

Daniel Wyatt

The Mary Jane Mission



THE MARY JANE MISSION

DANIEL WYATT

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PROLOGUE

If the radiance of a thousand suns
Were to burn at once in the sky,
That would be like the splendor of the Mighty One...
I am become death – the destroyer of the worlds.

the ancient Sanskrit writings of the *Mahabharata*

GUAM — AUGUST 1945

Under the searing heat of the afternoon sun, two armed military policemen lingered by a navy jeep exchanging glances. For the last two hours they had been guarding a spot along a gravel roadway inside the fenced-in compound at Agana Naval Air Base. Flanking both sides of the road stretched solid jungle growth that was nearly as tall as a six-foot man. Jutting through the growth, ninety feet directly behind them, stood a silvery B-29 Superfortress bomber, her tail section dominating the tropical landscape like an old windmill on a deserted prairie farm.

The taller guard broke the silence, leaning the back of his legs against the jeep's tires, the machine gun resting by his leg. "Man, sure the hell is hot today!"

The other guard nodded in agreement, looking to the bomber. "Still can't figure it. Why are we guarding that thing, anyway? Who's going to steal it?"

"Ah, nobody, of course. The captain told us to not let anyone near it. That's all."

The shorter guard licked his dry lips. "I could sure handle a cold beer right now."

"Hell, yeah. You and me both."

"Hey, snap up, here comes somebody." The guard groped for his machine gun.

"Huh?"

"Over there."

A jeep raced towards them, kicking up a cloud of dust. Two men inside. The machine skidded to a halt opposite the MP's, who were now standing at stiff attention. Out hopped an army air force colonel and a navy captain.

"There she be, Colonel Cameron." The chubby captain thumbed at the bomber. "You wanna take a closer look at her?"

The trim, square-jawed colonel stared purposefully at the navy man. "You bet I do. Let's go." Cameron gawked at the two sweaty MPs as he walked past them. He and the captain pushed and tugged through the jungle without uttering a word, only the occasional grunt of exertion. Cameron arrived at the bomber first, just under the giant port wing. He welcomed the shade. He stopped and inspected the B-29. It was from the special

bomber group, of which he was the commanding officer. The markings confirmed it – the large R inside the circle on the tail, the painting of a redhead woman in a tight, green, one-piece bathing suit and the name MARY JANE in black block letters below the cockpit port window.

“How did it get here, is what I want to know? It’s one of yours, isn’t it?”

The colonel was too preoccupied to answer at first. “She’s one of mine, all right,” he finally answered. He studied the wing for any damage. “But as far as how it got here... I don’t have a damn clue.”

“It’s weird there was no sign of damage to the aircraft,” the navy captain observed, frowning. “There aren’t even any flattened trees behind her tail. Looks... I guess... like a forced landing. What do you think, colonel?”

“Hell if I know.”

“The landing gear is intact. How could it have made a wheels-down landing in this mess of crap and brush. And... where are the crew?”

Colonel Cameron didn’t know how to reply. He couldn’t. Nothing made sense. Shaking his head, he climbed through the open nose hatch while the captain waited outside. Cameron found the front cabin deathly hot and stifling. First, he checked the navigator’s station on the port side. No sign of the flight log. *Good*. He hoped that no one else had found it. He inspected the cockpit next. Hanging down from the fuselage, directly above the port seat, were two clean rags stuffed into two side-by-side bullet holes. The colonel pulled the rags

out, examined them, then shoved his fingers through the holes. It seemed to him that the bomber must have been under enemy attack while in flight and that someone must have pushed rags into the bullet holes to keep the cabin pressure intact.

Next, he glanced down at the deck, where he saw dark stains. Blood spots? He squatted lower. Yeah. Blood spots. No mistake. He took a look around. Behind him, leading into the next aft compartment, more stains, only these were long and parallel, as if a person had dragged himself across the deck. The streaks ended abruptly at the opening to the bomb bay hatch, a few feet up from the deck. The colonel slowly opened the circular hatch door. Total darkness inside. He turned to catch the captain pulling himself up through the hole below.

“Is that blood?” the captain asked, bounding onto the deck.

“Yeah. Sure is. You see a flashlight anywhere?”

The captain spun around and checked the cockpit. “No, sir.”

“Try the flight engineer’s station... on the right.”

“Got it. Here you are, colonel.”

