

Daughter of Pallas

It had been a long and difficult two weeks. This was their final session. Grav was looking forward to it. He was looking forward to the end of it. School's out! Today was the Final Exams, Homecoming Game, the Senior Prom and Graduation. All combined in one day, in an Olive Drab and beige briefing room. Not to belittle it though. This could be the most important curriculum he had ever completed in a lengthy and complex academic career.

There were very few exercises *cum* exams administered during the two weeks. Grav did observe each instructor taking careful notes during Question-and-Answers, and post-briefing discussions. At these times the instructor would exert themselves to challenge each man in turn, with the questions, their opinions, or their applied learning. No game.

Grav had a sort of an itchy interest in this session. Craig Polemos was an impressive fellow. Very sharp. Straight talker. Knew his business. Whatever his business really was. Grav suspected that when he wasn't in the roll of an analysis and instructor, he was some type of intelligence agent.

But overriding it all, pervading the previous briefings, everyone had been dancing around some factor still to be clarified. He was tired of it. He suspected the nature of the issue. Wanted it over with. Wanted some straight talk. Waiting for the punch-line.

As the group seated themselves, Billy took the chair next to Grav for the first time in the two weeks. Billy immediately started to write again. Grav knew he was sufficiently intelligent to write his papers and take in the class. This was probably going to annoy Polemos though. Although Polemos might mistake this for note taking. Billy did demonstrate the discretion to casually rest an arm on the table, concealing his work.

Everyone was in high spirits. Like Grav, they evidenced an air of expectation. Almost excitement. Should be an interesting session. No matter what, it was the end. The tiny Officer's Club bar would probably be shoulder-to-shoulder by 1700. Maybe Polemos would join in?

Craig Polemos entered the room. He too had a reserved, expectant look about him.

'Good morning gentlemen. Welcome to the final session. At day's end, you should know as much as anyone in the world about the tactics and technology of Eastern Seaboard, surface-to-air, thermo-nuclear defenses.

As I'm sure you know, you've been carefully observed throughout this period. As a consequence some of you will be assigned command positions here at Tilden. Some will be assigned to other IFC's in the coastal defense network. And others will be assigned support roles. This will be based on the decisions of Gen. Duff, Col. Kidd and a panel (including myself) of selected instructors, as well as other Officers here on Tilden. Whatever your assignment, every one of you will assume a critical role in U.S. defenses. Bear that in mind.

Col. Kidd will convene a final briefing Monday morning at 0900 and PDA's 30/ will be given to you at that time.

Let's run through a fast review of the last two weeks (consulting his notes):

- You have been familiarized with Soviet bombers, support aircraft (escorts and tankers), as well as escort fighter-interceptors. No one knows more about this topic than you, except the Soviets themselves. I assure you.
- You know how to operate and maintain your launch and guidance support systems. The 9-5000 computers and the Launch Control Station. Fortunately, many of you have prior experience. So this was excellent re-enforcement training.
- You know everything now about the Nike Hercules. Range, speed, altitude, fueling, arming, mounting, maintenance, security and Brigade defensive procedures. As you must be aware by now, you're part of a large, well coordinated, and highly trained *team*. As part of this team, some of you will be performing one of the loneliest, most frightening jobs in the world. I empathize with you gentlemen. Believe me. In the end it's just you and the button. We have equipped you as well as we can; and I assure you, support will be non-stop and ongoing.

- You know the chain of command and the attendant communications, security and launch procedures. Keep your SOP nearby. This Training and Activation Agenda yielded a smaller OD cadre than we had planned. Therefore, we'll keep on searching for and vetting re-enforcements. In the mean time, you should anticipate spending about 5-6 shifts per week "in the barrel". Doesn't sound like much really. But considering the readiness levels you will be mandated, the number of exercises and joint exercises, and the site standards that will be imposed, you'll be busy. You may even enjoy parts of it.

I know you've covered a great deal more. But these are the cogent points for our last briefing and we face a full and perhaps difficult day, so we need to keep moving.

Questions?

Fine let's get started. Let's talk about some hard realities.

One. In any attack scenario, despite the best efforts of NORAD and SAC we know the odds are extremely high that some Badger Bombers will penetrate their defenses and breach American airspace. For our purposes, assume they will.

Two. The TU-16's hardened skin will probably not withstand a close proximity Nike detonation using a High Explosive warhead. That would be the conventional T-45 fragmenting warhead. Crew and aircraft will be destroyed.

Three. As we now know, the bomb bay of the re TU-16 is climatized, and in all likelihood further hardened. We do know their nukes are *massively* hardened.

Four. A Nike Hercules with an HE tip will not destroy their bomb within an acceptable margin of assurance. The degree and acceptability factors here are handed down by the JCS and the Secretary of Defense. Their nuke will be active and perhaps undamaged after destruction of the airframe. It can kinetically travel inward into our airspace and detonate. Even if it simply fell directly to the ground, its altimeter detonation would kick in automatically; and it would be terribly destructive. If we destroy only the plane and crew, we have gained *nothing*.

Five. As a direct consequence, all Herc's will be equipped with W-31 Nuclear Warheads. The yield will be preset. Your pit crews will only plug in, mount and deploy to the launch apron. Neither you, nor they, have authority regarding yield calibration. If you recall, that is the one training item we have not covered. You can be damned sure that Soviet calibrations will be massively greater than anything preset on the W-31. Let's say 25 Soviet megatons, compared with 2.5 megatons on the W-31. That's an exponential differential in destructive capability. A horrendous net gain between 2.5 and 25. You will be saving lives. I know it feels all wrong, but you will be saving lives.

