

The Life of a Warrior

The Story of Sergeant David Hack

By David D. Hack



Dedication

This book is dedicated to my brother
Lloyd A. Hack,
who made the ultimate
sacrifice and showed me the light,
and to my wife, Lani,
who picked up the
pieces and made me whole.



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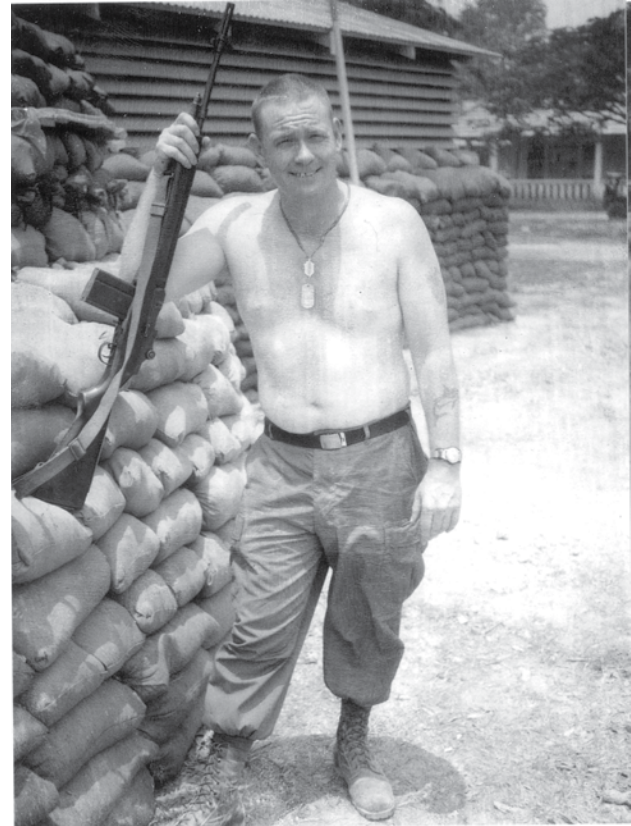


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I.

Friday the 13th

Western civilization holds no death more honorable than falling in combat as a warrior. In ancient Greece, the soldier's soul was guaranteed passage into the Fields of Elysium in the Underworld, where it spent eternity with the heroes from myths such as Hercules, Achilles, and Ulysses. In ancient Rome, the whole society was built upon this creed, as the military might of the Roman legions marched, fought, and died throughout three continents to found the greatest empire known to man, lasting over 1,000 years. All over Europe, statues of war heroes such as Wellington, Napoleon, and Bismarck line the streets and fill public squares. Not only in Washington, D.C., but in every major city and small town alike, this ideal is immortalized for the ages in monuments commemorating the fallen soldiers from every American armed conflict.

When the 1st Infantry Division was attacked, and Sergeant David Hack's personnel carrier was ambushed in the jungles of Vietnam during the Tet offensive, there was no time to think of honor, heroes, or lofty ideals about death. Deafening explosions occurred all around, leaving men cut in half and their body parts strewn about, as the chilling screams of dying soldiers filled the

background. The North Vietnamese Army had struck an American convoy heading to the front lines in An Loc. The attack was unexpected, well coordinated, and successful. The American soldiers were unable to return fire, as one personnel carrier after another exploded from direct mortar hits, and men were torn to pieces by gunfire. Only Sergeant Hack was able to return fire on the run, but he was outnumbered, overwhelmed, and cut down by bullet wounds to his arm, chest, and knee as he emptied his M-16 rifle.

Completely immobilized and out of ammunition, Hack could do little more than watch the Vietnamese step from the jungle to finish the battle's work. He bled profusely, as the enemy ran bayonets through the skulls and throats of wounded American soldiers. He simply waited his turn to enter Death's domain as the enemy's long bayonet pierced his throat and sinus cavity as it was plunged through his mouth. He lost consciousness and lay in the jungle with the dead surrounding him for over one full day. It was 24 hours before he awoke to a reconnaissance soldier's voice saying, "I think we've got a live one here." Hack was being sized for a body bag when he was discovered to be the only soldier to survive the devastating ambush by the North Vietnamese Army on that Friday the 13th, 1968 in South East Asia.

The real irony, though, lies in the fact that had Hack been where his position originally demanded at the side of his general, whose person he was protecting, his death would have been instant when the enemy's rocket struck the helicopter, killing General Ware. Keith Ware was the only Two Star general to die in the Vietnam conflict, and Hack would have died with him had an officer not refused him permission to board the helicopter and given him direct orders to be on that fateful convoy en route to meet them in An Loc.

