

Jimbo

Master Sergeant Jimbo Atkins, retired US Special Forces, nursed his second double of Tennessee whiskey. He drank it on ice, allowing the melt to dilute it as he sipped. The elixir began to relax him. His six-foot frame dwarfed the flimsy bar stool. Jimbo had crossed the county line to avoid the military crowd in the bars and strip clubs near Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

The Post hosted the 82nd Airborne and Special Operations units. US Special Forces. Army Rangers, Marine Recon, and Navy SEALs trained in the nearby forests. These groups fought each other not only on the mock battlefields. They carried their fierce unit pride into the Fort Bragg NCO Club and the nearby bars. The Air Force, which flew the soldiers to adjacent drop zones, put the NCO Club and many bars off limits to its personnel. The service did not want its flight crews involved in the many brawls.

Jimbo had routinely defended the reputation of the US Special Forces, known to most citizens as the famed Green Berets. Tonight, he just wanted a place to drink quietly. Meeting some short-term female companionship would be a bonus.

His retirement from the Army had not been smooth. Jimbo had no expectations when he took off the uniform. He had imagined something more productive. The Army had informed Sergeant Atkins a year ago that his services were no longer needed. Jimbo had been part of a wild brawl at the Fort Bragg NCO Club.

A Navy SEAL had been unaware of Jimbo's penchant for unconstrained violence. The sailor made a snide remark about the Green Berets. Before the melee concluded, two other SEALs hit the floor. A wet-behind-the-ears Military Police lieutenant ordered Jimbo to "stand down." The lieutenant joined the SEALs on the floor. Rather than court-martial a decorated Green Beret for punching an officer, an Army Judge Advocate advised Jimbo to retire.

Jimbo had not fared well as a civilian. He had tried owning a piece of a small business. Army friends asked him to invest in a bar outside Fort Bragg with them. He also worked as a bartender to earn some "sweat equity" in the enterprise. Jimbo's partners soon noticed that Jimbo drank more than his share of the bar's profits while working. The drinks he poured for friends also contained unprofitable amounts of alcohol. Hence, his business partners forced him to sell his minority stake back to them.

That move had happened earlier on this day. He didn't understand his partners' view on enjoying the bar's liquor. After all, what was the point of owning a bar if you couldn't drink? He accepted their decision, though, with no anger. Hanging around Fort Bragg was boring. Jimbo needed some excitement after a dull year as a civilian.

He finished his drink and waved to the bartender for a refill. Jimbo surveyed the patrons. Only one table near the front held a single prospect for companionship. She had a weathered face, the result, Jimbo guessed, from hard living. She met the basic requirements. The cleavage displayed from a partially buttoned blouse was her best feature. Studying her face, though, convinced Jimbo that he needed another drink. Her appearance needed to improve. Her female companion fell below Jimbo's low standards.

His experience in seeking such companionship taught him one lesson. Waiting for the drinks to improve a prospect was a risky gambit. Competitors with similar tastes could sweep in. Hence, Jimbo scanned the bar. He saw no competition.

Good, he thought. I can enjoy another drink before sweet-talking her.

Jimbo reviewed his options for the next phase of retirement. His modest Army pension offered enough for his simple needs of food and shelter. Entertainment funds, though, would be scarce. He had invested his modest savings in the bar to help provide for those. Now he needed another source of income. Wisely, he had deposited the cashier's check for the ownership stake his partners had paid him.

While visiting the familiar bars around Fort Bragg, Jimbo heard a former commanding officer was looking for him. Colonel Starbuckle had a potential project in Southeast Asia. No one knew what it was. Jimbo knew one thing about Lieutenant Colonel Dobie Starbuckle. Colonel Dobie did not go chasing after windmills. Jimbo decided to look up the colonel. Dobie, the rumor mill reported, was in Saigon.

He downed his drink and looked at the woman.

Damn, Jimbo realized, she isn't getting better.

Time to settle his bar tab and head back to his motel, Jimbo decided. He motioned to the bartender. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out bills to cover it.

The door of the bar crashed open, and three young men stormed in. They marched straight to the center of the bar. While they sported short beards and short hair, their neat appearance gave them away.

Shit, Jimbo thought. Swabbies. What the hell are they doing this far from the Post?

Jimbo knew they were Navy SEALS. Since it was Friday night, their week in the forests playing war games was over. Jimbo guessed it had been a successful week for them in their mock battles. Their superior attitude was unmistakable.