

THE VOYAGE OF THE
STINGRAY

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Richard Steinitz

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This book would not be what it is without the assistance of two genuine friends, who gave of their time and knowledge to help me write a better book.

Jimmy Olsen

Author of *The Poison Makers*, *Scuba*, etc.

Who has been my mentor and supporter, my inspiration and my guide, who has always been there with good advice and encouragement.
A better friend I know not, without us ever having met face to face.

George W. Jackson

Captain USN (Ret.)

Former Lockwood Chair of Undersea Warfare

U. S. Naval War College

Who voluntarily gave of his extensive knowledge and experience, and many hours of editorial time, to make the contents of this book more accurate and real. Any and all mistakes or inaccuracies are mine alone.

I am deeply indebted to you both, and cannot express my thanks enough.

PREFACE I

The agent lived a sedentary life in general, totally cut off from the rest of the world. On occasion, he thought to himself that his life was a bit like that of the man in the story “The Man Without a Country” by Edward Everett Hale. He had no contact with people from outside the Institute, other than a few military and political persons who needed and wanted to speak with him, and only with a limited number of those from within the organization, who knew of his existence.

Being without any close relatives at all, no-one asked about him or questioned his disappearance. Minor acquaintances who enquired about him were told that he had died in a road accident abroad and had been cremated. There was no-one to ‘mourn’ him and no-one who would want to visit his grave.

The big differences between himself and the “Man Without a Country” were that he had volunteered for his situation, and that he loved his country dearly. Everything he had done was purely and simply in aid of the continued existence of the state.

Over the years in solitude, he had undergone several minor plastic surgeries, in order to slightly alter his appearance and make him 100% indistinguishable (instead of the 99% that nature had given him) from the man he was due to replace.

Even his occasional female visitors were literally kept in the dark. They would enter his bedroom with a sleeping mask on, and he would guide them to his bed. Once the lights were off, they could remove the mask. When their assignation was over, they would put the mask back on and he would guide them to the door and let them out. He had no need of light in his room – after five years, he knew every square millimeter or square inch of it with his eyes closed.

Such was his life. He would read all the newspapers supplied to him in several languages, listen to the radio and watch television shows that interested him, but there was little more to it than that. His was a waiting game, and no-one knew when it would be over.

PREFACE II

The USS Princeton entered Pearl Harbor and headed for her berth in the submarine hub. Below decks, the Captain was in his cabin, having left the docking of Princeton to his XO, Lt. Commander Jeff Woodbridge. Woodbridge was the ideal model for a submariner – only 5’8” tall and weighing in at 145 pounds the last time he checked – he was built for life on a boat. Submarines were no place for tall and hefty sailors, even on the newest classes of nuclear boats. Big sailors belong on big ships, not in a submarine’s cramped quarters.

Once the Princeton was tied up alongside the dock, Woodbridge ordered shore power to be brought aboard and the reactor and propulsion plant shut down according to end-of-cruise procedures and the crew mustered on deck. He went to the Captain’s cabin, knocked, and went in. The Princeton’s captain was sitting at his tiny desk, with a cigar in his mouth and a pile of official envelopes in front of him. He looked up as the XO entered and said: “This pile contains new orders for about 25 of the crew. See to it that they receive them, and then dismiss those going on leave. I will stay on board till my replacement arrives.”

“Aye, Aye Captain.”

“And there is one envelope for you too, there. So, good-bye, and good luck.” He handed the pile to Woodbridge, shook his hand, showed him out and then shut the door.

Jeff Woodbridge never ceased to be amazed at the broken personality of his Captain. He was the ultimate professional when it came to running his boat, a perfectionist to the point of OCD, but he was also a total sociopath, and kept his contact with other human beings to a bare minimum. Jeff had learned this the hard way, but in the end, had accepted it and had served for three years with Captain Morningside, becoming an excellent sub-driver and superior officer in the process.

After dismissing the crew to leave, he watched them all go down the gangplank and when he was 100% sure that they had all left the boat, went to his cabin to get his sea bag. Before leaving, he sat down and opened the manila envelope to read his new orders.

‘LT. COMMANDER WOODBRIDGE IS HEREBY ORDERED TO REPORT TO THE OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER, NAVAL SUBMARINE FORCES (COMSUBFOR), AT THE PENTAGON. HE IS TO CALL THE OFFICE OF COMSUBFOR TO COORDINATE THE MEETING WHICH IS TO TAKE PLACE ONE MONTH FROM TODAY.’