Hack's chest and arm were scarred from the bullets, his skull and mouth were lined with metal, and his kneecap was completely destroyed, leaving only muscle and sinew to hold the leg together. He spent a year in recovery, all the while arguing with doctors that he would survive, despite not allowing a leg amputation. The price of honor is very high, and according to Hack, was paid by those who had no notions of heroism, honorable creeds about death, or any desire to be warriors, but rather just men who proudly did their nation's bidding, yet wanted to go home. Hack made it home, but none of his comrades from that battle did.

II.

The Warrior

David Hack had fought all his life. He fought hunger and poverty in rural Kentucky. He fought the fear of an abusive father, who beat him and abandoned his family. He fought the bullies who tormented him while growing up, with only a dirt-floored sheep shack to call home. He fought the anguish of a brother's sacrifice for his mistake. He fought seasickness as a member of the U.S. Coast Guard. He fought to obtain a Ph.D. in Military Science. He fought crooked cops and their unique form of business extortion. He fought the enemy in Vietnam. Now, he fought for life and limb, literally. Doctors proclaimed he would never walk again, but by finding strength in faith, which according to Hack "...isn't truly faith until it's all you have left to hang on to..." he proved them wrong. David would not only walk again, but he would also continue fighting.

David was born on April 21, 1940 in Louisville, Kentucky. His father, Ellis Monroe Hack, and mother, Viola French, both of Kentucky birth, had three other sons: Lloyd, Lambert, and Hoppy.

Hack's father, Ellis, was a carpenter who worked building houses. He was also a domineering man whose impatience led to child abuse and eventual abandonment of his whole family. It was a common occurrence for him to return home late after a night of drinking, and find a reason to beat David. He tormented him to the point of bed-wetting, which provided Ellis with yet another reason for using a coat hanger to discipline David. This psychologically affected Hack for years after Ellis Monroe left his family.

When David was six years old, Ellis drove Viola and the boys to a friend of the family's under the false pretext of a weekend visit. After disembarking the old sedan, Viola and her sons were helpless to do anything but watch as Ellis told his family to wait for him while he drove away to get cigarettes. David Hack never saw his father again, until he joined his brothers at the man's deathbed.

Ellis's friend, Jim, had nothing to offer the abandoned Viola and her sons in 1940's rural Kentucky, except an empty shack with a dirt floor that had housed sheep. It was a one-room, wooden shed with absolutely nothing but a door. Here Viola struggled, like a peasant in the harshest conditions of Medieval Europe, to raise her sons properly. Unskilled and uneducated, she worked in a factory to provide food, sent her boys to school every day, and loved them as much as any mother could.

Hack's memories from the four years in the shack were not their living quarter's harsh conditions, as much as the cruel kids in Sunfish, who taunted him on a regular basis about his home. He was constantly harassed, bullied, and beaten for his position in poverty and his bed-wetting. It was his older brother, Lloyd, who armed Hack with a can opener and the self-determination not to let anyone take advantage of him. He explained to David that if one guy can get away with it, "...you'll have the whole town kicking the mess out of you." Hack had learned one of his most important lessons in life; a man must stand up for himself, or he will have even more trouble. Until then, Hack had been taking the harassment, like he had taken his father's abuse - with stoic firmness, not shedding a tear. Now he knew better. "There's only one thing worse than learning from experience; not

learning from experience." Hack learned a lot of life's lessons while living in that shack, but none more important than those he would learn later from a man named Ivan Shively.

Ivan Shively was a short, rotund, bald man who was about "as cute as a toothless rat," but he fell in love with Viola French and married her. He took Viola and her family from the harsh degradation of the sheep shack to a proper home in Louisville. He worked hard to maintain a good life for his new family, and although he was not the boys' biological father, he taught them that there was more to being a dad than biology. He spent the rest of his life dedicated to raising Viola's sons, loving them as though they were his own. And Viola, who had known so little of happiness, spent her life by Ivan's side with a smile on her face. The whole family had learned a lesson: The heart of a saint can come in many forms. Ivan had been their savior in many respects, and the family respected and loved him for it.

Growing up in downtown Louisville, Kentucky was often not any easier than growing up in Sunfish. Small guys tend to get picked on, so David survived the next seven years in Louisville by fending off bullies with a sharp bottle opener, or ducking into the Police Athletic League Club to "learn a punch" and watch a young boxer named Cassius Clay spar.

