

PREFACE

IN THE DARK AND SECRET HEART OF WASHINGTON THERE IS A short and very covert list. It contains the names of terrorists who have been deemed so dangerous to the USA, her citizens and interests that they have been condemned to death without any attempt to be made at arrest, trial or any due process. It is called the 'kill list'.

Every Tuesday morning in the Oval Office the kill list is considered for possible amendment by the President and six men; never more, never less. Among them are the Director of the CIA and the four-star general commanding the world's biggest and most dangerous private army. This is J-SOC, which is supposed not to exist.

On a cold morning in spring 2014 a new name was added to the kill list. He was so elusive that even his true name was not known and the huge machine of American counter-terrorism had no picture of his face. Like Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-Yemeni fanatic who preached

hate sermons on the internet, who had once been on the kill list and was wiped out by a drone-launched missile in north Yemen in 2011, the new addition also preached online. So powerful were his sermons that young Muslims in the diaspora were converting to ultra-radical Islam and committing murders in its name.

Like Awlaki, the new addition also delivered in perfect English. Without a name, he was known simply as the Preacher.

The assignment was given to J-SOC, whose CO passed it down to TOSA, a body so obscure that ninety-eight per cent of serving US officers have never heard of it.

In fact, TOSA is the very small department, based in Northern Virginia, tasked with hunting down those terrorists who seek to hide themselves from American retributive justice.

That afternoon the Director of TOSA, known in all official communications as Gray Fox, walked into the office of his senior manhunter and laid a sheet upon his desk. It simply bore the words:

The Preacher. Identify. Locate. Destroy.

Under this was the signature of the Commander-in-Chief, the president. That made the paper a presidential executive order, an EXORD.

The man who stared at the order was an enigmatic lieutenant-colonel of the US Marine Corps of forty-five who also, inside and outside the building, was known only by a code. He was called THE TRACKER.

PART ONE

Assignment

CHAPTER ONE

IF HE HAD BEEN ASKED, JERRY DERMOTT COULD HAVE PUT hand on heart and sworn that he had never knowingly hurt anyone in his life and did not deserve to die. But that did not save him.

It was mid-March and in Boise, Idaho; winter was grudgingly loosening its grip. But there was snow on the high peaks around the state capital and the wind that came down from those peaks was still bitter. Those walking on the streets were huddled in warm coats as the state congressman came out of the legislature building at 700 West Jefferson Street.

He emerged from the Capitol's grand entrance and walked down the steps from the sandstone walls towards the street where his car was parked in readiness. He nodded in his usual genial way at the police officer on the steps by the portico door and noted that Joe, his faithful driver of many years, was coming round the limousine to

open the rear door. He took no notice of the muffled figure that rose from a bench down the sidewalk and began to move.

The figure was clothed in a long dark overcoat, unbuttoned at the front but held closed by hands inside. There was some kind of fretted skullcap on the head and the only odd thing, had anyone been looking, which they were not, was that beneath the coat there were no jeans-clad legs but some kind of a white dress. It would later be established the garment was an Arab dishdash.

Jerry Dermott was almost at the open car door when a voice called, 'Congressman.' He turned to the call. The last thing he saw on earth was a swarthy face staring at him, eyes somehow vacant as if gazing at something else far away. The overcoat fell open and the barrels of the sawn-off shotgun rose from where they had dangled inside the fabric.

The police would later establish that both barrels were fired simultaneously and that the cartridges were loaded with heavy-gauge buckshot, not the tiny granules for birds. The range was around ten feet.

Due to the shortness of the sawn barrels the shot-spread was wide. Some of the steel balls went past the congressman on both sides and a few hit Joe, causing him to turn and reel back. He had a sidearm under his jacket but his hands went to his face and he never used it.

The officer on the steps saw it all, drew his revolver and came running down. The assailant threw both hands in the air, the right hand gripping the shotgun, and screamed something. The officer could not know whether the second barrel

had been used, and he fired three times. At twenty feet, and practised with his piece, he could hardly miss.

