

January 29, 1972

*What's that noise?* Harry awoke to bright lights. Sunlight streaming through the open window blinds. Glaring fluorescent lights overhead. They gave him a headache. He slammed his eyes shut.

Someone shook his shoulder rather insistently. "Major Russell," said a female voice. "Can you open your eyes for me?"

Harry opened his eyes. Plain white walls surrounded him. The narrow bed and lumpy mattress felt like a torture device. An IV line ran from a plastic bag on a pole into his right forearm. The oxygen cannula tickled his nose hairs. The Foley catheter was uncomfortable. He was in a hospital room. Where, he had no idea. His last memory was the 95th Evac Hospital in Da Nang. But this sure wasn't it. Too clean. Too fresh-smelling. And too new. He looked up into the eyes of a young woman wearing a nurse's uniform.

"Sir, I need to change your bandages. Can you sit up for me?" she asked.

Harry struggled to sit. His arms quivered as he pushed himself up in the bed. "Where am I?" His left leg hurt all the way to his foot. He tried to wiggle his toes. More pain. His foot had to be there, not gone like the doc told him before the operation. *Thank goodness.*

"Tripler Army Medical Center in Hawaii." The nurse placed pillows behind his back to hold him up.

"Okay?" Harry searched his brain for any information. The inside of a C-130 entered his thoughts...dingy, gray, and smelling of aviation fuel. The memory was vague but there.

He'd ask his doctor later to find out. What he really hoped, JJ would walk through the door wagging his finger at him, standing tall and whole. He turned his attention to the nurse adjusting the drip on his IV line. She was the most beautiful thing he'd seen in a long time. Slender and curvy with a tight butt and dimples. "What's your name, Lieutenant?"

The young, dark-haired woman smiled at him. "Tammy Myers."

"Nice to meet you, Tammy."

Tammy pulled the rolling table with the bandage tray close to the bed. She flipped down the blanket and top sheet.

A cold draft slid over him, under the paper-thin gown, up to his... *Oh, damn!* He wasn't wearing anything but the hospital gown. His cheeks burned. He didn't dare look at the young nurse, afraid that simple biology might take over. The last thing he needed for her to see right now was an erection. Heat rose to the top of his head.

Tammy leaned over him.

Harry looked down at his feet. And stopped. No, one foot. The right one. Shock set in. His breath came in short gasps. Where the left one should have been was a rounded, slightly blood-stained white gauze bandage. Where was the pain coming from if he didn't have a foot? He had wiggled his toes a few seconds ago. Hadn't he?

Tammy unwrapped the bandage. A bruised, black round stump appeared where his left ankle should have been. Stitches everywhere. No foot and no toes.

All Harry could do was stare. "No...no...no..."

Tammy touched his shoulder. "Major, you're alive. That's what counts."

Harry tilted his head enough to look into her amber eyes. "That's easy to say when you have two feet. I'm a soldier. That's all I know. What am I going to do now?" No way would he cry in front of a girl. He leaned back into the pillows. It hurt too much to look.

"I can't answer that, sir. I wish I could. I'm so sorry." Tammy rewrapped his leg. She pulled up the blanket then placed a gentle hand on his arm. Her eyes sparkled with moisture as she left the room.

The more he stared at the ceiling, the more depressed he became. He was a cripple now. A drain on society. Useless. Someone others would feel sorry for. The Army would retire him for sure. You couldn't be in the Special Forces with only one good leg.