“Thanks.” The colonel took the flashlight and flicked it on, and the navy officer peered over his shoulder. Cameron examined the bomb bay from nose to tail. The payload was gone, but more blood stains. “Geez.”

Looking aft, Cameron stepped onto the ladder and crawled into the tunnel over the bomb bay. He came out in what once was the gunners’ compartment on earlier B-29’s. No guns or sights here on this machine. Only

bare metal fuselage. Nothing out of the ordinary. Walking on through the next bulkhead, he saw that the radar room had been left in order. Every piece of equipment in place. He strolled to the tail gun section where he found a box camera on the deck below the gun sight. He picked it up. The body was marked and scratched. The back was open and bent. The film gone. He set the camera down.

Crawling back through the tunnel, he stepped down to the deck and took another intrigued look at the blood streaks. He bent down on one knee and pushed his officer's cap back on his head. He was feeling the heat, but not as much as the overweight captain, who was sweating heavily.

"This is spooky, captain. Really spooky."

The captain tugged at his collar several times as if it were a fan to cool him off. "I'll say. It gives me the willies. Once the sun came up, there she was. You didn't hear anything?"

"Not a thing. No crash. No engines. Nothing."

Cameron rose and strode again into the cockpit for one last look at the bloodstains. Maybe he had it all wrong. Maybe the stains started in the bomb bay and ended in the cockpit. Then he dropped to the deck until his knees touched metal. He saw two more rags stuffed into the fuselage, this time on the right side near the intercom jack box. And... he caught sight of another item, a pair of glasses under the starboard seat. Reaching down and picking them up, he noted they

were custom-made. Very thick. The metal rims were bent and one of the lenses cracked.

“What do you want done with your bomber, colonel?” the captain called out from near the nose hatch. “We’re waiting on your orders.”

Cameron stood. He slowly, casually, slid a hand into his pocket, still holding the glasses with the other hand. “I’ll get someone down from North Field to pull it out. We’ll look after it.” Then he walked to the front hatch.

“By the way, I’ve been wondering about that. What is it?”

“What?”

“That.” The captain looked down, pointing at a set of long, thick wires connected to a metal box about the size of a small bookshelf.

Cameron pondered that for a while, then turned to the navy officer, and replied as cordially as he could. “For your own good, pretend you never saw it.”

“Got yuh.”

Chapter one

GUAM — JULY 1990

Lieutenant Les Shilling opened his locker and appraised his flight equipment. He was going to *work*. But this was no normal nine-to-five job.

He began his routine by pulling on his G-suit, which he jokingly called his eighteen-hour girdle. He breathed in and zipped up the side. Then he sucked in his belly, held his breath, and bent down in order to zip up the leggings. Next, he threw on his chest harness and strapped the leg restraints on his calves. After that came the survival vest. He checked for his emergency items. *Strobe light. Water bottle. Knife. Flare gun. Smoke signal...* He placed them all on his body. Somewhere. A pocket here. A pocket there. He reached for his gloves and oxygen mask.

Last but not least, he grabbed his helmet. He was now ready to do battle, if called upon, in the way he was trained. He was an aerial gladiator, in much the same tradition as the coliseum combatants in the days of the old Roman Empire, but now acted out in the technical, computerized times of the late twentieth century.

* * * *

Les turned a sharp left and lined up his F-18 Hornet fighter to the edge of the runway. The stream of white light from his wing sliced the heavy night air. He stopped and ran through the final checks before takeoff. He fidgeted in his seat until he felt as comfortable as any pilot could be in his G-suit, helmet, and oxygen mask. He took one last glance around the cockpit. So tight in such a self-contained space.

His high-tech enclosure – full of screens, digits, and dials – winked codes in bright colors. *Greens, yellows, whites.* Three large cathode-ray tubes measuring five inches square dominated the cockpit. These were the Digital Display Indicators. DDI's, as they were known in the business. The left and right DDI's exhibited precise three-color information for such items as radar navigation, weapons, sensor data, and system checks. The bottom screen was a Multipurpose Color Display – MPCD – that contained navigational data and a digitally-generated colored moving map. At eye level... the HUD. The Head-Up Display was an electro-optical instrument that superimposed numerical information onto the pilot's twelve-o'clock field of view. Les's cockpit was right out of *Star Wars*.

Finished with the final push-buttoning prior to flight, he readied himself for takeoff, gloved hand on the stick.

