

Chapter One

July 4, 1986 – Phoenix, Arizona

The dark, rugged looking man knelt near the fourth floor window of an office building with his rifle at the ready. There had been a light rain in the morning but the sky was starting to clear as a large crowd gathered along the parade route below. It was monsoon season in the desert. A brisk wind moved the sounds of the people and the slow rumble of the motorcycles around the canyon of high buildings like an amphitheater.

He had built a cave of boxes around the window, creating a makeshift-hiding place. He gazed at the park across the street looking for his spotter. They had told him that the lookout would be easy to see but so far he hadn't appeared.

His gaze was interrupted by the grind of the elevator's motor in the back of the large, vacant room. He stood his rifle against the wall and picked up his clipboard and started toward the middle of the room. He knew that as long as he appeared to be working no one would question him. Someone had moved the elevator to the third floor, right below him. He needed to be on guard.

He returned to his shelter and looked back out the window. It wouldn't be long until his target would be in sight. He had been a gun for hire most of his adult life after the Marines but his age was catching up with him. God, he was over fifty.

He had a clear view of the street in front of him but there was a large tree in the park that could be a problem. Some of the people sitting in the park waiting for the motorcade were looking up toward him. He moved back slightly from the window.

His plan was simple. Follow the plan. Eliminate the target. Evacuate the location. Get in position and protect your back.

Moving from one side of the strike area to the other, he checked the large room behind him and then returned to the half open window.

He wasn't a regular employee so any hard questions would end the op but he was in a uniform with an ID provided by his client.

Again he went on alert when he heard loud voices close by. He left the window quietly, listening for the location of the conversation. It was right below him he decided. It was probably the workers who had moved the elevator to the floor below. He returned to the window.

He had been told there was a backup shooter somewhere along the route. If discovered, stop and get out. He knew all he had to do was just squeeze the trigger. Take the shot. Police the brass. Take the rifle. Execute a calm exit. Mingle with the crowd. Become one of them. Meet at the airport for his pay day.

The plan rang in his mind. He had over a hundred kills since leaving the Marines but this seemed different.

Soon his target would approach the kill zone from the west. He knelt sideways by the windowsill to avoid facing the sun. He tried to stay motionless as his heart started pounding.

This was a big opportunity and he couldn't miss it. This meant big bucks and the kill shot was worth a bonus. That would be the icing on the cake.

The birds on the roof kept flying and returning, as the noise below got louder. The glare of the sun on the window would be gone soon.

His rifle was locked and loaded. He could see the target coming from his left now as the noise from the crowd increased.

He would be patient. Take the best shot. He would be shooting down on the target. He had taken shots many times over a hundred yards. This would be much shorter. He looked to his right but the lookout still wasn't in sight. The guy could be hidden by the trees in the park.

He could handle this by himself he thought. He would know if he hit the target. He didn't need the spotter to tell him that.

Now he was ready to take the shot. The target had passed below him and turned left onto Central Avenue. He was moving away with his back fully exposed. The tree could be a problem but the bullet would fly right through the leaves. The rush was tremendous. He tried to control his hands. He pulled the trigger.

The shot flew through the air and hit the target. The windows rattled and the building shook with a noise that sounded like an explosion. The pigeons above flew away with a loud, rushing sound. The target had slumped to his left.

Sirens started whaling and the roar of the motorcycles filled the air. The crowd below was falling to the ground and running in all directions. Mothers were grabbing their children while others ducked for cover. It was complete chaos.

He thought he heard another shot but with all the noise, he wasn't sure. He paused a second then started his escape.

He moved quickly to the rear of the room toward the elevators. He broke the rifle down and put it in his tool box. The elevators were still on the floor below. He had no time to bring one up to his floor so he headed for the backstairs with the tool box in one hand and the clipboard in the other.

Halfway down the stairs, he heard loud talking. He ducked into the empty lunchroom just before a policeman with a drawn gun entered. He needed to stay calm. He tried not to change expressions as the officer approached him. The cop quickly checked his employee badge. Then he nodded and rushed by him. The employee uniform and badge had worked.

He had been trained if you have something in your hand you don't appear out of place. He moved to the vending machine, bought a coke and headed down the backstairs to the first floor. He proceeded to the front of the building toward the main entrance. Only one person was left in the office and she was talking to a policeman. He was trying to look natural and not rush. The police encounter had been too close.

As he got to the entrance of the building, he heard loud screams and saw people moving in all directions. He moved into the crowd as a policeman approached him. He hoped he didn't have to pull the pistol hidden under his shirt. The officer rushed right by him, brushing his shoulder as he passed, and entered the building as the ex-marine took a deep breath.

He had been told that the rifle was untraceable. He thought for a second. He had picked up his brass. The plan was right on schedule. And it seemed like everyone was focused on the parking deck across the street.

He walked quickly into the park and like a ghost, disappeared into the throng of people.

The next day, the local Phoenix paper's headline read:

ARIZONA SENATOR AND U.S. SENATORIAL CANDIDATE, TAD CLOSEN SHOT DOWNTOWN