His three slugs took the shouting man in the centre mass of the chest and threw him backwards, where he hit the trunk of the limousine, bounced off, fell forward and died face down in the gutter. Figures appeared from the portico doorway, saw the two bodies down, the chauffeur staring at his bleeding hands, the policeman standing over the assailant, gun double-hand gripped, pointing downwards. They ran back inside to call for back-up.

Two bodies were removed to the city morgue and Joe to hospital for attention to the three pellets that had lodged in his face. The congressman was dead, chest penetrated by over twenty steel balls which had entered heart and lungs. So was the assailant.

The latter, stripped naked on the morgue slab, gave no clue to identity. There were no personal papers and, oddly, no body hair save his beard. But his face in the evening papers yielded two informants: the dean of a college on the edge of town identified a student of Jordanian parentage, and the landlady of a boarding house recognized one of her lodgers.

Detectives ransacking the dead man's room took away many books in Arabic and a laptop computer. The latter was downloaded in the police technical lab. It revealed something no one in the Boise police headquarters had ever seen before. The hard drive contained a series of lectures, or sermons, by a masked figure, staring at the screen with blazing eyes and preaching in fluent English.

The message was brutal and simple. The True Believer

should undergo his own personal conversion from heresy to Muslim truth. He should, within the confines of his own soul, confiding in and trusting no one, convert to jihad and become a true and loyal soldier of Allah. Then he should seek out some notable person in the service of the Great Satan and send him to hell, then die as a *shahid*, a martyr, and ascend to dwell in Allah's paradise for ever. There were a score of these sermons, all with the same message.

The police passed the evidence to the Boise office of the FBI, who passed the entire file to the J. Edgar Hoover Building in Washington DC. At the national HQ of the Bureau there was no surprise. They had heard of the Preacher before.

1968

Mrs Lucy Carson went into labour on 8 November and was taken straight to the natal wing of the Navy Hospital at Camp Pendleton, California, where she and her husband were based. Two days later her first and, as it turned out, only son was born.

He was named Christopher after his paternal grandfather, but since that senior US Marine officer was always called Chris, to avoid confusion the baby was nicknamed Kit, the reference to the old frontiersman being entirely coincidental.

Also fortuitous was the birth date: 10 November, the date of birth of the United States Marine Corps in 1775.

Captain Alvin Carson was away in Vietnam where fighting was ferocious and would remain so for a further

five years. But his tour was close to its end so he was permitted home for Christmas to be reunited with his wife and two small daughters and to hold his first-born son.

He returned to Vietnam after the New Year, finally returning to the sprawling Marine base at Pendleton in 1970. His next posting was no posting, since he remained at Pendleton for three years, seeing his boy grow through toddler stage to four and a half.

Here, far from those lethal jungles, the couple could live a customary 'on-base' life between married quarters, his office, the social club, the PX commissary and the base church. And he could teach his son to swim in the Del Mar boat basin. He sometimes thought back to those Pendleton years as the days of wine and roses.

The year 1973 saw him transferred to another 'with family' posting at Quantico, just outside Washington DC. Back then Quantico was just a huge spread of mosquito- and tick-infested wilderness where a small boy could chase squirrels and raccoons through the woods.

The Carson family was still on base when Henry Kissinger and the North Vietnamese Le Duc Tho met outside Paris and hammered out the accords that brought to a formal end the decade of slaughter now called the Vietnam War.

The now Major Carson returned for his third tour in Vietnam, a place still seething with menace as the North Vietnamese army poised itself to break the Paris Accords by invading the south. But he was repatriated early, just before the mad scramble from the embassy roof to the last aircraft out of the airport.