A voice crackled on his radio. "ZULU TWO-FOUR-THREE CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF. MAINTAIN RUNWAY HEADING AND CONTACT DEPARTURE

CONTROL ON THREE-THREE-THREE DECIMAL THREE WHEN SAFELY AIRBORNE.”

Les answered the tower with a prompt, “ROGER BARKSIDE.”

Brakes on, he nudged the dual throttles forward to full military power. The roar of the engines, nearly 16,000 pounds of static thrust each, made him tingle, as it always did. He could hear the blast and felt the vibration through the cockpit Plexiglas and his padded helmet. Then he let go of the brakes. With two fingers of his left hand on the throttles, he lit the afterburners. The equivalent of one swift kick in the butt, and he was off and down the runway, gathering speed.

The acceleration was smooth and swift. With the stick in the neutral position and using the nose wheel steering button on the column, Les controlled the takeoff roll. He gently brought the stick back so that the angle of attack read *seven degrees* nose-up on the HUD. Then... in a blink, he was in the air. Before the far edge of the runway the wheels sucked into the belly with a slight jar. The HUD data changed from *gear down* to *gear up*. Over the water now he turned north, leaving Agana Naval Air Station and the tropical island of Guam behind him. He glanced at the HUD. Airspeed – 373 *knots*. Altitude – 500 *feet*. It was a half-moon night, no turbulence in the air, the silhouette of clouds ahead. He changed radio frequencies.

“BARKSIDE, ZULU TWO-FOUR-THREE AIRBORNE.”

“ROGER ZULU TWO-FOUR-THREE, THIS IS BARKSIDE. TARGET TO PORT ON HEADING THREE-FIVE-

ZERO. ANGELS ONE. SPEED 200 KNOTS. RANGE ONE-THREE-ZERO.”

Les came off afterburners, climbed and leveled off. His right hand went for the right DDI. Using the push buttons, he selected the proper functions for the Range While Search – RWS – mode which detected targets out to eighty nautical miles. The DDI glowed brightly with symbols and bits of info. But no target. He tapped the decrease range and azimuth buttons to obtain the required range. In a short time, he saw the lights of Tinian below. His MPCD verified it. He recognized the Manhattan-shaped island on the color display.

Then a target appeared.

The Single Target Track – the STT – mode burned a prompt onto the HUD. A flick of a switch on the stick, he changed the air-to-air mode from RWS to STT. Now he could track a single target with more clarity, as well as be ready for steering commands and shoot prompts for the armed missiles he was carrying on the wing tips and fuselage.

“ZULU TWO-FOUR-THREE. TARGET SHOULD BE DEAD AHEAD. RANGE TEN MILES.”

Les hit the radio button. “ROGER BARKSIDE. I SEE IT.”

“ZULU TWO-FOUR-THREE, GO BUTTON ONE-FOUR LEFT.”

“ROGER.” Les’s gloved hand reached to his up-front control at chest level and changed the radio frequency from the right radio to the left radio. The comm 1 channel display window confirmed the move. He turned

the volume up. "ZULU TWO-FOUR-THREE ON ONE-FOUR LEFT, BARKSIDE."

The Hughes APG-65 digital multi-mode radar burned into the right DDI. Les could see it was a large target. The readouts showed the aircraft to be ahead at a range of seven miles. He peered through the glass and the HUD, into the night, towards the direction of the dark, puffy clouds. No visual. Not yet. Two hundred knots was pretty damn slow. It had to be landing somewhere. Maybe the nearby island of Saipan.

"ZULU TWO-FOUR-THREE, THIS IS BARKSIDE. FIND OUT WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE'S DOING IN OUR AIRSPACE. WE ARE UNABLE TO MAKE RADIO CONTACT. OVER."

"ROGER, BARKSIDE. COMING UP ON HIS SIX. CLOSING AT 500 KNOTS."

Then the radar target disappeared off the pilot's radar. "BARKSIDE, THIS IS ZULU TWO-FOUR-THREE. IT'S GONE. REPEAT, GONE."

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN GONE?" Long pause. "HEY, YOU'RE RIGHT. SCOUT AROUND. FIND OUT WHERE HE WENT."

"ROGER, BARKSIDE."

* * * *

After a thorough but unsuccessful search of the area, Les hit the radio transmitter. "BARKSIDE, ZULU TWO-FOUR-THREE. NO VISUAL. OVER."