Six. In any event, the W-31 yield calibration is not terribly relevant. The thermo-nuclear kill radius of even our lowest calibration will reach ground zero from any attack altitude capable of their bomb groups and selected by the Soviet command.

Seven. The MBA of your birds are also preset, as you know. However, again as you know, you can override the preset. This you will do if the Badgers come in at under 20,000 feet. They probably will in my opinion. You can calculate the commensurate surface destruction as the nuclear burst is proportionately lower. It's like pushing a beach ball into a tub of water. The surface displaced is geometrically expanded for every centimeter the ball is submerged. Even at 2.5 megs an extreme low-level MBA will wreak square miles of havoc on the ground.

Seven. If you do your job, Soviet bombers will *not* destroy any areas on the Eastern Seaboard. *You will*. This is as close to a win scenario as there is.

Eight. The 52nd Brigade IFC Commander will make all such determination, within a probable launch window of approximately fifteen minutes. No time to fuck around.

Your Launch Commander will have complete information on the tactical situation. Attack force, altitude, bearing, speed and control over Tilden and the IFC's throughout our corridor. His job is to decide when to fire and set MBA. Your birds will be pre-calibrated so that's the only decision you don't have to make. Your finger on the launch trigger, although you'll be supported by the entire available command infrastructure ... though at say ... 0300 hours on a Sunday, Christmas Morning, with a Fifteen minute launch window. You

cannot expect the same level of command support. That's a worst-case however. Odds are that NORAD, SAC and the DEW line will have provided a sufficiently early warning.

Grav. 'So we launch a nuke to take out a nuke?'

Polemos. 'Exactly.'

Lufe. 'Then we could take ourselves out as well.'

Polemos. 'Well put.'

Lufe. 'What is the probably of that?'

Polemos. 'Very high.'

Major Fairchild. 'We could be led into a "one shot" scenario. We destroy ourselves and there's no one to defend against 2nd and 3rd wave incursions. All missile defenses will be depleted within range of this corridor.'

Polemos. 'That is a valid scenario. That's why we have inland defense fallback installations. And we will have gained time to scramble additional interceptors. They pick up when you drop out. However, this is a cascading defense strategy. If the Soviets can deploy wave after wave. Ultimately they will have taken us all out, and our interceptors, and their destructive capability will be unchallenged. Scant comfort, but our bomb groups will be doing the same over there. The Think Tanks have coined a new buzz-word that's starting to circulate with insiders around Washington. As new technologies are unveiled, we expect the acronym to be a best seller in a few years. MAD. Mutually Assured Destruction.'

Grav whispered to himself, under his breath. 'Insane.'

Silence in the room. Grav noticed that Billy was rubbing his silver dollar in one hand in his lap.

Polemos. 'I doubt all defenses in our corridor would be destroyed in the same assault. Although, if the MBA is sufficiently low, which I deem highly probable, everything changes.'

Gentlemen we cannot prevent the Soviets from attacking the East Coast. We can only ensure they don't penetrate our skies to wreak even more damage.'

Bill Conley suddenly slapped the table; head down with bitter, totally silent laughter.

Polemos frowned. Concern, confusion and irritation. 'Do you find this amusing Captain?'

Conley looked up, cast a penetrating look to Grav and whispered out the side of his mouth 'It's the Invisible Hand Grav.' Aloud he said with great certainty. 'No. I certainly do not. Not in the least.'

Polemos. 'Do you have a point to make Captain?'

Conley. 'Things are moving with or without our attempts to control them. As individuals, or as countries, we appear to have no governance over our future. Our survival. I believe this is incredibly dangerous. Incredibly reckless.'

Polemos wryly smiled. 'Welcome to the real Cold War gentlemen.'

'Are we clear? Do you have any questions?'

He waited some moments before continuing. He seemed to sense this was a critical point in the briefing. He'd been here before.

'I trust you're prepared to assume your duty commands as assigned on Monday. Intensive exercises will begin almost immediately under the direction of Col Kidd.' Polemos looked at them, almost challengingly. Jaws clenched. Lips compressed.

This provoked an uproar. The session continued on noisily and intensively for hours. Polemos understood this reaction quite well. It was very much like tending to a delirious fever victim. You just had to let it run its course. Wait for the fever to break. Rebellion at this point was normal. Human.

Only one short break in the long day to bring in lunch.

Not a person in the room thought of anything else. Complete fixation on the issue. Polemos went over and over the options, imperatives and technology. Polemos didn't really have control any more. Bitter objections. The group

took apart everything he said, challenged it, and re-modeled it. They developed scenario after scenario. They argued heatedly, almost frantically with Polemos and between themselves. In the end, they simply could not escape, or discredit the same tragic conclusion.

‘Assignments will be distributed on Monday, and aerial combat games will commence soon thereafter. I’ll be here on Monday, throughout the week, and at irregular intervals thereafter. Among your hand-outs you will find my card. Call me anytime.’

The poor stenographer was exhausted. Polemos was exhausted. The group was completely spent, and in a sort of shock.

Thank you for your time gentlemen. I know this has been very difficult. This completes your Training and Activation Agenda. Congratulations and welcome to the 52nd.