During those years his son Kit went through the normal stages of a small American boy – Little League baseball, cub scouts and school. In the summer of 1976 Major Carson and family were transferred to a third enormous Marine base – Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

As second in command of his battalion, Major Carson worked out of the 8th Marines HQ on ‘C’ Street and lived with his wife and three children on the sprawl of married-officer housing. It was never mentioned what the growing boy might like to be when he grew up. He was born into the heart of two families: the Carsons and the Corps. It was just assumed he would follow his grandfather and father into officer school and wear the uniform.

From 1978 to 1981 Major Carson was tasked to a long overdue sea posting at Norfolk, the great US Navy and Marine base on the south side of Chesapeake Bay, Northern Virginia. The family lived on the base, the major went to sea as a Marine officer on the USS *Nimitz*, the pride of the carrier fleet. It was from this vantage point that he witnessed the fiasco of Operation Eagle Claw, also known as Desert One, the forlorn attempt to rescue the US diplomats being held hostage in Tehran by ‘students’ in thrall to Ayatollah Khomeini.

Major Carson stood with long-range binoculars on the bridge wing of the *Nimitz* and watched the eight huge Sea Stallion helicopters roar away towards the coast to back up the Green Berets and Rangers who would make the snatch, and bring the liberated diplomats back to safety offshore.

And he watched most of them limp back. First the two

that broke down over the Iranian coast because they had no sand filters and had run into a dust storm. Then the others carrying the wounded after one of the ‘choppers’ had flown into the windscreen of a Hercules, causing a fireball. He remained bitter about that memory and the foolish planning that had caused it for the rest of his days.

From the summer of 1981 to 1984 Alvin Carson, now lieutenant-colonel, was posted with his family to London as the US Marine attaché at the embassy in Grosvenor Square. Kit was enrolled at the American School in St John’s Wood. Later the boy looked back with affection on his three London years. It was the time of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan and their remarkable partnership.

The Falklands were invaded and liberated. A week before British paras entered Port Stanley, Ronald Reagan made a state visit to London. Charlie Price was made ambassador and became the most popular American in town. There were parties and balls. In a line-up at the embassy the Carson family was presented to Queen Elizabeth. Fourteen-year-old Kit Carson had his first crush on a girl. And his father reached his twenty-year mark in the Corps.

Col. Carson was promoted to command the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment as a lieutenant-colonel and the family transferred to Kaneohe Bay in the Hawaiian Islands, a considerably different climate from London. For the teenage boy it was a time of surfing, snorkelling, diving, fishing and taking a more than active interest in girls.

By sixteen he was developing as a formidable athlete but his school grades also showed he hosted a very fast-moving brain. When a year later his father was promoted G3 and sent back to the mainland, Kit Carson was an Eagle Scout and a freshman in the Reserve Officer Training Corps. The presumption made years before was coming true; he was on an unstoppable glidepath to follow his father into the ranks of US Marine officers.

Back in the States a college degree beckoned. He was sent to the William and Mary at Williamsburg, Virginia, where he resided as a boarder for four years, majoring in history and chemistry. And there were three long summer vacations. These were devoted to jump school, scuba school and Officer Candidate School at Quantico.

He graduated in spring 1989 aged twenty and simultaneously got his college degree and his single shoulder bar as a second lieutenant in the Corps. His father, now a one-star general, and his mother, both bursting with pride, were at the ceremony.

His first posting was to Basic School until Christmas, then Infantry Officer School until March 1990, emerging as the honours graduate. Ranger School at Fort Benning, Georgia, followed, and with his Rangers tab he was shipped to Twentynine Palms, California.

Here he attended the Air/Ground Combat Centre, known as 'The Stumps', and was then posted to 1st Battalion, 7th Regiment, on the same base. Then on 2 August 1990 a man called Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. The US Marines went back to war and Lt Kit Carson went with them.

1990

Once the decision was taken that Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait could not be allowed to stand, a grand coalition was formed and ranged along the Iraqi-Saudi Arabian desert border from the Persian Gulf in the east to the Jordanian border in the west.