"COME ON BACK, ZULU TWO-FOUR-THREE," the controller sighed. "NO JOY TODAY."

“ROGER, BARKSIDE. COMING HOME.”

Les pulled hard right on the stick and increased the throttles until the speed flashed to *600 knots* on the HUD. The G-forces pressed against his body... 3-G... 4-G... This was the second time in a week that a large unidentified target had appeared suddenly on the Agana radar screens, only to vanish without a trace once a navy fighter approached it. Both times, Les was in the cockpit. He wasn't too concerned about it, though. Often, especially in the last few weeks, Andersen Air Force Base, situated on the north end of Guam, would send up their USAF bomber aircraft and the lines of communication with the navy would get crossed. Right now, that aircraft – whatever the hell it was – was probably about to or had already landed on Saipan.

On the way back, he set up his waypoints and followed them on the overlaid display on the MPCD. The south edge of Tinian flashed by, then the small island of Rota. The waypoint bearing readout showed 184 degrees. Before he reached Guam, he made the selections for the TACAN – the Tactical Air Navigation – a navigational approach aid that gave both distance and bearing to a base.

Coming in downwind at 280 knots, eighty percent RPM, speedbrakes out, flaps in the auto mode, Les had the nose up at nine degrees. He fell easily and controllably out of the sky with a twenty-eight-degree bank turn. He retracted the speedbrakes and leveled out. His airspeed dropped to 240. Two miles out, he selected *full gear down* and *full flaps*.

He watched the HUD closely. He lined up the velocity vector symbol on the horizon line. On final approach, he throttled back and lowered the velocity vector three degrees. Now he was coming in at 125 knots, 300 feet above the runway. Les loved landing the Hornet. Simple as pie, he often said. One big computer game. He lined the HUD velocity vector with the edge of the touchdown markers that were painted on the runway and brought the armed monster in for a perfect landing.

* * * *

Lieutenant Les Shilling was a twenty-eight-year-old, fresh out of Fightertown, USA, the famous Top Gun school in Miramar, California, where he completed a five-week training course with high honors. The calm, cool pilot had been a disciplined terror over the California desert. The instructors were impressed with the no-nonsense Shilling, who was rock steady at the controls. No one, including the instructors, had escaped him and his aircraft during the strenuous, competitive dog fighting. He could make the F-18 do what most other pilots couldn't. In short, he took to heart von Richthofen's words: "The quality of the crate matters little. Success depends on the men who sit in it."

Les relished flying, proud to be one of the chosen few. The US Navy stats spoke for themselves. Out of every thirty desirable applicants in the training program, ten went on to flight training. Four passed as pilots. Out of these four, only *one* was considered worthy to fly

operationally. Les was that one. A notch above the rest. A naval aviator. An artist.

And he was part of a proud force – the United States Navy — who had never lost a war at sea. Going back to the War of 1812, the Americans, with a measly seventeen ships, held Britain's more than 600 vessels at bay. During the Second World War, the USN kept the sea lanes open to Britain and brought the Japanese to their knees in the Pacific, beginning with the Battle of Midway. Now, the USN was top dog in the Pacific, the only area of the world where they were not competing with the army and air force for recognition. Not so in places like Europe. Les had been stationed on Guam for five months now with a temporary special forces Hornet squadron, after coming over from Japan, where he had spent six months with another Hornet squadron. Prior to that he was attached to the USS *Midway*, homeported in Yokosuka, Japan. Hornets in every case. His machine.

As far as Les was concerned, there was no other fighter quite like the F-18 Hornet, the aircraft to beat at Top Gun. This multi-role fighter scared many pilots at first. It seemed too complicated, too computerized, too damn expensive. However, it quickly functioned beyond original expectations. The power, the maneuverability, the lightness of the controls, impressed fliers. From the time Les first stepped into the fighter, he found it unbelievably easy to fly, as if he had already been in it for months. He prized the visibility factor. He could see extremely well in all directions. He felt as though he was

sitting *on* the aircraft. Not inside it. Damn good crate, she was.

* * * *

Now in his work khaki, Les threw his gear in the locker marked by his callsign of HULK, and closed the door. Without a doubt a one-woman man, he was, a handsome, muscular specimen who often made the opposite sex's heads turn. He stood tall – just over six feet – and was richly tanned from the tropical sun. The strong, silent type, he was not one to waste words, almost taciturn at times, talking only when it seemed necessary. Only for something deemed important.

