

CHAPTER ONE

Ken Hack hadn't seen it. But he'd damn well heard it.

There was no mistaking the sound of an RPG being launched. The second he heard the all-too-familiar pop and then the sound of the missile cutting through the night sky, he turned quickly to his right and could see the rocket headed straight at him.

"Incoming!" he yelled into his wrist microphone, dropping to the solid gray metal behind one of the stacks on the roof of the White House. A huge explosion shook the entire building under him. A fireball shot high and far from the Oval Office.

Lying near the ledge, facing south on the roof, he jumped up and sprinted as fast as he could away from the path of the next missile, which he was certain would be directed right at him.

Inside, his Secret Service agents were yelling for everyone to, "Get out!" Fear filled the eyes of staffers as they ran, not knowing where, fires burning in the halls. Away was the destination.

Screams echoed through the halls. The sound of the second RPG-7 pop could be heard.

Hearts raced. Feet flew. The sound of shoes pelted off the carpet. People panicked!

"Run! Run! Run!" yelled someone, somewhere, somehow, in the total chaos.

Above, Hack and his five-man team sprinted toward the far end of the roof over the West Wing, when the missile grenade struck the center of the already-damaged Oval Office. Another thunderous explosion and massive fireball shot out from the heart of the most powerful building in the world.

Hack, the incredibly strong, 6'2" Director of the Secret Service, was sent flying like a human cannonball in a circus. It felt like a bad dream, a nightmare. In the air, he could see his loyal and trusted team members around him. Arms and legs flailing, eyes bulging, mouths screaming. They were like a team of skydivers drifting through the air with no parachutes.

Hack landed hard on his back against the unforgiving roof, bouncing, keeping his head up to avoid a concussion. His shirt sleeves torn, elbows bleeding.

Hack quickly gathered himself. Bumps and bruises wouldn't stop this heroic soldier. He bounced up like a gymnast. His men were scattered across the roof. No time to check them.

He picked up his 300 Winchester Magnum chambered bolt action rifle, ran to the front ledge and aimed toward the smoke cloud billowing from the launch point in The Ellipse, the 52-acre park on the south side of the White House.

Through his binoculars, he could see four men, all dressed in green fatigues. They were hurrying to load another RPG-7, the Russian-made weapon.

Not this time, Hack thought. He had been in this situation many times in Afghanistan, where he had earned the Bronze Star for his courage under fire. He was the best United States Marine Corps sniper in his division, with more than fifty kills. He took great pride in having saved his buddies during a period of the war when soldiers were going door to door, looking for dangerous Taliban fighters. Hack's incredible record had resulted in the White House recruiting him to guard President Gregory H. Walsh and his family.

Over the decade he had roamed the grounds, halls and roof of the White House, he had never had to fire his weapon. It had certainly been locked and loaded the day the misguided flag-draped American man had climbed over the tall, spiked black metal White House fence. Lying on the roof, Hack had his 300 Winchester Magnum pointed at the unwelcome, uninvited intruder, who had raised his arms in victory on the North Lawn. Hack had been relieved to see three heavily armed Secret Service agents and their dogs apprehend the disturbed man, allowing the military veteran to avoid adding another kill to his record.

Despite his rifle's lack of use over that time period, he had never lost the anxiety he felt on a daily basis. He consistently reminded himself and his team of the responsibility they held, protecting the leader of the free world.

The highly trained, muscular, 210-pound patriot knew that it only took one person, one nut, one terrorist to decide to jump that fence with a weapon and a mind full of bad intentions.

Or one cleverly disguised miscreant who outsmarted the security system and passed through the White House E Street security checkpoint.

Or, as he had found out on that evening, four misguided green-fatigued combatants firing two anti-tank RPG-7s at the Oval Office.

And on that hot first day of May in 2015, International Workers' Day, when the dangerous projectile had been fired at the office of the commander-in-chief, President Jack Fallon, the highly determined Ken Hack had no intention of allowing a third shot at the home of a President he loved and admired for his distinguished service as a naval aviator, who had been

shot down over Vietnam, but had somehow survived a long, tortuous capture by the Viet Cong. He was a great hero. A man all America admired.

Through his binoculars, Hack could clearly see the four attackers, each wearing a balaclava to protect their identity. They were scrambling to reload the RPG launcher. By their actions, Hack knew immediately they were experienced with weapons. No time to give them another chance to prove it.

Just then, a single shot sounded above the White House.

The combatant, holding the long brown metal launcher on his right shoulder, fell to the ground, shot through the front of his head. Dead!

The weapon landed next to him, directly in front of the comrade still holding a green rocket grenade in his two rubber-gloved hands.

Panic and fear now shifted to the lawn of The Ellipse.

Another rifle shot. Down he went, falling backwards, the RPG-7 falling straight to the ground.

The other two looked up toward the White House.

“Run! Run!” yelled a twenty-something, long-haired and bearded leader. Before he could take his first step, a third shot rang out. Right through the heart. Down he went. Dead before he hit the ground.

The three were sprawled only a few feet apart across the grass of President’s Park. Dead! Blood poured out like a stream of departing evil, filling the dirt patches in the thick green lawn.

The fourth attacker dropped his rifle and sprinted south as fast as he could possibly run, hoping to escape the range of Hack’s rifle.

Running hard but looking over his shoulder, he couldn’t find the black Suburban SUV that was supposed to pick up the assault team immediately after the attack. He was on his own. He huffed and puffed with each step, his eyes wide, his mouth open, sprinting with every ounce of energy he had in his unconditioned, unathletic body. Then, he could hear something hit the ground just behind him. A bullet, he thought. He kept running, sprinting. Then, a stinging sensation filled the back of his right thigh. It knocked him to the ground.

He struggled to get up.

Hack took another look through his binoculars. He watched the assailant pull the balaclava off his head and his long hair fall out. He was just a kid, thought Hack. A kid who was in great pain, trying to get up and escape.

Hack could have finished him off easily. But no. This young, bearded, brown-haired, pudgy-looking assailant would be kept alive for an interrogation, to find out who was behind this plot to attack the White House.

As the injured combatant rose to his feet, whoosh! A burning sensation filled his upper right thigh. Down he went. Both legs had been shot and were badly bleeding. He was going nowhere except lockup, where he would be questioned. And they would get answers.

A few seconds later, a half dozen police from the SWAT tactical unit arrived at the scene. Guns were drawn, locked and loaded. One false move, and the bleeding boy on the ground would be the dead boy on the ground. Within minutes, the tactical unit had him handcuffed and led to their armored SWAT vehicle twenty-five yards away.