The US Marines came in the form of the Marine Expeditionary Force under General Walter Bloomer, and this encompassed the 1st Marine Division commanded by General Mike Myatt. A very long way down the pecking order was 2nd Lt Kit Carson. The division was posted to the extreme eastern end of the coalition line with only the blue waters of the Gulf to its right.

The first month, the stupefyingly hot August, was a time of feverish activity. The entire division with its armour and artillery had to be disembarked and posted along the sector to be covered. An armada of freight ships arrived at the hitherto sleepy oil port of Al-Jubail to discharge the impedimenta required to equip, lodge and keep supplied an entire US division. It was not until September that Kit Carson got his assignment interview. It was with an acid-tongued veteran major, probably passed over at that rank and not happy about it.

Major Dolan read slowly through the new officer's file. Finally his eye caught something unusual. He looked up.

'You spent time in London as a kid?'

'Yessir.'

'Weird bastards.' Major Dolan completed his perusal of the file and closed it. 'Parked next door to our west is the British Seventh Armoured Brigade. They call themselves

the Desert Rats. Like I said, weird. They call their own soldiers rats.'

'Actually, it's a jerboa, sir.'

'A what?'

'A jerboa. A desert animal like a meerkat. They got the tag fighting Rommel in the Libyan Desert in World War Two. He was the Desert Fox. The jerboa is smaller but elusive.'

Major Dolan was less than impressed.

'Don't get smart with me, Lieutenant. Somehow we have to get along with these desert rats. I am proposing General Myatt send you over to them as one of our liaison officers. Dismiss.'

The coalition forces had to spend five more months sweltering in that desert while the combined allied air forces achieved the fifty per cent 'degrading' of the Iraqi army that commanding General Norman Schwarzkopf demanded before he would attack. For part of that time, after reporting to the British General Patrick Cordingley, commanding the 7th Armoured, Kit Carson liaised between the two forces.

Very few American soldiers were able to establish either interest in, or empathy with, the native Arab culture of the Saudis. Carson, with his natural curiosity, was an exception. In the ranks of the British he found two officers who had a smattering of Arabic and from them memorized a handful of phrases. On visits to Al-Jubail he listened to the five daily calls to prayer and watched the robed figures prostrate themselves, time and again, forehead to the ground, to complete the ritual.

He made a point of greeting Saudis he had occasion to meet with the formal '*Salaam alaikhum*' (peace be unto you), and learned to respond with the reply: '*Alaikhum as-Salaam*' (and unto you be peace). He noted the jolt of surprise that any foreigner should bother, and the friendliness that followed.

After three months the British brigade was increased to a division and General Schwarzkopf moved the British further east, to the chagrin of General Myatt. When the ground forces moved at last, the war was short, sharp and brutal. The Iraqi armour was blown away by British Challenger II tanks and American Abrams. Domination of the air was total, as it had been for months.

Saddam's infantry had been pulverized by carpet bombing in their trenches by B-52 US bombers and threw up their hands in droves. The onslaught for the US Marines was a charge into Kuwait, where they were cheered, and a last run to the Iraqi border, where higher authority ordered they should stop. The ground war took just five days.

Lt Kit Carson must have done something right. On his return in the summer of 1991 he received the honour of transfer to 81 mm Platoon as the best lieutenant in the battalion. Clearly marked out for higher things, he then did something, for the first but not the last time in his life, unconventional. He applied for and received an Olmsted scholarship. When asked why, he replied that he wanted to be sent to the Defense Language Institute, located in the Presidio at Monterey, California. Pressed further he admitted he wanted to master Arabic. It

was a decision that would later change his entire life.

His somewhat puzzled superiors conceded his request. With the Olmsted under his belt, he spent his first year at Monterey, and for his second and third was given a two-year internship at the American University in Cairo. Here he found he was the only US Marine and the only serviceman who had ever seen combat. While he was there, on 26 February 1993, a Yemeni called Ramzi Yousef tried to blow up one of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, Manhattan. He failed but, ignored by the American establishment, he had fired the first Fort Sumter shot of the Islamic jihad against the USA.