Turning around, he was suddenly and unexpectedly face to face with feisty Jack Runsted – callsign Tiger – another F-18 fighter pilot who had just finished an earlier night flight. Tiger was a skilled navy pilot who'd been bitten by the navy bug in his mid-teens. The women thought this six-foot bachelor was good looking enough, what with his blue eyes and short, curly, blond hair, although he was often irritating, arrogant, and a downright flake. Word was out that he was sowing his wild oats all over the island of Guam. While in a half-drunken state at a navy party a month earlier, he had even tried to make a pass at Les's wife. Les had calmly offered to re-arrange Tiger's face. Since then, Les avoided the young man with the Brooklyn accent. Today was no exception. Les turned to the hall, ready to leave. As far as he was concerned, Tiger wasn't there.

“The CO wants to see you in his office,” Tiger said, breaking the silence. “Right away.”

“Yeah. OK,” Les grunted, over his shoulder.

A short stroll later to the CO’s office, Les saluted his commanding officer, Captain George B. MacDonald. On the walls hung color photos of an F-14 Tomcat, an F-18 Hornet, and the same F-4 Phantom that MacDonald had flown in the Vietnam War.

“At ease, Hulk,” the CO barked in his deep voice, looking up from his desk.

“Thank you, sir.”

MacDonald’s tanned face was long, with sunken, alert brown eyes. Nearing fifty, he kept himself in great shape, appearing to be a good ten years younger. A go-getter, he always wanted everything done in a hurry. And with precision. “What happened out there?” He leaned back in his chair, waiting. No expression.

Les took a breath. “Well, sir, the target disappeared before I could identify it.”

“Disappeared?”

“Yes, sir.”

“That’s the second time this week. And you were there the other time.”

“Yes, sir. That’s right.”

“Did you circle the area this time?”

“Yes, sir. Nothing.”

“What do you make of it, lieutenant?”

“I don’t rightly know, sir. It could be the air force are playing games with us.”

The captain folded his arms. It was no secret that Andersen Air Force Base to the northeast, the old converted World War Two B-29 base, had been busy throughout the Mariana Islands all July with aerial activity. “The air force have been deploying some exercises lately where radio silence is vital. But I wish we’d know in advance so that we don’t waste taxpayers’ money sending up a thirty million dollar aircraft for nothing. Do you think it could have been the B-29 that’s being repaired for the Second World War reunion coming up on Tinian? The – what’s that squadron?”

“The 509th Composite Group, sir,” Les replied.

“Yeah, the atomic outfit.”

“It might have been the B-29, sir. The target was large enough. And it appeared to be landing. Maybe at Saipan. It never got above a thousand feet.”

“But why this late at night.” The CO smiled for the first time. “I remember your file. Your father was based with the 509th, was he not?”

“Indeed he was, sir. Ground crew.”

“Is he coming out for the reunion?”

“I’m hoping he is, sir. I don’t know yet.”

“I’d like to meet him, if he does make it.”

“You would?” Les tried to restrain his surprise. “Yes, of course, I’ll let him know.”

The CO smiled again. “OK. In the meantime, I’ll see if I can find out what’s going on. I’ll make some calls. Dismiss, lieutenant. Go get some sleep. Say hello to Gail for me.” Remaining in his chair, he snapped off a stiff salute.

“Yes, sir, I will.”

Inside of five minutes, Les jumped into his newly-leased, white Nissan 240SX, opened the sunroof, and drove through the front gate. The night was warm. He opened the glove box and fingered through his assortment of 1950's and 1960's rock-and-roll tapes. Fats Domino, Ricky Nelson, Buddy Holly... He chose *Dion's Greatest Hits*, one of his favorites, and snapped it into the tape deck. There wasn't a car on the road, not at two-thirty in the morning during the week. However, he still stuck to the island's strictly enforced thirty-five-mile-per-hour speed limit out of habit. When *The Wanderer* came on, he cranked the music up good and loud, tapping his fingers on the steering wheel. Home, his wife, the sack, ten minutes away.

