

Channel 49
The Word

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Special Operations

Neither Sgts Cain nor Gilhooley had trained for 'hard-core' Special Ops but fell into it -- discovering it pays to be smart, scared, cautious and observant. Cain thought that being somewhat out-of-sync with the 'normal' was an advantage as it gave him both a chameleon-like subterfuge and sense of thinking removed from the ordinary.

Gilhooley had his first two initials and last name tattooed in a modest 16 point Sylfaen font over his right breast. Cain had no markings save a few fading scars. As Gilhooley explained, "Cain's people were Kenite. Long ago they had clan brandings on their right hand and a tattoo of Almighty God's name between their eyes. No one messed with the Kenites because of their retribution. Some of 'em wouldn't live in houses, either. But clan leaders put a stop to branding, scarring and tattooing, so Cain don't have any."

Hunkered down in the near darkness they synchronized watches and plans. Gilhooley observed a distraction in his cousin and inquired. Cain related a troubling dream: "Last day and last class of high school redux; very large campus suggestive of an engorged community college. Walked to a commercial new building where my barber had relocated in a secluded suite on an upper floor behind a restaurant's veranda. Missed my last class and still unable to find him for my graduation haircut. The restaurant on the veranda was closed and all interior doors led to nothing recognizable. ... Decided at the last minute to go on a cruise instead of the graduation dinner. Went to the ship where I joined R E --you know he bought it. I left the cane I had been using for the foot injury behind. Never boarded the ship, though, and instead got on a bus with anonymous others for the ride to the end of the graduation dinner. I saw a few classmates sitting at an outdoor table on the second floor. I thought it would be good to see Greg, again, who I knew was dead; but I didn't expect him and didn't look for him... As the bus pulled up I saw the great mass of classmates, well dressed and standing in preparation for the graduation march to the auditorium. I saw S standing with others near the Left entrance gate and wondered if she was any taller than I remembered or perhaps it was her shoes. I decided not to pass her and took the Right entrance gate from the bus. We few walked down a large hallway reminiscent of a stadium corridor growing dim at its unlit far end. One or two others ahead of me gave up and turned around. I persisted and saw that the corridor T-ed into another one which became well lit as it offered entry to the upper levels of several auditoriums as well as shops. The auditoriums I came across were sparsely attended for events like junior-twirling and not graduations. I decided to leave..."

"And what's up with that?" Gilhooley asked. -- "Getting on a cruise ship with a dead comrade, you know what that means" Cain answered.

"But Gil-boy, you did not get on the cruise ship and did not expect to see Greg at the place you decided to go; so you chose life. -- And as for S; that's you, boy, going the long way around rather than deal with something you bottled and left forever. Think you're good to go this leg." Cain nodded, "Suppose you're right. Got everything? -- Let's push off."

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Gilhooley was "shotgun" this trip as they were "Contract-Control" a term Cain made up for Combat Control which used to be Air Force; but with situations where U.S. Military could not be on the ground the dynamics changed; kind of like Lima 85 gone permanent. "Don't give me the radio," Gilhooley warned, "With those tracks booking in at 8 Klicks a second I can't orientate." -- "I forgot more than I ever thought I knew. They won't tell you what they're carrying either, though it's mostly JDAMs." Cain said.

Their biggest anxiety was always the "Friendlies" who they had to get close to without displaying the hyper-vigilance which came naturally. If there was a literate friendly they would communicate over a handheld using virtual keyboards and Google or Freemorn translator. But when the vibes went bad and the Friendlies went into a whispering huddle they wondered when to toss a frag and open up with controlled bursts. Instinctively they separated in relation to the distance of the "friendly" huddle and 'took a knee.'

A targeting request had originated from another source and the radio crackled asking for a visual at their approximate 020° from magnetic north. Cain told command and control, most likely a 'Joint-STARS,' he would check and put binoculars on his 2 o'clock horizon. He saw movement, probably two or three pickup trucks. "The enemy?" Gilhooley asked moving in a crouch behind him while watching their hosts 15 meters away. "Somebody's pissed off father-in-law or a cuckolded husband or somebody they owe money to; who the f--- knows... I'm tellin' ya getting inside work passing intel is better..." -- "I'm no indoor spy," Gilhooley said.