There were no electronic newspapers in those days but Lt Carson could follow the unfolding investigation across the Atlantic by radio. He was puzzled, intrigued. Eventually he paid a call upon the wisest man he had come across in Egypt. Professor Khaled Abdulaziz was a don at the Al-Azhar University, one of the greatest centres in all Islam for Koranic studies. Occasionally he gave visiting lectures at the American University. He received the young American in his rooms on campus at Al-Azhar.

‘Why did they do it?’ asked Kit Carson.

‘Because they hate you,’ said the old man calmly.

‘But why? What have we ever done to them?’

‘To them personally? To their countries? To their families? Nothing. Except perhaps distribute dollars. But that is not the point. With terrorism that is never the point. With terrorists, whether Al-Fatah or Black September or the new supposedly religious breed, the rage and the hatred come first. Then the justification. For the

IRA, patriotism, for the Red Brigades, politics, for the Salafist Jihadist, piety. An assumed piety.’

The professor was preparing tea for two on his small spirit stove.

‘But they claim to follow the teachings of Holy Koran. They claim they are obeying the Prophet Mohammed. They claim they are serving Allah.’

The old scholar smiled as the water boiled. He had noticed the insertion of the word ‘holy’ in front of Koran. A courtesy but a pleasing one.

‘Young man, I am what is called “hafiz”. That is one who has memorized all 6,236 verses of Holy Koran. Unlike your Bible, which was written by hundreds of authors, our Koran was written – dictated, actually – by one. And yet there are passages that seem to contradict each other.

‘What the Jihadists do is to take one or two phrases out of context, distort them a little more and then pretend they have divine justification. They do not. There is nothing in all our holy book that decrees we must slaughter women and children to please the one we call Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. All extremists do that, including Christian and Jewish ones. Do not let our tea go cold. It should be drunk piping hot.’

‘But, Professor, these contradictions. Have they never been addressed, explained, rationalized?’

The professor served the American more tea with his own hands. He had servants but it pleased him to make his tea personally.

‘Constantly. For thirteen hundred years scholars have

studied and composed commentaries on that one single book. Collectively they are called the hadith. About 100,000 of them.'

'Have you read them?'

'Not all. It would take ten lifetimes. But many. And written two.'

'One of the bombers, Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman, the one they call the blind cleric, was . . . is . . . a scholar too.'

'And a mistaken one. Nothing new in that in any religion.'

'But I must ask again. Why do they hate?'

'Because you are not them. They experience deep rage at what is not themselves. Jews, Christians, those we call the "*kuffar*" – the Unbelievers who will not convert to the one true faith. But also those who are not Muslim enough. In Algeria the jihadists butcher villages of *fellagha*, peasants, including women and children, in their Holy War against Algiers. Always remember this, Lieutenant. First comes the rage and the hatred. Then the justification, the pose of deep piety, all a sham.'

'And you, Professor.'

The old man sighed.

'I loathe and despise them. Because they take the face of my dear Islam and present it to the world twisted with rage and hatred. But Communism is dead, the West weak and self-serving, concerned with pleasure and greed. There will be many who will listen to the new message.'

Kit Carson glanced at his watch. It would soon be time for the professor's prayers. He rose. The scholar noticed the gesture and smiled. He too rose and accompanied his

guest to the door. As the American left he called after him.

‘Lieutenant, I fear my dear Islam is entering a long, dark night. You are young, you will see the end of it, *inshallah*. I pray I shall not live to witness it.’

Three years later the old scholar died in his bed. But the mass killings had begun with a huge bomb in an apartment block favoured by American civilians in Saudi Arabia. A man called Osama bin Laden had quit Sudan and returned to Afghanistan as honoured guest of a new regime, the Taliban, which had swept the country. And the West continued to take no measures to defend itself, but continued to enjoy the locust years.