Chapter two

SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA

Robert Shilling turned his back to the sun, wiped his brow, and continued vacuuming the pool in his swim trunks. It was a typical southern Arizona summer day. Hot, dry, no clouds. Now, at mid-afternoon, the temperature hung at a blistering 103 degrees. Shilling was feeling the heat. He was getting too old for this. Since his retirement in 1985, he had been thinking seriously of selling his sprawling suburban bungalow and moving into an apartment on one of the hillsides overlooking Phoenix or Scottsdale. On the other hand, he couldn't bear the thought of wasting away the last few years of his life in some concrete high-rise. Besides, a mechanic by trade, he loved to work with his hands. And there was always plenty to do around the house.

"There you are. Come out of the sun before you fry to a crisp."

Robert spun around to see his wife, Edna, standing with a tray of two tall, frosty pina colodas. She set the tray down on the patio table near her, under the shade of the umbrella.

“Have a drink. Cool off. What are yuh doing out here, anyway?”

Robert sighed, adjusting his dark sunglasses. “Ah, the pool’s so dirty. I haven’t been able to get at it for a week.”

“Can it wait? Sit down.”

“Sure.” Robert hooked the top part of the pole under the diving board to keep the vacuum system circulating freely. “Be right there.”

“You’re getting a little red on your chest,” Edna warned her husband as he walked over to the shade of the patio umbrella.

“It’s no wonder,” he admitted, glancing down at his chest thick with white bristle. “I’ve been out most of the day.”

“Naughty boy.”

“I didn’t think it was that bad. I could use one of those drinks right now.” He plunked himself down in one of the white plastic chairs and placed his sunglasses on the table.

So far, retirement had been good to the couple. They were healthy and tanned, and both had stuck to a daily exercise program to keep the pounds down. Part of that program was golfing. At seventy, Robert had a full head of white, crewcut hair. He still had the broad shoulders from his youth, but age was slowly etching its evil way into his dark skin. The wrinkles were deeper and his voice gruffer. He had often said that he would have preserved his lungs and voice box if he had quit smoking earlier, instead of only ten years ago. Edna had

been a smoker also, until shortly after her husband quit. Her face too had the telltale lines, which she thought was rather unbecoming for the Miss Arizona 1944 she had been. Nevertheless, she was still pretty with vivid blue eyes and dimples when she smiled. The sixty-four-year-old was still quite attractive in the one-piece bathing suit she was wearing.

She pulled up a chair and joined her husband in the shade. Noticing his war album on the table, she turned to him. “Reminiscing?”

Robert consumed some of his drink. He enjoyed pina colodas on a hot day. “I guess I am. You know, I haven’t looked at it in ages. I wonder if I’ll recognize any of those guys at the reunion?” His eyes grew large. “And will they recognize me?”

The couple eyed each other.

During World War Two, Robert Shilling had been a master sergeant with the United States Army Air Force, a crew chief with the famous 509th Composite Group on Tinian Island, the organization responsible for the world’s first atomic bombing missions. Following his post-war discharge, he returned to his hometown Phoenix, married Edna, and worked as a mechanic for a Ford dealership in the city, the job he had recently retired from.

Staring at the open book of snapshots, Robert recalled – in a flash – some of his hard-working war years on the tropical island of Tinian. There had been no glory scraping his fingers to the bone keeping his crew’s B-29 in the air. *Keep the boys flying* was the rally cry, much to

the same degree as *Remember Pearl Harbor*. That was hard to do considering all the mechanical problems that plagued the first B-29's. The hours had been long, the heat unbearable. Often he was so tired that he would fall asleep in his work clothes because he was too weak to even peel them off.

"There it is," Edna said, bracing herself.

"Huh?"

"The *Mary Jane*. You had it open to the *Mary Jane*."

Robert set the drink on the table. "Yeah, missing in action," he said slowly, as if in a trance.

"They never found the bomber or the crew, did they?" she asked softly, hoping for a response. The *Mary Jane* was usually a taboo subject in the Shilling household.

Robert answered with a jerk of his head. "No one knows what happened. It just disappeared somewhere between Tinian and Japan, a couple days before the Japanese surrender. Geez, they were a good bunch of guys."

"A couple of days *before* the surrender? So it went missing after the atomic missions. After all these years. I never knew that!"

He sighed. "You didn't?"

"No."

"Ah, it was just a routine mission." Robert took a big gulp of the drink. "There was still a few conventional bombing missions after the atomic ones."

"Was there?"

"Yeah. A lot of people don't know that. Anyway, can we drop the *Mary Jane*?"

