

Brigadier General Hiram Talbott Cork

“Old soldiers never die. They just fade away.”
-Douglas MacArthur

God damn this place. This is the last place in the world you want to be. Nothing here but pointy-headed scientists, idiotic civilians, and sand. Even worse, Darla won't talk to you any more.

And things had seemed so promising for you once. Your father had been a cavalry officer in the Spanish American War, and his tales of riding into battle, swinging his saber, left such an impression on you that there was never any doubt that you would join the military. You graduated from West Point in 1929, fourteenth in a class of a hundred, and settled into life as a young officer at Fort Dix in Louisiana. The pay was terrible, but after the Depression hit everyone was thankful just to have a job. You slowly rose through the ranks, and married a local girl named Loretta Thomas. The two of you lived happily and raised three kids: Nathan, James, and Maureen.

In 1941 the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor, and all hell broke loose in the ranks. Everyone knew that it was going to be a long war, and the small regular army just wouldn't cut it. Draftees started pouring in, and you were bucked up from Captain to Major and given a battalion to get into shape for the coming fights. You led that brigade through the deserts of North Africa, the mud and rains of Italy (taking a bullet in the leg at Anzio) and prided yourself on being one of the first Infantry groups to hit the beach at Normandy. After pushing through to the Rhine, HQ made you a Lieutenant Colonel and gave you the job of helping clean up the straggling Nazi armies in western Germany.

At the beginning of the war, you had been worried about what your career would be like afterwards; sure, you were getting a quick promotion then, but everyone expected the army to pare back down to a small size after the war, and suddenly half the COs wouldn't have troops to command. Luckily, the gnashing of teeth between America and the Russkies made sure that no one wanted to be unprepared for the fight everyone expect to see next. You kept your rank and were stationed in West Germany, one of the first groups of infantry that would see combat when the Commies finally decided to make their move.

Well, the Commies made their move all right, but it wasn't in Europe. Hordes of them swung down from North Korea into the South, and MacArthur did a grand old dance of pulling back until he could pull back no more, then doing a sea invasion of the North, forcing the lines back beyond the 38th parallel. The U.S. and U.N. forces would have blown straight through to the China border if it hadn't been for tens of thousands of Chinese streaming in to help the North Koreans fight. When Washington realized what trouble MacArthur was in (not that MacArthur ever would have admitted it), you got

mobilized and sent to help out. That was a damned fight, too, hills everywhere prepped with mines and barbed wire, troops dug in so deep that it took a day of carpet bombing to advance a single hill, a mess everywhere you looked at it.

And you loved it. Nothing is as invigorating, as wonderful as the smell of gunpowder, the sound of falling bombs and the sight of Commie hordes laying down and dying. Once you've seen that, my friend, nothing will ever be the same. Ah, to be back at Hamburger Hill, Hill 426, or any of those other places where you *know* you're alive; where every sense is on fire, and every essence of your being is hooked into just staying alive.

But, that wasn't the way things worked out. They made you a Colonel during the fights, and after Eisenhower came over and settled out a peace, you were sent back to the states to run the new conscripts in at Fort Bragg. It wasn't much of a job, but without any hot war going on, being able to lead troops through exercises was about as close as you could get. Life outside of the barracks went on as well; the kids were all off at school, and Loretta passed on in '56 after a year of fighting off cancer.

Then, two years ago they gave you a star. Brigadier General. You were ecstatic. You were in the big time now, able to give orders to a whole mess of troops with only a couple of people above you to keep tabs on you. Yes, sir, you were on your way up. Rare is the brig at fifty who doesn't make four-star by sixty-five. And then you got your assignment. Commander of Ft. Lucas Rita and the adjoining Research Labs.

Well, looks like you're going to be one of those rare brigs who doesn't make four-star. Hell, you'll be lucky to see two-star with this dirt job. The only brigs who get promoted are those commanding troops and maneuvers out in the front lines of Europe or Japan. Running some dinky little base out in the middle of Arizona is a guaranteed ride into oblivion.

That was your original opinion when you got your orders. You hate to say it, but you were being mighty optimistic. You didn't realize how much of a pain in the ass it would be to try and run a research institute. The pointy-heads all look down on you because you don't know what a tri-dilithum regulated monitor is. And even though you're supposed to be in charge, getting them to stop toying with weird ideas and start working on real projects for Uncle Sam is like trying to shoot a bird out of a tree two miles away. You're sure there are people out there who can do it; but you aren't one of them. Then there are the locals, all of whom seem to think you're doing something big and dangerous in here, and wondering when something big is going to explode in the middle of town. It seems like every month you have to stand up and reassure everyone that this isn't going to be Alamagordo or Bikini Atoll. Tonight, for example, you and the heads of the various departments are supposed to give some sort of presentation to the town about the kind of things you're working on.

So here you are, stuck in the middle of nowhere, trying to make a competent crew out of a group of doctors who don't respect you, civilians who want you to be in someone else's back yard, and you don't even want to think about the quality of the troops you have on base. It's not Colonel Daniels' fault. Hell, Fred's a good guy, a young up-and-coming like you were before they sent you off to pasture here. He's smart, and you don't doubt he'll get a star pretty soon. But you'll be damned if you don't think that everyone who only barely based their physicals or showed incredible incompetence in the line of duty got sent here to torment you.