Present Day

The little market town of Grangecombe in the English county of Somerset attracted a few tourists in summer to stroll through its cobbled seventeenth-century streets. Otherwise, being off all main roads to the beaches and coves of the Southwest, it was a quiet enough place. But it had a history and a royal charter and a town council and a mayor. In April 2014 he was His Worship Giles Matravers, a retired clothier, having his Buggins’ turn year of office and the right to wear the mayoral chain, fur-fringed robe and tricorne hat.

And that was what he was doing as he opened a new Chamber of Commerce building just behind the High Street when a figure rushed out of the small crowd of onlookers, covered the ten yards between them before any of them could react and plunged a butcher’s knife into his chest.

There were two policemen present but neither was armed with a handgun. The dying mayor was tended by his Town Clerk and others but to no avail. The policemen tackled the killer who made no attempt to flee but repeatedly shouted something no one understood but which experts later recognized as '*Allahu akhbar*' or 'Allah is Great'.

One officer took a slash to the hand as he lunged for the knife, then the assailant went down under two blue uniforms. Detectives duly arrived from the county town of Taunton to institute the formal inquiry. The assailant sat dumbly in the police station and refused to answer questions. He was dressed in a full-length dishdash, so an Arabic speaker was summoned from County Police HQ, but he had no more success.

The man was identified as a shelf-stacker from the local supermarket, living in a one-room bedsitter in a boarding house. His landlady revealed he was an Iraqi. At first it was thought his action might have stemmed from rage at what was happening in his country, but the Home Office revealed he had arrived as a refugee and been granted asylum. Youngsters from the town came forward to testify that Farouk, known as Freddy, had until three months earlier been a party-goer, drinker and dater of girls. Then he had seemed to change, withdrawing to become silent and contemptuous of his earlier lifestyle.

His bedsitter revealed little but a laptop whose contents would have been very familiar to the police of Boise, Idaho. Sermon after sermon by a masked man sitting in front of a sort of backcloth inscribed with Koranic

inscriptions urging the devout to destroy the '*kuffar*'. Bemused Somerset police officers watched a dozen such sermons, for the sermonizer was speaking in virtually accentless English.

While the killer, still silent, was being arraigned, the file and the laptop were sent to London. The Metropolitan police passed the details to the Home Office, who consulted the Security Service, MI5. They had already received a report from their man in the British embassy in Washington about an event in Idaho.

1996

Back in the USA, Captain Kit Carson was assigned to Camp Pendleton for three years, the place where he was born and spent the first four years of his life. During those years his paternal grandfather, a retired colonel of the Corps who had fought at Iwo Jima, died at his retirement home in North Carolina. His father was promoted general with one star, a promotion his own father was puffed with pride to witness just before his death.

Kit Carson met and married a Navy nurse from the same hospital where he had been brought into the world. For three years he and Susan tried for a baby, until tests showed she could not conceive. They agreed to adopt one day, but not just yet. Then in the summer of 1999 he was assigned to Staff College back at Quantico and in 2000 was promoted major. Following graduation he and his wife were posted again, this time to Okinawa, Japan.

It was there, many time zones west of New York, seeking to catch the late-night newscasts before turning in,

that he witnessed, unbelieving, the images that would later simply be designated Nine Eleven, 2001.

With others in the officers' club he sat out the night watching the slow-motion shots of the two airliners ploughing into first the North Tower and then the South, in silence, over and over again.

Unlike those around him, he knew Arabic, the Arab world and the complexities of the religion of Islam, subscribed to by over a billion of the planet's inhabitants.

He recalled Professor Abdulaziz, gentle, courtly, serving tea and prophesying a long dark night for the world of Islam. And others. He listened to the rising buzz of rage around him as the details came through. Nineteen Arabs, including fifteen Saudis, had done this. He remembered the beaming smiles of the shopkeepers of Al-Jubail when he greeted them in their own tongue. The same people?