“Sure.” She got the intent. No more talk about the bomber. At least not for now.

Robert’s mind fell back to the war. He remembered how the aircrew had treated him and his ground crew with the utmost respect. They were a team, regardless of rank. The loss of the *Mary Jane* aircrew had struck Robert hard, as if he alone – the crew chief – was to blame for their disappearance. Due to guilt, he, at first, refused to attend the 509th reunion. Forty-five years later he continued to ask himself the tormenting questions. Were there mechanical problems with the engines? Was the bomber shot down by a Japanese fighter... or worse... by some trigger-happy US Navy gunner aboard some battleship? No one would ever know. Then... more recently... he asked himself what difference it really made now. Why sweat it over and over again? It was then that he decided to go to Tinian. He and his wife needed to get away, see some old friends from the 509th and their two sons – David and Les – on the other side of the Pacific.

“Looking forward to the reunion?”

“Yeah, I guess so. Now I am.”

“Have you heard how many are going?”

Robert took a long time to answer. Folding his arms, he said in a flat voice, “Including wives, something like four or five hundred.”

Edna looked surprised. “That many? I can’t wait to see Les’s kids. They must be so big now. Did you read David’s letter?”

“I did. He seems to be doing quite well for himself. The Midas Touch. But he didn’t have to send us the air fare to Kyoto.”

Edna chuckled. “He’s got a lot more money than we do.”

“That’s for hell sure.” Robert paused for a moment. “Sounds as if he’s dating a Nip.”

“This is 1990, dear. The politically-correct term in Japanese. No more Nips. Not even Japs.”

Robert grunted. “Oh, yeah. So I’ve been told.”

“From the sound of your voice it seems you don’t approve.”

Robert stared her down. He couldn’t bear the thought of a Japanese daughter-in-law. Young people David’s age just didn’t understand. They didn’t live through the war years. “What do you think?” he said curtly.

He still found the war hard to forget. His mind drifted back to how badly the American POW’s were treated by the Japs. The Americans had taken Japan to their knees. After the war, the Japs turned around and whipped everybody else by selling their products cheaper. This was especially true in the car market. *Buy American* was Robert’s personal motto. Keep the jobs here. But he seemed to be the last of a dying breed.

Edna decided to change the subject. “By the way, why are they not waiting for a 50th anniversary, instead of a 45th?”

“I wondered that, too. Maybe because we’ll all be too old in 1995.”

“What’s on the agenda?”

Robert adjusted his chair, and told Edna what he knew. The usual assortment of breakfasts, lunches, and other get-togethers. *Fifi*, the world's only flying B-29, would make an appearance by flying over the runways at Tinian. Major-General Phillip Cameron, the pilot who had dropped the first atomic bomb, at the controls. Next, a couple tours of Tinian, with a windup gala evening on the third and last day.

"I can't wait. Two weeks to go. It'll be fun."

"Sure," Robert replied.

"Too bad it has to be in August. I heard that's the hottest month in the Mariana Islands. Les says it gets pretty humid there at times."

Robert shrugged. "It has to be August. That was the month we dropped the bombs and ended the war. It wouldn't be right any other time. Anyway, I'd better get back to the pool."

* * * *

GUAM

Les was so sound asleep that he didn't hear the bedside phone ring. His wife pulled her tired body across her husband's bare chest and grabbed the receiver, warm from the sun's rays streaming through the bottom of the curtain covering the bedroom window.

"Hello," she said, gruffly, almost in a whisper into the receiver, as she lay on her back.

"Gail. It's David. How yuh doing? Yuh OK?"

She brushed the hair from her eyes and got up on one elbow. “Hi, David.” She glanced over at the digital clock on the nightstand. “Guess we slept in. Hell, it’s ten o’clock.”

“Can I talk to my little brother?”

“Sure. He was out late. Didn’t get back from the base ’til two or so.”

“Out on maneuvers, was he?”

“Yeah. I’ll see if I can wake him.”

Gail glanced at Les, who was out cold. “Hey, Les.” She was talking louder now. “It’s your brother.”

Les opened his eyes to see Gail looking down at him, inches away, smiling, hugging him close. Her long brown hair hung down over her nightgown. She placed the receiver between them so they both could listen.

“Hi, David,” Les said, clearing his throat.

“How goes it, little bother?”

“Ah, well... hanging in there. What’s up?”