"We got two birds inbound -- Roger-that, uh, huh, uh huh; that's affirm; gotcha; over and out." Cain said partially to Gilhooley and the rest to the battle commander over the radio as he jotted down frequency numbers. "No gaggle, just two 16s Gunfighter 13 and 14 coming from our 7."

Gilhooley was perturbed and kept his gaze on the friendlies, his weapon slanted along his bent over midsection. Cain was on the radio: "George-Fox one-three this is Camel-Walk four, over..." using retro R-T then advanced four decades: "Golf-Foxtrot one-three this is Camel-Walk four, over..." The received a sputtering reply as acknowledgement. Cain on radio: "Visibility five miles; no ceilings; wind negligible, gusts under 3 knots out of Northwest. Suggest you make visual on IP under four Angels, over..."

An argument had broken out among their hosts and one man trying to stand was knocked down by the others. There seemed to be considerable vituperation above the furtive glances at Cain and Gilhooley. "Abort the run, cousin," Gilhooley advised. "Negative..." Cain replied. Get your gear and let's back away..."

"Uh, Camel Walk can you mark your position? Over" Gunfighter 13 asked. "Will do on your inbound in approximately 60 seconds..." Cain typed something onto his handheld and tweaked the text-to-speech app. The handheld blurted a long statement. Cain turned up the volume and held the device above his head, repeating it. Then he led Gilhooley in a fast rearward retreat. The huddle rose to a crouch but kept their weapons docile as they looked above.

"Whatja say?" Gilhooley asked. "I don't know... something like 'my angels are coming and I shall be a martyr.'" With a hill between them they paused. "Pop smoke." Gilhooley, an outfielder in high school, heaved a smoke grenade 20 meters to their 2 o'clock. Cain announced their position on the radio: "On the red our position is 20 meters from smoke at

225 degrees with magnetic North being trip-zip; roughly your 12 o'clock on inbound heading..." Then he tried to set up two gun-runs; one nearby and one for the approaching pickup trucks. The pilots didn't want to overfly their position on a gunrun. Cain persisted, "Our position perilous. Please comply request." Then he watched two glints approaching like shooting stars out of the clear sky with much noise. "Get down Gilly and pray."

They hugged dirt as fifty 20 mike-mikes murdered sand. In a moment a hundred more rounds exploded in the distance. There might have been a secondary. Cain and Gilhooley got up and ran. "Think they got 'em?" Gilhooley panted. "No. --maybe the trucks... buying us some time."

Gunfighter 13 and her sister-ship came around for another pass but requested updates on their targeting. Out of breath Cain answered: "Same coordinates; --we are exfiltrating under duress..." Cain pointed to a small rise another 50 meters further and they gave it their all to get there and hunker down with higher ground under them. Without standing as an advertisement they could see nothing but heard a burst of heavy automatic weapons fire. "Sounds like a Ma-Duece..." Gilhooley remarked. Cain thought it was 'grime-ier.' "14.5 maybe? --Could be one of them pickups got through... --Get out the GPS and map co-ords and if they pop up soon we'll try..." The radio blurted cryptic info. --"Say what?" Gilhooley asked. -- "They done with us. Gunfighter's been re-fragged to a bigger, more visible target. Size counts; it's a dollar and cents world..." Cain said.

"They ain't gonna send a pick-up chopper till after dark..." Gilhooley observed. They were quiet. "I'm not much good as a marksman past 90 meters..." Cain volunteered. Gilhooley laughed. "You qualify every year." -- "Not when it counts. -- So either you take the long shots or we have to wait till they're on top of us... Maybe I should crawl out to 30 meters on a slant and cover myself in dirt... Catch 'em in a cross-fire. Think I should slant left or right?" Cain asked studying the terrain.