And just a few months ago, things had started to look up. There's this girl in town, Darla Hotchkins. She's the school nurse at Edwood High. You met her in one of the little pits they call a bar around here, and she told you that she had always been intrigued by military men. Well, you naturally took the opportunity to explain to her all about military men, and show her a few things about military men that you don't think she knew before. Now, a gentleman never truly describes exactly what goes on in his love life, but let's just say that she cooks a mean breakfast.

Unfortunately, the bloom was off that rose nearly as soon as it started. She doesn't return your phone calls, has not once acknowledged the flowers you sent, and she seems to ignore you as if she had no idea about who you are. Damn it, if it was just going to be a fling, you wish she'd have told you before hand. You'd still have done it, but you wouldn't have gotten so caught up in it and made yourself look like a fool. You should have known something was up when she called you "March" in the middle of the act.

So that all went to hell, and then Dr. Berry, head of the Astronomy Department, just up and quits. Says he got a better offer from a university out in California, and he's using his vacation time for his last two weeks. Damned shame, since he was one of the only people who would listen to you. And to make matters worse, the only qualified replacement for him was Dr. Sarah Carroll. Now, she might be just fine and dandy at home in the kitchen, but running a big operation like this is no job for a woman. But Dr. Bates, the Lead Scientist and theoretical head of the Labs, pushed you hard to choose her, and it's not like you had anyone else to take the job. So you gave her the nod.

And then you get a call from Col. Harry Eider, back at the Pentagon. He was your main aide back in the Big One, and he works military intelligence now. Well, he let you know that he had picked up on some embassy taps that the Commies were getting information about some new weapons- top-secret weapons that were being developed in your base. He wanted to give you a heads up so that you could stop the problem before it became something big and unstoppable. Well, that's just what you needed. Stuck in a hell-hole like San Inguon, the last thing you need is to be caught with your pants down. So you called another friend in Washington, who relayed a message to the CIA division in California, who sent out one of their best agents. Tom Madden should be showing up anytime now; for all you know, he's already in town. Hopefully, he'll be able to find out who's been leaking secrets to the Ruskies, and you can clear your name.

In fact, you might be able to do more than clear your name. If you and Tom can break down most of this spy ring, you might get noticed by the big boys at the Pentagon, and you might just yet get a second star. At the very least, if you do well enough here, you might be able to finagle your way into a position in Europe, where you'll be back on the upwards path. So look sharp, dress your lines, and make sure those intellectuals don't do anything really stupid.

Stock quote: "We seem to have a situation here that calls for massive firepower."

Mannerisms: Combine the roles of George C. Scott from "Patton" and George C. Scott in "Dr. Strangelove." Bombastic, over-bearing, intolerant, and in love with destructive power.

People You Know:

Colonel Fred Daniels: Commander of the military troops at Ft. Rita. A strong, capable, and intelligent man, he is one of the best subordinates that you have ever had.

Dr. Lawrence Bates: Head of the Physics Department at the Labs. As Head Scientist, he is responsible for most of the day to day activities, as well as translating most of what is being done into terms you can understand. At least theoretically. Unfortunately, he is the epitome of the absent-minded professor, and you doubt that he can run his own office, let alone the Labs. Unfortunately, he has seniority over the other Department Heads, so you have no choice but to continue him at his job.

Dr. Marshall Fields: Head of the Chemistry Department at the Labs. A very vain and secretive man, but he has done wonders for new chemical weapons. Very into the destructive powers of Chemistry, and therefore a fine scientist in your opinion.

Dr. Gerald Forbes: Head of the Biology Department at the Labs. A fine, upstanding young man. At least, he was until his wife died in a car accident two weeks ago. He's been mostly solitary and quiet since then. You understand; he needs time to deal with the situation. Still, he does have a job to do, and grieving needs to be done on his own time, not the government's.

Dr. Sarah Carroll: Head of the Astronomy Department. A head-strong, pushy person who is the symbol of every feature you dislike in a woman. You wish she'd give up on playing with a man's job and go back to keeping a clean house, where she belongs.

Mayor Cunningham: Epitome of a slimy politician. Says one thing to you, one thing to his constituents, and it's anyone's guess what he'll really do. You dislike dealing with him, but usually you have no choice. After all, if you piss him off, he can get a couple of Senators and Congressmen pissed off, and then you'll have no chance of seeing two stars.

Harold Sturvin: The richest man in all of San Inguon, if not Arizona. He made his money off of some uranium mines, so much of his wealth is tied into government contracts. For this, he toadies up to you sometimes. You don't mind this; it's nice to have *someone* toadying up to you.

Darla Hotchkins: An extremely attractive young woman whom you had an affair with recently. You'd like to confront her and find out what her intentions towards you are;

you'd like to know whether she'd still like to get together every once in a while or whether the entire deal is off. Strange woman; her emotions are like hot and cold.

Goals:

1. Preserve the integrity of Ft. Rita. Find out who's been spying, and deal with them. The last thing you need on your record is a serious security breach of a base you were in charge of.

2. Keep the base out of trouble. Keep an eye on the scientists and make sure they're not up to something dangerous or illegal. Make sure that the town continues to tolerate the base being around, and quell any rumors about dangerous projects being worked upon.

3. Make yourself look good. Take charge of every situation, and if it works well, take all the credit. If it doesn't, find a scapegoat. No matter what else, come out of this smelling like a rose. Even if you have to destroy the careers of everyone around you, you're not going to end up holding the bag if Washington decides that someone here really screwed up.