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01 YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN NOW

Kalisz. We're still only in Kalisz. We need to get out of here. Fast. The artillery barrages are getting closer. The Soviets will be here soon. Sarge says we move out after dark. I'm not sure we'll last that long.

We were cav scouts, mechanized reconnaissance. Our life expectancy in combat was about two minutes. Most of us didn't even last that long. We never saw the enemy coming. When the Division HQ started shouting over the radio, it was already too late. The tanks of the Soviet 6th Guards Motor Rifle Brigade hit them hard at dawn, five clicks north of Kalisz.

The proud US 5th Mechanized Infantry Division - now just a band of scattered stragglers, spread out all over hell. Running for our lives. Dying in the Polish dirt, which had been cratered and irradiated by tactical nukes from both sides.

Not that we were a particularly grand bunch when this operation started. A ragtag gang of jolly green giants, walking the Earth with guns. Soldiers. Not just Americans - in our ranks we had Poles, Czechs, Germans, you name it. Even civilians. Hell, by the end we'd take in anyone who had a gun and knew which way to point it.

The command and supply chains broke down back in '98, when the US and Soviet naval forces obliterated each other on the high seas of the North Atlantic and the air resupply collapsed. After that, our forces over here in Europe were stranded. Living off the land. Falling apart.

When we first heard about Operation Reset, we couldn't believe it. The first major offensive by NATO forces in Europe in over a year. The order was to link up with other US forces under III Corps and push our way to Warsaw, or what's left of it. We weren't told why. Some said it was a last hurrah, a final try to save the world as we knew it. We didn't care. We just knew it was a Hail Mary, a desperate gamble in the most desperate of times. And maybe, just maybe, a chance to find a ride home.

It was no surprise that it went to hell. Most things have in the last few years.

Some say it didn't have to be this way. Some say history could have taken a different turn. If the Soviet Union had collapsed back in '91 when it was on the ropes. If the Gang of Eight coup against Gorbachev had failed, the world would have looked very different today. Some say. I think it's bullshit. This storm was always coming, sooner or later.

It doesn't matter anymore, anyway. Now, all that matters is to survive each day.

It's all up to us now. Our squad. Jonesy. Diaz, driving the M113. That Polish girl Kasia. The men and women around me. No one else will come to our rescue. The final words from division HQ, before they signed off for good, left little doubt.

"Good luck. You're on your own now."