"Gil, stay here." Cain looked at his cousin. "Better odds Skee if we break the action..." "Shoot, cousin, I don't want to die alone," Gilhooley said, and he wasn't joking.

"OK." They were quiet again, till Gilhooley spoke. "Did I ever apologize for hitting you?" -- "When's zat?" -- "In High School." Cain laughed. "Glad we had that fight." -- "Why?"

"Because I didn't like to fight unless I was real mad or didn't know the guy," Cain admitted. - - "What about the tough-egg you put a knife into, downtown?" -- "Didn't know him." They snickered. "No, you had a rep and after we had that toe-to-toe, everybody left me alone," Cain said.

"Chipped your tooth," Gilhooley said. -- "Not bad." -- "What was it about; do you remember?" Gilhooley asked. -- "Some girl. Ellen something..." Cain said.

"Did you go out with her? Because I can't even remember her." -- "No. I teased you... --Don't matter; it was a lifetime ago."

"I had a reputation, huh?" Gilhooley mused. -- "Oh yeah. Everyone was shocked when you joined the Coast Guard. Figured you for the Marines."

Gilhooley laughed. "Billy Farbrigand went into Marines and was a real A-hole. I figured if they took him -- I didn't want no part of it. I liked the Coast Guard. Small boats; coastal waters. I was boarding party. Coast Guard is probably the only uniform service that accomplishes anything."

"So why'd you go Army?" Cain asked.

"A woman. ... --A brand new ensign: Assistant station chief and my boss. I just bristled when she told me to do something; don't know why. She sensed it. So being a rookie tried to bridge differences with an informal chat. Offered me a beer... We ended up in a romance. Jeeze! I wasn't going to get married; it was uncool as hell; especially for her. Coast Guard is a small place; after awhile everybody knows everything. So when my hitch was up I was gone."

"Ever hear from her?" Cain asked. -- "For awhile I'd get an email or an invitation for FaceBook..." They both laughed. "She got married a few years back... -- Over is over..." Gilhooley said looking forlorn.

"See that?" Cain asked about what could have been sand blowing around. "Uh huh..." Gilhooley swallowed as Cain put binoculars on the area and swiveled 15 degrees on each side of the horizon. "Wish I had my 30-30," Gilhooley said.

"Wish I had a 'Mark-19' grenade-machine gun; wish I weren't here... Why a 30-30?" Cain asked. -- "I know statistically a 30-30 lever action is a dog," Gilhooley said, "but I got one; 20" barrel and 4x32 scope and I never miss anything under 200 meters; and I ain't talkin' *sniper*... -- Don't really love this here little-bitty bullet..." He shook his M4 for emphasis. "Jus' somethin' about a slower, heavier slug for knockdown. Topple a 400 pound bear... -- Maybe the energy gets expended in the target and not the next county..."

The friendlies, looking none-too-friendly, came jogging up out of shimmering heat vapors. Behind them bucking unsteadily on the terrain was a pickup truck with men and firepower in the bed, trying to peer through the sand cloud they were creating.

Cain and Gilhooley looked at one another and ran away from their visitors hoping to find and take advantage of depressions in the landscape that could provide cover and concealment. Behind them came an abrupt and loud 'CRUMP.' "Mortars!" Gilhooley shouted as they dove to ground. Another ranged closer. ".81s..." -- "Can't stay here..." They ran a quick burst and dropped down again as another round closed in. Firing and commotion ceased and Cain looked for the rotors. He got on the radio. "Allied asset: Apache helicopter in sector C-Charlie-two-squared this is Camel-Walk 4 over..." They waited. Finally there was a tenuous acknowledgement: "I don't know you Camel-Walk..." -- "Two Americans in jeopardy I need you to engage armed vehicle..." -- "Don't know you... -- [then another voice] who won the last superbowl?" "G-damn-it I don't remember what I had for breakfast. -- Alright don't engage; --Recon an armed vehicle. Be advised it has a 50 cal or a 14.5 mm triple A... it's supporting a mortar team..."

