They had unclipped the phone cable tap and were fading back from the trail into the shadows of the jungle when the enemy patrol appeared, forcing them into their perimeter, behind the claymores. They had covered their scent with a mixture of CS powder—a potent irritant—and black pepper as they respooled the wires attached to the communications lines along the trail. The mixture was highly effective, though it did not work if the dogs had been fooled before. Bloodhounds used by the NVA were smart. If they had previously encountered the countermeasure, they would stop before getting close enough for it to destroy their sense of smell. Some would even circle around the concoction to pick up their quarry's scent on the other side.

Tom prayed these were not those kinds of dogs.

The barking stopped. Tom shut his eyes and focused on his hearing.

A dog was moving around the countermeasure.

He slowed his breathing.

Steady...

Tom gently removed the integrally suppressed .22 caliber High Standard H-D semiautomatic handgun from the holster on his belt. The World War Two-era pistol had been modified by Bell Laboratories for the Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor to the CIA. With the type of ammunition that made up the ten rounds in the magazine and one in the chamber, it suppressed the shot to 20 decibels, or the sound of a light cough. The longer Tom's team could go without revealing their exact location, the better.

Tom brought the pistol up as deliberately as he could. Havoc's advantage was stealth. The NVA had to move to find them, making noise, while Havoc could remain still, silent, and camouflaged.

Get ready.

The barking was getting closer, now from the flank.