“I got a letter from mom and dad. They’re going to the reunion after all. They said they plan to come up to Kyoto for a few days, too. I wanted to know if you and the family wanted to drop by with them. How about it?”

“Yeah, I suppose so,” Les said slowly, struggling for the words, eyes squinting. “If I can get the time off. I’ll have to see, I’ll let you know,” he went on, stopping to kiss his wife on the cheek, while she purred in his ear. “By the way, I didn’t think dad wanted to go. What changed his mind?”

“Hell if I know. And he even wants to visit Japan for the first time. You don’t suppose the ol’ guy has finally mellowed?”

“Maybe.”

“Get back to me as soon as you can, OK.”

“Sure. A day or so.”

“Great. Got to go. See yuh, navy boy.”

“You bet.”

Gail hung up for him.

“Hi there, Hulk,” Gail said, her hand moving in his hair.

Les smiled. “Are the kids up?”

“I don’t hear them. Close the door,” she demanded, smiling.

“Now?”

“What’s the matter, you not up to it? Hulk can’t take it in the morning anymore?”

As Les got up to shut the door, she quickly sat up on the bed and removed her nightgown.

* * * *

KYOTO, JAPAN

David leaned backwards in his upholstered chair and laced his hands behind his neck. He was already on his third cup of strong coffee this morning, inside his plush Kyoto International Hotel office.

David had found pleasure in the good life. While Les had the Navy, David was already a millionaire at thirty-two. A wise investor and businessman, he owned two

hotels, several middle class and well-to-do apartment buildings, and two fine-dining restaurants, all in Kyoto, one of the most breathtaking cities in Japan. He was the fortune hunter of the family, having left the States in his twenties to take a business administration course at Tokyo University. Despite his mother's good-natured pestering, he still remained unmarried, although he did practice a lot. He had had girl friends. A few affairs. Now for the last two months, he had been dating a pretty Japanese girl. Things were getting serious. And they both knew it.

David stepped over to the attached washroom and stood before the mirror. He combed his thinning hair which was mostly dark, with a thin splash of gray around the temples. Shorter and heavier than his navy brother, David was handsome in his own right. The elder Shilling brother took pride in his appearance. Nothing but designer clothing. Suit, tie, shirt today.

Finishing his coffee, he turned to the window and looked down at the beautiful and historical Imperial Park fifteen stories below, where the imperial family had made their residence for centuries prior to Tokyo becoming the capital of Japan. His eyes scanned what he could see of Kyoto, a city surrounded by low hills. Off in the distance, miles away, he saw shiny Lake Biwa. The city of over one million people below was renowned for its hundreds of Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. A good number of old buildings – the previous century and older – were still standing because Kyoto was a unique major Japanese city. It was completely un-

touched by American bombing raids during World War Two. Kyoto was a tourist attraction, which pleased David. That meant money. One unofficial tag for Kyoto was the Convention City. Visitors who came here had to stay in a hotel and had to eat at restaurants. And he had that ground covered. Furthermore, any students who attended university needed to reside somewhere and what would be better than one of his apartments near the campus.

David also liked the land, the climate, and the people of Japan. Grinning, he thought of his father and how he still hated the Japanese. The silly bugger. David shook his head and turned to his desk.

**That's the end of the sampler. We hope you enjoyed it.
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About the author

Historical fiction author Daniel Wyatt is Canadian, born and raised on the prairies of Saskatchewan. He now resides with his wife and two children in Burlington, Ontario, thirty miles outside Toronto.

His first published work was a set of first-person stories from World War II allied air force veterans called *Two Wings and a Prayer* by Boston Mills Press, Erin, Ontario, Canada in 1984. This was followed up in 1986 by *Maximum Effort* with the same publisher. In 1990, Wyatt made the switch to historical fiction with *The Last Flight of the Arrow*, a techno-thriller set during the Cold War years of the late 1950's. Originally published by Random House of Canada, it sold 20,000 copies in paperback form. The *Mary Jane Mission* came out two years later, also by Random House. "The Falcon File" series, consisting of *The Furerhermaster*, *The Filberg Consortium* and *Foo Fighters* was published as an ebook original by Mushroom eBooks, and in paperback as *The Falcon File* by Bladud Books in 2007. Wyatt's other published works include aviation magazine articles in Canada and the United States.

A big baseball fan, Wyatt enjoys collecting Detroit Tigers memorabilia.