This was a career-changing message, though he did not know the real meaning behind it. It obviously involved a new assignment, and he had great hopes as to what that would be, but only when he met COMSUBFOR himself would he know his fate.

When he went home that afternoon, his wife Shirley was thrilled to see him after a 30-day cruise, but was unsettled by the news of his new orders. They had lived on base in Pearl for just

over three years, and she was enjoying Hawaii. The children were happy in their schools and she was not looking forward to moving again, though that was to be expected as a military family.

Woodbridge spent the next three weeks on vacation, just enjoying the time with his wife and children. There was no way of knowing if his next posting would be at Pearl or some other navy base, so they didn't pack up the house. They did do some serious cleaning and threw out as much accumulated and unnecessary 'junk' as they could, so that if a move was on the books, it would be as easy as possible. They said nothing to the children, just that their father would be flying to Washington at the end of the month.

When the time came, he dropped the kids at school and went home to pick up a small overnight case, and then Shirley drove him over to Hickam Field to catch a military flight to D.C. He was booked to overnight in Washington at a mid-class hotel not far from the Pentagon which was used to catering to military visitors and was accommodating with extending and shortening stays when necessary. The next morning he would report to COMSUBFOR and find out what this was all about.



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[PAGE 36]

STINGRAY VII

NCIS REPORT

Three days later, the new NCIS agent appeared on the dockside and asked to see Captain Woodbridge. The OOD (Officer of the Deck) sent a seaman down to the Captain's cabin to tell him. Woodbridge called the OOD and told him to send the agent down to his cabin, with a seaman to guide him and keep him away from things he shouldn't see.

The seaman knocked on the Captain's cabin, motioned the agent to enter and returned topside to continue his duties.

"Welcome. I assume you are Agent Briggs. Take a seat."

"Thank you. Yes, I'm Special Agent James Briggs, Captain, and here are my credentials. Glad to meet you."

Jeff had a quick look at the agent's wallet with his photo ID and NCIS badge, and said: "Likewise. Coffee?"

"No thanks, I'm fine."

"OK, what can I do for you, or what can you do for me?"

Briggs smiled. "I have a report for you on the progress of our investigation. I gave it to Admiral Towner, but he asked me to deliver it to you personally. Not sure why, but if an Admiral asks us to do something, we usually try to oblige."

"That would be a favor to me, Agent Briggs. I've known the Admiral for many years, and he knows that I want, and need to be kept up-to-date on this investigation."

"Fine with me, I enjoyed the ride up from Quantico, any excuse to get out of the office is a good one."

Briggs continued. "As I said, I have a written report, so why don't I just give it to you to read, take your time, and then once you're done, if you have any questions I'll try to answer them."

"Works for me," said Woodbridge.

Briggs handed him some papers and the Captain started to read them.

The report started with a letter from the agent to Towner.

From: Briggs, James

Special Agent, NCIS

To: Towner, George, Vice-Admiral

COMSUBFOR

Dear Admiral,

Attached are field reports from various agents that have been working on the case of Capt. Joe Moreno. To save you the bother of going through them all, this is the gist of where we are today:

- 1. After Capt. Moreno's body was found, Shore Patrol from Groton sealed off the base and the bay where your boat is being built. A complete headcount was made of all naval and civilian personnel who were supposed to be on base and at Electric Boat. A civilian worker, one Casper Kazmi, was found to be missing, despite having signed in at 2000 hours. He is a general worker who has been doing**

menial jobs on the SSL-1001 project since its start, and was supposed to be cleaning up dockside rubbish that morning next to your boat. And in response to the questions you obviously want to ask - yes, there are cleaners working at Electric Boat, hired for very ordinary work, but all of them have to pass the same normal security clearances that everyone else does. Mr. Kazmi has full security clearance, and was offered this job due to being unemployed, after his brother, Gunnery Sergeant George W. Kazmi, USMC, was killed while fighting in Iraq.

