

CHAPTER ONE

THE GEORGIA SUN was hot—even for July. The air was heavy and thick with humidity. Major Robert E. Clark and Captain Dan McCormack were sitting on the steps of their office building, a converted, World War II-era, “temporary” wooden barracks with peeling paint. Ronald Reagan’s revitalization of the military had somehow failed to reach the Staff Judge Advocate’s Office of Forces Command at Fort McPherson. Every window of the building was covered with condensation, as the outdated air-conditioning units perched on the windowsills struggled to keep the inside cool. The two men were bent over, lacing their shoes, preparing for an afternoon run.

“Sir, are you sure we should be running in this heat?” Dan asked.

“If you don’t want to, Dan, that’s fine. But next week is my last physical fitness test before I leave the Army, and I intend to max it.” Clark raised his eyebrows and grinned. “It’s cool inside the gym. You can go work out there if you want.”

“Uh, no sir, I’d rather run. Anyway, I was hoping to talk to you.”

“Okay, but I’ll be pushing it. I’m not sure how much I’ll be able to talk.”

Both men were wearing Army-issue black running shorts and gray T-shirts with “ARMY” on the front in bold black letters. They stood up and began to stretch.

“Sir, I just don’t understand why you’re getting out.” Dan’s intensity caused Clark to wonder whether the young captain might be questioning his own decision to remain on active duty, so he chose his words carefully and avoided saying anything negative.

“It’s pretty simple, Dan. I’m getting out because the Army is no longer the right place for me.”

“What exactly does that mean, sir?”

“Let’s just say I have a plethora of personal problems that complicate things. Come on. Let’s get going.”

As they jogged past the commissary, Clark noticed a family getting out of their minivan to go grocery shopping. The young father held his daughter’s hand as they walked across the parking lot. I’ll never have that life again, he thought.

Dan persisted. “But you’ve had such a great career so far. Top of your class at West Point, platoon leader at Fort Hood, and then the Army sent you to law school.” Dan jogged a few paces and then said, “And you got to be a prosecutor on your first JAG assignment. What I would have given for that.”

“Don’t get me wrong, Dan.” Clark had picked up the pace, causing him to speak in short puffy spurts. “The Army’s been good to me. It’s taught me most of what I know. But it’s time to leave.”

“But, sir, how many Army lawyers do you know have airborne wings and a Ranger Tab and have prosecuted a murder case?”

Clark stopped abruptly and stared at him. “Are you thinking about getting out?”

“I, uh, I’ve thought about it. My dad wants me to join his firm in Macon. But if I’d been able to do the things you’ve done, it would be a no-brainer. I’d stay in for sure.”

“Well, you need to make your own decision. But let’s just say that much of what I did didn’t turn out all that well. And right now I need to be running, not talking.” Clark took off at a faster pace. “Four times around the parade ground is two miles, right?”

“Right.”

The late afternoon sun bore down on them, causing their faces to flush. As their bodies heated up, sweat darkened their T-shirts; their skin glistened. When Dan increased the pace, Clark’s expression turned serious and determined, sweat now rolling down his cheeks. But that’s what he wanted. He wanted to be ready for the test. It had been several years since he had achieved a perfect score, and he wanted to repeat that performance on his last test.

The two-mile course ended near the gym, so they went inside to cool down. As soon as they sat down on the bleachers, Clark asked, “How was our time?”

“Fourteen minutes and thirty or so seconds.”

“Well, that sucks.” Clark put his elbows on his thighs and rested his chin in his hands.

“Not as much as this air conditioning.”

“Yeah, but it’s better than being out there,” Clark said, without lifting his head but motioning to the door.

“Can I ask you a question, sir?”

“No, Dan, because I know what it will be.” Clark didn’t raise his head and almost sounded exasperated. “Look,” he said, now sitting up and making eye contact with Dan, “I love the Army. It’s made me into the man I am today.” He paused as if struggling to decide whether to say more. “This is not an easy decision for me. But I have a multitude of reasons for getting out of the Army, most of which I’d rather not talk about.”

“Sorry, sir. I didn’t mean to pry. But you know you’ll have to talk to Colonel Barnes. He’s going to try to persuade you to stay on active duty.”

Clark again rested his head in his hands. “I don’t know, Dan. I might stay in the Reserve, but I’m not even sure about that right now.”

“Okay.” Dan paused, seeming to collect his thoughts. “Sir, I understand you don’t want to discuss why you’re getting out. But would you mind telling me why you’re moving to Texas? I mean . . . You’re from Pemberton, Georgia, right? You went to the University of Georgia law school. Those guys dominate the State Bar and all the big law firms in Atlanta. My dad says connections are everything when it comes to building a practice. Why do you want to go all the way to Texas?”

Clark sat up and looked at him with a smirk. “When Davy Crockett left Tennessee, he said, ‘Y’all can go to hell. I’m going to Texas.’ Or something like that. I kinda feel the same way right now. I’m ready to leave.”

“Yeah, but Crockett died at the Alamo.”

“Well, *Daniel*, I’m not headed to the Alamo. I’ve got a lead on a job at a big firm in Dallas.” Clark hesitated, trying to decide whether he should continue, and then asked, “Do you know Alan Taylor?”

“Who doesn’t? He’s that black officer who graduated from Harvard, right? Everybody thought he’d be a general someday. I met him a few years ago at the Employment Law Course at the JAG School in Charlottesville. He looked like a politician—always walking around with a big smile and shaking hands with everybody.”

“That’s the guy. Actually, he went to Howard and then Harvard Law. We were in the same JAG Officer Basic Course and got to be friends. He’s a really good guy.” Clark stood up and headed toward the door; Dan followed. “When I told him I was thinking about getting out of the Army and leaving Georgia, he

got real excited and said I should come to Dallas. He's out of the Army and is with Underwood & Crockett. Ever heard of them?"

