

# An Eagle Unchained

by  
James R. Olson

Copyright © 2008 James R. Olson

All Rights Reserved.

No part of this excerpt may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Contact the publisher at:

<http://www.ErianPress.com>

or

[publisher@erianpress.com](mailto:publisher@erianpress.com)

## THIRTY

**T**here was only a soft ripple on the oily water as ex-Special Forces Sergeant Frank Sawyer eased to the surface. Huge mercury vapor lights illuminated most of the shipyard, but beside the bulk of an empty dry-dock, heavy shadows concealed his movements. For a full minute he remained suspended in the water, silently rotating a complete 360 degrees to make certain no one was lingering in the vicinity.

Satisfied he would not be observed, Sawyer slowly pulled himself from the harbor, the only sound being the quiet splatter of water dripping from his wet suit.

It has stopped snowing, but the icy wind was still swirling around the shipyard. About an inch of heavy March snow covered the dock and surrounding areas, but he wasn't concerned about leaving signs of his presence. Any footprints would simply mingle with the normal shipyard activities.

About a hundred yards further down the dock, the harbor's bright lights were concentrated around where a night shift was working on the LHD-14. Even at this distance, the sounds of hammering, welding, and equipment motors were loud enough to cover any slight noise he might make.

He slipped off his single air tank and laid it gently on the dock before reeling in the nylon rope that held the waterproof equipment bag. He shivered in the wind as he stripped off the wet suit and quickly dressed in the warm work clothing he had stowed in the bag. After removing a small parcel and the soft rifle case containing his weapon and ammunition, he stuffed the wet suit, swim fins, air tank, facemask, weight belt, and nylon rope into the bag and tied it shut.

It went against his thrifty nature to abandon the equipment that had cost a small fortune, but he had no further use for the gear, and carrying it would impede his movements. He eased the bag into the water, watching the stream of bubbles as it sank to

the bottom of the harbor, knowing the chances of the items being discovered in the muck were slim. If they were ever found, the equipment was untraceable.

Slipping the smaller bag over his shoulder and carrying the rifle case in his left hand, he moved from shadow to shadow until he was as close to the work area as he considered safe. Because of the tight security around the shipyard, he had not been able to do a proper reconnaissance. He still had to determine where to set up his sniper position so he would be properly concealed and yet have a clear view of the target.

A large pre-fabricated platform, draped with red, white, and blue bunting, had been erected abutting the ship's hull. Obviously the target would be on the platform to address the gathering and christen the ship. It was an ideal setup. The President would be in the open, elevated above the spectators.

Although the dock around the work area was crowded with forklifts, crates, and a large crane that dangled over the ship's deck, the area was too open for his purposes. The closest buildings were about two hundred yards distant, but that was almost point blank range for him.

A couple of two story, flat roofed structures, which looked like warehouses, might give him the cover, elevation and field of fire he needed. At least they were worth investigating.

Taking a wide detour that kept him beyond the glare from the mercury vapor lights, he was a drifting shadow moving to the nearest building. He cursed softly when he found the side door padlocked. The old, rusty hasp could have easily been pried away from the doorframe, but a broken lock would immediately raise suspicions when the Secret Service checked the area.

Being careful to avoid leaving tracks in the patches of snow banked against the wall, he crept toward the back of the warehouse. He had nearly given up hope of finding an easy entrance when he discovered a casement window that had been left open a couple of inches. At first the window resisted his efforts, then suddenly shot upward with a loud screech. He crouched in the heavy shadows for a minute, waiting to see if the noise had been heard. Satisfied no one had been alerted, he climbed through the open window and then carefully closed it behind him.

The warehouse stretched the length of a football field, the far corners nearly invisible in the gloom. The only lights in the building were red exit signs over scattered doorways. Rows of crates and boxes, stacked ten feet high on pallets, covered the warehouse floor.

There was barely enough illumination from the dock area, seeping through high, dirty windows, to enable him to make his way between the aisles toward the front of the building.