Cain and Gilhooley knew that once the Apache left, the show would re-start. Cautiously they rose and began traveling. They ran 10 meters apart. Another mortar round struck base-plate and launched. "Incoming!" They went down. This one vibrated Cain's eye-sockets. He coughed up dust and looked around for Gilhooley. "Gilhooley! SKEETER!" Nothing -- anywhere. Just swirling dirt.

In the distance the Apache gave off two short bursts of 30mm cannon and the truck and mortar team disappeared. Cain couldn't hear anything and could not tell if the radio was functioning. The friendlies were still there though dazed and confused. Cain [not a Moslem] stood up and screamed "Allahu Akbar!" several times and fired a burst in the air. The friendlies looked at him, looked back at the remains of the 3rd party and two of them raised their weapons and shouted the same. There was some discussion among the others and eventually they waved and walked away. Shifting allegiances and vacillating attitudes between who they hated or feared the most had changed the balance power here in *no-where's-ville* as everywhere else.

Cain, his ears ringing, looked for Gilhooley's remains. He was already distraught. The dust was settling and he could see a form feet-up laying supine in a shallow crevice. Gilhooley's unfocused eyes were half open as was his mouth. "Oh, man...Skeeter; what have we done to ya?" The form coughed. "--Gil?"

Cain's first thought was that death was an existence in another dimension of unknown proportions and he was there too. Gilhooley coughed some more and attempted to move. "My head feels stuffed with cotton...I ain't right..."

Slowly Cain brushed the sand off of him and got him into a sitting position. Gilhooley closed his eyes and then rolled onto his side as he exhaled forcefully. "...Aint' right, cuz..."

"T.B.I." Cain said. -- "Who?" -- "You got a concussion." -- "Zat all... Where's everybody else? Gilhooley asked, his left temple pressed into the earth.

Cain looked around. "Apache's gone. Bad guys, once-again, blowed up -- always more comin' though. Friendlies, friendly again and on their way..."

"Apache?" Gilhooley queried. -- "Gun-ship; you remember?" -- "Not exactly... --How long I been out?" -- "Few minutes." -- "Oh."

"Drink?" Cain offered Gilhooley a canteen. "Pour some on my hand." Gilhooley said and when that was done rinsed his face, his eyes still shut. Cain sat down. "Got to raise a medevac. Need it on your record. Get a Dx of traumatic brain injury; have the company back-date you into Reserve-status and take it to the V.A. Worth beer-money anyway." Gilhooley laughed softly. "Always thinkin' Gil-boy." -- "I fractured my damn skull years ago; but never filed a claim," Cain admitted.

"When you do that?" Gilhooley asked. -- "I don't remember." They both laughed. "They say your hearing can eventually be affected too," Cain said. -- "What?" They laughed again.

"So, I get to use a cane, like yourself, every third week when I feel extra dizzy..." Gilhooley said, opening his right eye in a squint.

Post- Op -- Off the record interview:

Interviewer: So, Sgt. Cain, you're a Kenite?"

Cain: Yup.

Int: You look maybe... Italian or Jewish or Armenian

Cain: Probably all the above.

[Gilhooley laughs]

Interviewer: So, what are you really?

Cain: Kenite. Did Genetic research on all my grandparents and they say I am 50% Eastern Mediterranean and 50% Eastern European.

Gilhooley: In other words half Polish and half Jewish; what an FU-ed combination. Instead of the strong Polish body and strong Jewish mind he got a switcheroo [laughs].

Cain: Look who's talking. Cousin Skeeter is half Irish and half Polish...-- but that's all BS.

Gilhooley: [serious] Yes it is.

Cain: Because we is both 100% true-blue-red-and-white American.

Interviewer: Is your name Gilmore?

Cain: No, just Gil. Gil C. Cain. The C is for Clay

Interviewer: But Sergeant Gilhooley calls you "Gilmore" sometimes.

[both laugh]

Gilhooley: We must have a hundred nicknames for one another

Interviewer: And you, L. Skeeter Gilhooley? The L is for?

Cain: Lawrence...

Gilhooley: boo

Defensor Fortis - Semper Paratus

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