

Chapter 18

Lieutenant Carter Colorado State Police

It took Carter two hours to drive down to Pueblo's District office for her appointment with Major Lions. When you drive a state Trooper's vehicle, even an unmarked cruiser, cars pull over from the passing lane. Drivers seem to recognize these cars with their specialized bumpers and interior warning lights, even when not turned on. She entered their building by 10:20 and was greeted by Lions'

secretary, who immediately directed Abbi to the break room for coffee before showing her to the conference room. When Major Lions entered, he immediately recognized Abbi. It was his district that had responded to the shoot out during Abbi's training time with Officer Dan Hodges when he had been shot. Remarkably, a brand-new trooper, Abigail Carter, had saved his life just 25 five miles from the Pueblo District offices two years ago. Although he had not followed her career, Lions saw that Carter was now a Lieutenant. Abigail spoke first, "Thank you for seeing me this morning. I now work for Governor Molis on his fentanyl mandate. He appointed me as his resource to provide feedback on commercial and private vehicle searches using our canines, as well as visits to postal sorting fa-

cilities looking for signs of drug movement through the federal mail system. The Postmaster General reluctantly agreed to allow us inside, using our sniffers for drug identification. And lastly, have you been able to use our state motor carrier officers for commercial vehicle inspections? I have been asked to update the Governor's office as I make my rounds."

Lions swallowed his coffee and then lifted some pages from the table and handed Carter a copy. "Lieutenant Carter, this summarizes where we are so far. Although this district is geographically distant from the pace of life in Denver, we are the closest district to Mexico where most of drugs come from. So, if we are going to seize anything, they're probably going through my District."

Abbi looked at the pages she had been given as Lions continued, "In the past two-week period District Two made seventy-three highway stops for specialized circumstances. All Troopers were first addressed by their Sergeants who reviewed goals, conditions to permit searches, and safety concerns. They were specifically warned of the hazards associated with this drug, its lethal risks and the need to use their N9 masks. We stopped vehicles along I-25, and US highways 285, 160, 385 and 83. We used teams of six officers on each stop and rotated both South to North, and the reverse. The stops were down during daylight hours until we can become more comfortable with our technique for officer safety and our concerns on traffic control. During these stops, we nonetheless did confis-

cate over 385 kilos of fentanyl with a street value of sixteen million dollars. We also were able to seized sixty-three weapons and 20,000 rounds of ammunition. We were creative in establishing probable cause considerations."

Carter kept her composure but was impressed. "Thank you and your men for their efforts. Clearly, what you are doing is meaningful toward the state's goal. While I'm here, can you give me a schedule of where and when the next stops will be set up? I would like to observe how officers are doing this. Also, what can the Governor's office be doing to help you, maybe a wish list that you can email to me? How many drug sniffers do you currently have available to the district, and lastly have you been able to utilize our Port

of Entry officers during commercial vehicle examinations?"

Lions looked up and said, "Lieutenant, why don't you grab another coffee while I get some additional information, I'll only need a few minutes if you are Ok with waiting."

Carter looked up and replied, "Yes, thanks, I do have the time." Twenty minutes later. Carter received what she needed and decided to visit one of the points where stops would be made. She drove over to US 285 where Troopers were set up. She pulled to the shoulder in the opposite direction, put on her emergency lights, found a reflective vest in the truck and donned it over her jacket. She then walked toward the other troopers making sure her badge was visible. Carter approached a sergeant who oversaw the scene.

"How long have you been at this location?" she asked. He looked at her and she realized he didn't know her. I am Lieutenant Carter from the Governor's office. I am visiting all of our districts, and I asked Major Lions for your location so that I could observe from a distance."

He replied that they had started twenty minutes earlier and would be continuing for another hour. It depends on what type of bottleneck it creates, and what is subsequently found.

Carter gave a short nod and explained her intentions. "I will stay out of your way, back where I parked. We want to help field officers slow the flow of drugs into or through our state- that's my mission" With that, she returned to the side of her vehicle, stand-

ing behind the car's door as an observer. US 285 was a desolate two-lane highway with no vegetation taller than five feet growing from the dried-out brush. The entire area, as far as the eye could see, was dried scrubland. Carter could see for miles in any direction. The troopers had set up their site just beyond an elevation in the road which meant north-bound drivers would have no opportunity to avoid the checkpoint. This region saw little traffic which would be attractive to vehicles from Mexico that might have used an undetected tunnel to get drugs over the border. She stood by her car for more than ten minutes before the vehicle came into view. They had a variety of reasons for stopping each car or commercial truck.

Although Abbi had rarely participated on DUI highway checkpoints, she still missed the energy that came with being in uniform as a State Trooper. However, the independence she now had as a private investigator had its own rewards: her own hours, cases that she accepted, and the freedom to work the way she preferred, using her own guidance. Now with ten hours of State work each week, she could still feel that she was a part of the Colorado State Trooper life. Abbi had to admit that she relished the mix.

Abbi's mind refocused as she observed the first truck stop. Two of the officers who approached the driver wore Port of Entry uniforms. The authority allowed them to inspect any commercial vehicle. Some states use State DOT officers who may have a Troop-

er present as a backup. Typically, their mission includes determining if the paperwork on the trucks and drivers are in order, if the driving hours are correct and current. They may also inspect the vehicle for safety issues such as gross weight by using a portable scale. These officers have access to everything inside, outside and under any commercial vehicle. In addition, one of the uniformed State Trooper was tending to a K-9.

The driver was asked by Port of Entry officers to exit the vehicle and to present his licenses, driving log and BOL for what was inside the twenty-five-foot box truck. These trucks can have a total Gross weight of 26,000 pounds, including a load of up to ten thousand pounds. This was a typical routine for commercial truck inspection, except for the

four troopers wearing full uniform and the dog. Abbi observed from almost thirty feet. While the driver exited his cab, Abbi thought she saw a gun under the driver's shirt. As she watched, Abbi walked to her trunk, put on her vest and removed her patrol rifle, first making certain a round was chambered. As her eyes returned to the driver, he had already pulled the pistol out and fired two rounds at the officer wearing Port of Entry Uniform and then pivoted and fired three more rounds in the direction of uniformed Troopers. Abbi screamed at the driver, as she switched on all her lights to distract him, before aiming and firing her rifle at the perpetrator. She hit him in the right rear shoulder, but he climbed back into his truck and started the engine. Abbi fired the rifle again at the truck, strik-

ing both a front tire and the engine block. She stayed behind the door of her cruiser for cover until the truck's engine stopped. Abbi then screamed at the driver to open the door and exit the truck with his hands in the air. Two other officers had been shot. She ran forward, ordering the driver to get down on the ground, as she removed his pistol. The one uninjured officer was on the radio requesting assistance. Abbi screamed at him to cuff the suspect and to start tending to their wounded. Abbi suspected it would be at least ten minutes before medical help could arrive. She went over to the wounded officers and began assessing injuries. The K-9 was fine, and Abbi was able to place the dog inside his car. The dog was distressed- his partner was injured, and they were a team. The officer

was conscious enough to calm the dog which helped Abbi and the other Trooper as they tended to each of the wounded officers.