Windowless, twelve-foot-high overhead doors faced the harbor. About fifteen feet above the floor steel support girders stretched from front to back of the building. It was difficult to judge distances in the poor lighting, but it appeared as if the warehouse roof was about five feet above the girders. Along all four sides of the building were a series of narrow ventilation windows between the roof and the support beams.

He climbed the tallest stack of crates in the area and discovered the girders were still nearly five feet above his head. However, he had come prepared. Slipping the small bag off his shoulder, he undid the fastener and pulled out a miniature grappling hook attached to a length of nylon rope.

It required three attempts before the rope wrapped around the girder and the grappling hook caught. Then he put his full weight on the rope and pulled until he was certain the line was secure. After tying the free end of the rope to the gun case and the small bag, he climbed to the girder, swung his leg up and pulled himself on top of the foot wide steel beam.

The ceiling was closer to the girders than he had estimated, giving him a crawl space of less than four feet. He hauled up the bag and gun case, released the grappling hook, coiled the rope and replaced it in the bag. Then he duck walked to the ventilation windows along the front wall.

Inch thick planks had been laid from beam to beam; creating a three-foot wide platform, which he surmised, was some sort of maintenance walkway. Whatever the purpose, it was perfect for his needs.

The ventilation windows were all partially open, slanting outward from the bottom. The glass was filthy, but through the narrow opening he was able to see the well-lighted dry dock where the night crew worked on the ship. His perch was about two hundred yards from the christening platform with an unobstructed view of the speaker's podium.

He opened the gun case and carefully withdrew the Remington M40A1 rifle with attached Unerti 10x scope. The M40A1 was the Marine Corps' sniper rifle, a modification of the Remington 700DBL, with a maximum effective range of over 800 yards. It was the sweetest, most accurate rifle he had ever fired. There had been almost no recoil, and his grouping could have been covered with a silver dollar when he used five rounds to zero the scope at three hundred yards. He would hate leaving the weapon behind, but his escape plans did not call for him to carry out a rifle.

By kneeling on the girder he was able to easily center the crosshairs on the Presidential podium. However, with the ventilation windows opened as they were, it was necessary to extend the rifle barrel beyond the window before the dirty glass no longer interfered with his sight picture.

Twisting the little hand crank beside the window, he opened it further, checked the scope, and then opened it two more inches until the rifle's muzzle did not have to extend into the open.

Concerned some alert security person might notice one ventilation window open further than the others, he moved along the maintenance planks, adjusting each of the windows until they were all at approximately the same angle.

Returning to his chosen spot, he groped inside the gun case until his fingers closed on the box magazine he had already loaded with five 7.62 NATO bullets. He snapped the magazine into the receiver and worked the bolt to chamber a round. Checking that the safety was engaged, he carefully laid the weapon on the platform next to the wall.

He glanced at his watch and was surprised to discover it was nearly two o'clock. While with the Special Forces, he had learned the trick of catching sleep whenever and wherever he could. His little sniper nest was as ready as it would ever be, so he decided to grab a nap before the Secret Service people arrived to check the area.

From the small bag he extracted a dark green nylon tarp. He stretched out on the maintenance walk, and carefully covered himself, knowing that from the warehouse floor he would look like a pile of equipment.

He must have dozed deeply because the sound of someone walking on the flat roof jolted him awake. That would be a Secret Service agent, using the warehouse as a vantage point with a view of the entire shipyard. If security was doing its job, there would be one or more agents on every high point in the area.

His senses alert, he heard the faint sounds of someone undoing the padlock on the warehouse door moments before the sound of footsteps and clicking nails on the concrete floor announced the arrival of a Secret Service K-9 team. If he remained perfectly still, it wasn't likely the dog would scent him so high above the floor. Since there was no stairway or easy access to the girders, he didn't figure the security people would do more than visually inspect the area between the girders and the ceiling.