2. A very thorough search was made of the entire base and the Electric Boat complex. Mr. Kazmi was not found.
3. Together with the Groton, Conn. Police Department, NCIS carried out a search of his listed residence - a small apartment in Groton. He was not there, nor was there very much in the way of evidence of his having lived there, other than a toothbrush and some stale food in the refrigerator. The one other item of interest in the apartment was a large freezer chest with no less than three padlocks on it. Upon opening, it was found to be working, but empty. Once it was defrosted, our Crime Scene Unit found traces of clothing fibers and a few tiny bits of what appear to be human flesh. Unfortunately, the DNA had deteriorated due to the freezing process, making any identification of the remains totally impossible. The clothing fibers are common cotton, consistent with work clothes of the type worn by dock workers, but nothing more than that can be confirmed.
4. Later that afternoon, a call was received from the Connecticut State Police reporting that a burnt-out car was found in the Bluff Point State Park, with a body inside. There was very little other evidence found in the car, other than a half-melted Electric Boat identity badge in the name of Casper Kazmi - which is why they called us.
5. Being an organization with a suspicious nature, NCIS requested a complete and thorough autopsy of the body by our own medical examiner, including DNA analysis and facial reconstruction. The face that resulted from this was very similar to the photograph on the ID card, and to the video surveillance at the entrance to the Electric Boat shipyard, and would normally have passed inspection. Again, being very suspicious due to the circumstances, DNA analysis was done of the body and it did NOT match the DNA sample taken from the toothbrush from Mr. Kazmi's apartment. New, high quality facial recognition software was used to compare the reconstruction of the burned body with the video surveillance at the entrance to Electric Boat. The older, low-level software said that they were the same person, but the new program disagrees. There is apparently enough difference between the two to make the match less than 50%, which to me means that they are not the same person.

While probably not enough for courtroom proof, for us this is enough evidence that the man who was working dockside the night of Capt. Moreno's death was not the real Casper Kazmi. Further examination of the body from the burnt out car showed evidence that it had been frozen for some time (impossible to say how long) and then burnt in the car. Cause of death has not been determined at this time, due to the state of the body.

Our assumption, though not really based on concrete courtroom-level evidence of any kind, is that the body in the car is that of the real Casper Kazmi. Again, though there is no hard and fast forensic evidence, my gut says that the man on the dock (Mr. X for convenience's sake) killed Capt. Moreno by pushing him off the gangway, thereby breaking his neck. Mr. X is a total unknown at this point, nothing is known of his origins, background, affiliation, etc. How and when he managed to replace Kazmi and get into the dockyard is under investigation, but will take some time, if ever, to ascertain.

6. The real Casper Kazmi was single and lived alone in the apartment where Mr. X was staying. He was a second-generation immigrant, the only surviving son of an Iranian couple who came to the USA after the fall of the Shah in 1979. Both parents died a few years back, as far as we can tell (so far) of natural causes.
7. Both the Connecticut State Police and NCIS are working to try and find out more about Mr. X, but this will take time.
8. Until we know more, NCIS urges everyone involved in the SSL project to exercise the utmost caution.
9. Good Luck.

(Signed) Special Agent James Briggs

P.S. The one item of interest that was found in Kazmi's apartment was a very, very small digital camera. Some commercial model from SONY, which had been stripped down to make it even smaller and lighter. The slot for the memory card was empty, so we don't know what was on it. However, our tech lab tells me that they are hopeful that they will be able to recover the last 100 images or so from an internal back-up memory chip. This back-up is not advertised or listed in the camera's specs; it is an emergency function and it is quite possible that whoever used the camera did NOT know of its existence. If he had, he would have either destroyed the camera or taken it with him. If and when we recover anything from this memory, I will let you know a.s.a.p.

Woodbridge read the report twice, and then handed it back to Agent Briggs. "Disturbing, I would say. I take it you would like this back?"

"It's not a 100% requirement, but unless you have a good reason for keeping it, it's probably better that way."

"No problem. I've memorized the important bits. Is there anything in the actual agent reports that I should read?"

“No, it’s just loads of bureaucratic mumbo-jumbo that says what is in the two pages you just read.”

“Good enough, you can have it all back. Question is, what now?”

“I wish I knew,” said the agent. “We will continue our investigations and broaden their scope. I think we are going to send some information to parallel agencies in this country and abroad, and see if anything comes up. If I hear anything of interest, you’ll be the second person to hear – Admiral Towner gets priority.”

“Thanks, I appreciate it. I’ll let you know if by any chance anything happens here that you should know about. I’d offer you a tour of our boat, but then you’d see things that even an NCIS agent shouldn’t see and then there would have to be another investigation.”

“Don’t worry, Captain. I did my time in a *boomer* – the Woodrow Wilson (SSBN-624), about twenty-five years ago. I don’t need to know any more than that.”

“Glad to hear it. I’ll walk you up-top so you don’t get lost down here.” They both went topside and then after shaking hands, the agent went across the gangway and up to where he had left his car in the Electric Boat entrance circle.

Woodbridge went back to his cabin and thought for a while about what he had learned, then filed it away in his memory and went back to the day-to-day work of running Stingray.

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