

## **CHOICES (A short story for Manx Radio)**

Winston had been lying there for nearly three days. As a Corporal in the SAS, he had been well trained to maintain a position in silence and without much movement but three days had seemed like a lifetime. It was so very hot and the flies seemed to find him a feast of a meal. The mosquitoes were worse as they constantly sucked at his blood, night and day. It was sweltering in the day and so so cold in the night he thought he might freeze to death.

He had arrived in April so was only 8 months in the province but the old sweats had told him, when he arrived on his first ('live action') overseas posting, that the Hellmand Province was so accurately named. Whilst he knew it was strictly ill-advised as part of his training, his mind had drifted to his youth in Jamaica and the first time he had met his beloved wife. It was in the local Evangelical Church Sunday school and, by chance, despite their slight age difference, he was in the same class as Christina. As time went on and they became closer together, and their two families agreed that they were made for each other. They were so much in love by then, they delightedly agreed. The marriage took place in an Ecumenical chapel in Kingston, conducted by Christina's father, and several hundred attended. Winston's parents had let them use their garden 'shack' as a place to sleep but it did mean that most of their time was spent with his parents and five siblings.

They had very little time alone together. Christina's father had served in the Falklands conflict and brought Winston a recruiting advertisement for the British infantry one day. After a long time 'chewing' it over, they both agreed that their life in Jamaica had little to offer and that the British army might hold a brighter future.

Both their families scrimped and saved for almost a year and, eventually, they had sufficient money for their air fare. They traveled to Britain and Winston was accepted as an infantry recruit. Christina thought that she had died and gone to heaven when they were given accommodation near the barracks. Neither of them had known such luxury before. Winston's training was a success and he had several short postings to Belize, The Falklands and Cyprus but never faced any hostile action. He got bored. He applied for SAS training and was pleasantly surprised when he was accepted. It was hard. Much harder than he could have

imagined but he was one of the 5% of applicants who passed the course. In the 'Regiment' teams of five are the 'norm' and each has to be a specialist in one or more aspects of warfare. Winston chose to be a rifleman/sniper. Months of further training ensued but he qualified at an acceptable level. He could hit a peanut at 300 meters and that seemed to satisfy the instructors. Hence it was, almost a year after qualifying, that he was stuck in this dug-out waiting to take a shot at a Taliban leader who according to military intelligence, was due to pass this way 'at some time'.

He was dragged from his thoughts by movement in the distance. Too far away to see even with his scope, but they were certainly coming in his direction. Within half an hour, he could clearly see the group of Taliban and, amongst them, was their leader. His job to eliminate. As they got a little nearer, he had the guy, almost, in his cross hairs. But not quite the perfect firing position. The other men tended to call them 'Ragheads' but being from an ethnic minority himself, he preferred to think of them as simply terrorists. He moved, slightly, to get a better shot, and something fell out of his pocket. He looked, briefly, and saw the picture of his wife with his newborn son who he had yet to see, sat around a Christmas tree. As he put the photo back, he noticed that his watch showed December the 25th.

The Taliban leader was right in the middle of the 'cross-hairs' yet he paused. He knew that this man would kill him without a second thought yet he knew it was Christmas Day, the birth of his Saviour. He knew that the man wasn't and never would be a Christian. The commandment, "thou shall not kill" flooded his thoughts. Momentarily, he thought of this man's wife and children and imagined the effect that his death would have on them. He gently and compassionately stroked his trigger and the terrorist's head exploded like an over-ripe water melon.