He took the chance of peeking under the edge of the tarp. A man was sweeping the area with a flashlight as he slowly made his way between the aisles of stacked boxes. His other hand tightly gripped a German Shepard's leash. The dog moved ahead, its nose to the ground, either searching for explosives or recent man scent. As Sawyer had suspected, the agent was satisfied to merely sweep the beam of his light along the girders and the maintenance walkway. The team was much more thorough on the ground, the canine partner sniffing every crevice and cranny for nearly half an hour.

When they exited the building, he heard the padlock snapped into place. He breathed a sigh of relief, knowing the security detail would consider the building clear and no one would check again before the President arrived.

It was only nine o'clock, but he was too nervous to sleep again. Instead, he mentally reviewed his escape plan.

He intended to fire at least three shots, and perhaps empty the magazine, confident he could get off all five rounds within ten seconds. After the first shot there would be a great deal of confusion on the speaker's platform and he would use the moment of chaos to begin his escape. Leaving the rifle, the tarp and the small bag on the maintenance walk, he would drop down onto the nearest pallet and make his way to the same window he had used to gain entry. Exiting the building and closing the window behind him, would only take a few seconds. The panic and confusion at the ship would attract every person in the immediate vicinity. By running around the warehouse and mingling with the shipyard workers, he would simply become another bystander.

He figured the total time from the first shot until he was lost in the crowd would be somewhere around ninety seconds. The Secret Service agents would be looking for the assassin to be running away, or trying to conceal himself. They would never suspect the shooter of joining the curious spectators running toward the center of activity.

When he glanced at his watch again, it was only nine-thirty. In the military he had participated in plenty of ambushes where he had learned to discipline himself to endure waiting periods patiently, but the inactivity was not something he enjoyed. At least here in the warehouse it wasn't freezing cold, or boiling hot with flies and biting insects pestering him. Still, the time dragged, the hour hand on his watch seeming to stand still.

At ten-thirty workers began placing folding chairs on the platform. A couple of electricians installed a microphone on the podium and fiddled with the wires to the large speakers until the sound and volume satisfied them.

At eleven a team of Secret Service people, with their canine companions, performed a last check of the speaker's platform, making certain no one had placed

explosives in the supports when they weren't looking. He smiled to himself. The Secret Service was being so thorough, but had missed him entirely. When the first shot was fired, he imagined they would be wondering what they had done wrong.

At eleven-thirty spectators and dignitaries, bundled in heavy coats against the sharp wind, began arriving. The sounds of work on the ship ceased as the security teams cordoned off the area and made their last precautionary sweeps.

At eleven forty-five, he heard the distinctive whop, whop of an approaching helicopter. From his vantage point he could not see the landing pad, but the increased alertness of the Secret Service agents, told him the President had arrived.

At eleven fifty-five a black limo drove up to the speaker's platform. The President, surrounded by agents, stepped out of the vehicle and waved to the crowd. From his vantage point, with the 10X scope, Sawyer could easily have put all five rounds in the man's head. He was tempted, but had previously decided to take his shot when the President was beginning his speech.

The few seconds before a kill were always the sweetest time, when he almost felt omnipotent, and he wanted to savor the moment. The instant the target had exited the car, Sawyer held the power of life and death in his hands. The thrill, the surge of adrenaline, was better than the best sex he had ever experienced.

He followed the action through the scope as President Hale mounted the five steps to the platform and shook hands with three men; two civilians and an Admiral. He must have made a funny comment because the people around him laughed politely. It would be the last humorous words the President ever spoke.

When one of the civilians moved to the podium, Hale sat down. In the chair, the President was partially hidden by the rostrum and the heads of the audience.

Sawyer waited patiently until the civilian finished speaking and Hale approached the podium, placing some papers on the stand.

Now was the moment. Sawyer snuggled his cheek against the stock and centered the scope's crosshairs on the bridge of the President's nose. He took a deep breath and slowly let it out as his finger began to tighten on the trigger.



Thank you for reading this sample chapter from *An Eagle Unchained*. If you enjoyed the brief journey, perhaps you would read the entire novel and tell your friends about it.