At dawn the entire regiment was summoned on parade to listen to the regimental commander. His message was bleak. There was now a war on, and the Corps would, as ever, defend the nation whenever, wherever and however it would be called upon.

Major Kit Carson thought bitterly of the wasted years when attack after attack on the USA in Africa and the Middle East had led to one-week-long outrage from the politicians but no radical recognition of the sheer size of the onslaught being prepared in a chain of Afghan caves.

There is simply no way of overestimating the trauma that Nine Eleven inflicted on the USA and her people. Everything changed and would never be the same

again. In twenty-four hours the giant finally woke up.

There would be retribution, Carson knew, and he wanted to be part of that. But he was stuck on a Japanese island with years of the posting yet to serve.

But the event that changed America for ever also changed the life of Kit Carson. What he could not know was that back in Washington a very senior officer with the CIA, a veteran of the Cold War called Hank Crampton, was scouring the records of Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines for a rare type of man. The operation was called the Scrub and he was searching for serving officers who knew Arabic.

In his office at the No. 2 Building, CIA compound, Langley, Virginia, the records were fed into the computers which scanned them far faster than the human eye could read or the human brain digest. Names and careers flashed up, most to be discounted, a few retained.

One name flashed up with a pulsing star in the top corner of the screen. Marine Major, Olmsted scholarship, Monterey Language School, two years Cairo, bi-lingual in Arabic. Where is he, asked Crampton. Okinawa, said the computer. Well, we need him here, said Crampton.

It took time and a bit of shouting. The Corps resisted but the Agency had the edge. The Director of the CIA answers only to the President, and DCI George Tenet had George W. Bush's ear. The Oval Office overruled the Marine protests. Major Carson was summarily seconded to the CIA. He did not want to swap services, but at least it got him out of Okinawa and he vowed to return to the Corps when he could.

On 20 September 2001, a Starlifter rose above Okinawa heading for California. In the rear sat a Marine major. He knew the Corps would take care of Susan, bringing her later to accommodation on the Marine base at Quantico, where he could be near her at Langley.

From California Major Carson was shipped on to Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington and thus presented himself to CIA headquarters, as per orders.

There were interviews, tests in Arabic, a compulsory change into civilian clothes and finally a small office in No. 2 Building, miles from the senior ranks of the Agency on the top floors of the original No. 1 Building.

He was given a pile of intercepts of broadcasts in Arabic to peruse and comment. He chafed. This was a job for the National Security Agency over at Fort Meade on the Baltimore road up in Maryland. They were the listeners, the eavesdroppers, the code-breakers. He had not joined the Corps to analyse newscasts from Radio Cairo.

Then a rumour swept the building. Mullah Omar, the weird leader of the Taliban government of Afghanistan, was refusing to give up the culprits of Nine Eleven. Osama bin Laden and his entire Al-Qaeda movement would remain safe inside Afghanistan. And the rumour was: we are going to invade.

The details were sparse but accurate on a few points. The Navy would be offshore in strength in the Persian Gulf delivering massive air power. Pakistan would cooperate but grudgingly and with dozens of conditions. The American feet on the ground would be Special Forces only. And their British equivalents would be with them.

THE KILL LIST

The CIA, apart from its spies, agents and analysts, had one division that involved itself in what in the trade is called ‘active measures’, a euphemism for the messy business of killing people.

Kit Carson made his pitch and he made it strong. He confronted the head of the Special Activities Division and told him bluntly: you need me.

‘Sir, I am no use sitting in a coop like a battery hen. I may not speak Pashto or Dari, but our real enemies are Bin Laden’s terrorists – Arabs all. I can listen to them. I can interrogate prisoners, read their written instructions and notes. You need me with you in Afghanistan; no one needs me here.’

He had made an ally. He got his transfer. When President Bush made his announcement of invasion on 7 October, the advance units of the SAD were on their way to meet the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. Kit Carson went with them.