"Isn't that Davy's old firm?"

"Very funny," Clark said.

Dan's face turned serious. "Of course I've heard of them, sir. They're big time. They recruited at Emory during my third year of law school. If I remember correctly, they snagged a few of the law-review types. So, Taylor is with that firm?"

"Yeah. He's in their Dallas office, and as you can imagine, he's already making a name for himself. Says he thinks he can get me an interview. The rest is up to me."

"You're braver than I am. I wouldn't leave the Army without a job offer in hand. But it sounds like your mind is made up."

"Yeah. Listen, I need to get going. I've got to get packed up and ready to move out of my apartment. I'll be headed to Dallas soon." Clark's grin crinkled the corners of his eyes. "See you Monday," he said as he turned and walked toward his car.

"Okay," Dan called after him. "You want me to pace you on the run during your test next week?"

Clark turned and said, "Nah. You've got better things to do. Have a good weekend." He waved and walked away.



Clark knew he had to report to his boss to discuss his decision to resign from the Army, and he wanted to get it over with. As soon as he arrived at his office the following Monday morning, he reported to Colonel William J. Barnes, the Staff Judge Advocate of Forces Command. As he entered the colonel's office, Clark studied the mementos of his boss's long military career, which he'd seen

many times before but had never bothered to examine. They covered most of the wall space of his office: pictures of him with general officers and senators and one with President Reagan; plaques from the units he'd served in, including the 82nd Airborne; a cavalry saber; a dress bayonet on a plaque with his Vietnam Service Medal; and a shadow box containing an array of medals, including a Silver Star and a picture of a young officer who must have been Colonel Barnes's father. Considering how broken-down the building was, they made Colonel Barnes's office look rather impressive.

The Staff Judge Advocate was not only a good boss, he was also a leader—something rare in the JAG Corps. Everyone who had worked with him thought he should have become a general officer, possibly even The Judge Advocate General, the highest ranking Army lawyer. It was somewhat of a mystery that he hadn't advanced beyond colonel. Now, here he was, completing his Army career in 1986 in a dilapidated wooden building that was supposed to have been a temporary barracks in WWII.

If this is how the Army treats one of its finest lawyers, Clark thought, why would I want to stay in, especially with everything else I have to deal with?

Barnes pointed to a chair in front of his desk. "You know, Clark, you can skip the PT test if you want to; that is, unless I can persuade you to tear this up." He tossed Clark's resignation across the desk.

Clark shook his head slightly. "No, sir. My mind is made up." He readjusted himself in his seat and looked earnestly at Colonel Barnes. "I do want to say, sir, that I sincerely appreciate all that the Army has done for me. But I have issues to deal with that I can't handle while I'm still in uniform."

"Have you thought about the Reserve?"

"Yes, sir. I haven't made up my mind about that. But continuing on active duty just isn't going to work."

“Okay, Clark.” Colonel Barnes sat back in his chair. “I’m sure you have your reasons. And I don’t want to pry.” He glanced down and to his left, as if pondering something, and then leaned forward and looked intently at Clark. “Let me just say that we hate to lose you. You’re a fine officer.” He paused to let that comment sink in, waiting for a reaction. When none came, he sat back again and continued. “But I’m sure you’ll do well wherever you wind up.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Do you have any plans?”

“Nothing specific, sir.” Clark did not want to talk about Texas, and he certainly did not want to talk about Alan Taylor. Although Alan had performed well as a JAG trial counsel, prosecuting courts-martial, he departed the Army under a cloud. Clark didn’t know the details but had heard that Alan was discharged before his commitment was up, alleging that a highly regarded JAG colonel had discriminated against him. As a result, he had tarnished his reputation among the old guard of the JAG Corps, of which Colonel Barnes was a member.

“Well, good luck to you, Clark. And if you decide you want to come back on active duty, give me a call.”

“Thank you, sir. Will do.” That was Clark’s cue to leave, so he stood up and walked toward the door, pausing to say, “And by the way, sir, I *do* want to take the PT test one last time.”

Colonel Barnes smiled and shook his head. “Okay, Clark. Have at it.”

Early the next morning Clark took the PT test. He didn’t max it. He achieved a perfect score on the push-ups and sit-ups but was forty seconds too slow for a perfect score on the two-mile run. He took the result in stride, though, and didn’t mention it to anyone—except Dan, who grinned and reminded Clark that he’d offered to pace him on the run.

For the rest of the day, Clark went to various offices on post to deal with what the Army called “out processing.” Although he’d left posts previously in his career, this time was the last time. When he finished, he said goodbye to Dan, Colonel Barnes, and his other colleagues and headed to his car with a box full of his own Army plaques and photographs. He smiled as he looked at the Fort McPherson sticker on the windshield and thought about those that had preceded it: West Point, Fort Knox, Fort Hood, the JAG School, Panama. I guess I’ll have to scrape that off, he thought.

Rather than head directly to the gate, he drove around the parade field, down the tree-lined street known as “general’s row,” past the immaculately cared-for Victorian homes where the generals of Forces Command lived. The last house on the street was where Colonel Barnes lived. The Commanding General said he always wanted to have his lawyer close by.

As Clark approached the gate, the guard snapped to attention and saluted. Clark returned the salute and, pulling onto the highway, whispered aloud, “And that’s the last time I’ll be doing that.”

It hit Clark that he was thirty-three years old and had just left the institution where he had spent almost half his life. The Army had molded him. Hell, it had practically raised him. Now, everything would be different, and he wasn’t sure he was ready.