Hack grew to be a young man in Louisville, and Ivan continued to provide for him as a teenager also. He lent David his old car to go on a date one evening. The car had tires so bald that it was a wonder they held air. Once the sun had gone down, Hack set out on his first business venture - to obtain new tires for Ivan's old car. Unfortunately, the venture was larceny, and a policeman obtained a great deal of satisfaction from watching him commit the crime, even though he could have stopped him, and perhaps set the young man on a different agenda for the evening. David was arrested and held in custody at the police station. David called his older brother, Lloyd, who came to see him before anyone else knew about the crime. In order to save David, Lloyd made an agreement with the police to confess to a string of burglaries around Louisville, even though he had not committed them. Lloyd swore his brother to secrecy for their mother's sake and took the stiffest penalty that the hanging judge could grant him. He only asked David to promise to go on and make something of himself. This sacrifice by Lloyd created anguish in David that was the driving force behind him to succeed in doing good deeds. David regretted his actions that night for the rest of his life and spent years trying to make up for it with hard work in one of the world's most dangerous professions, the armed service.

With no money or post secondary education, David Hack had few options in Kentucky, so leaving the state was imperative. In 1957, he joined the United States Coast Guard.

Hack's main concern was getting an education while serving, but between the antics of Coast Guard sailors and the nauseating sea, he worked hard just to maintain his daily routine. If he was not trying to ignore sailors' jabs for his lack of desire to imbibe beer, he was running to the deck's edge to vomit from seasickness. He spent his spare time reading and studying, as his comrades drank heavily and poked fun at him for his abstinence. In his usual fashion, Hack's stoic temperament made him endure, never forgetting the sacrifice Lloyd had made, or the promise he had vowed. Yet, it wasn't until his ship's docking at Wake Island, that the full meaning of sacrifice became tangible to Hack.

Wake Island was a United States Marine Corps outpost at the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The Imperial Japanese Navy was ordered to take control of the island after Pearl Harbor's bombing on December 7th. The Americans on Wake Island had no idea of just how large the contingent of naval power was that was poised to attack them. There was no radar, and the sound of the incessant waves crashing against the small atoll hindered knowing

the enemy's strength by hearing their ships and planes.

For 15 days, from December 8th to the 23rd, the small, poorly equipped, and grossly outnumbered American force held off the Japanese navy. They sank two destroyers and damaged two cruisers, a transport ship, and two other destroyers. They shot down 21 enemy aircraft and damaged a total of 51 planes. The Americans killed circa 1000 Japanese. The United States' military did not reinforce Wake Island during its valiant resistance, but the American commanders refused surrender until the last of the U.S. fighter planes had been shot down. The commanders, fighter pilots, Marines, and civilians who fought, died, and were taken prisoner at Wake Island, exemplified the fighting spirit of America's will to remain free, regardless of the odds.

After disembarking from his ship, the young Coast Guard sailor David Hack found himself on Wake Island among the skeletal remains of those who had died there. The Japanese who had occupied the island for the length of the war had never buried the American dead, and America never used it again as a major outpost. So, while on Wake Island, Hack took the time to put some of America's bravest men and women into their final resting place. Single-handedly he dug the graves and buried the remains of many who

fought in America's first "Alamo" of the Second World War. This was surely one of America's most solemn funerals for its war dead. Unknown to Hack at the time, this was a pivotal point in his life. He began a relationship of love and respect for those who had fought and died for their country, his country. This respect would permeate his life for the rest of his days.

III.

The Hilltop

Once out of the Coast Guard, Hack invested his money in a legitimate business. A friend had advised him to buy The Hilltop Nightclub in Louisville, Kentucky, and he took his advice. His crowded nightclub was very popular and brought in enough money to attract the attention of law officials. Two policemen came to Hack's business demanding money, and explained to him that this was simply the way people were allowed to stay open in their county. It was government-sanctioned extortion.

Hack was unyielding and went on to report the two officers to their superiors. This made him very unpopular with both the policemen and their bosses. Any competent law official usually knows when his men are receiving bribes. This made Hack a "marked man" in certain circles of the county's judicial system. In an attempt to be an honest man refusing to give into extortion, David Hack had put himself into the "cross hairs" of the local law enforcement's rifle scope.

Now, the corrupt police needed only to wait for Hack to make a mistake, as there is often trouble in a popular establishment where liquor

is served. One evening, a fight broke out at The Hilltop Nightclub, in which numerous people were involved. The bartender was overwhelmed and thought that exhibiting a shotgun would quiet the crowd before someone got killed. Unfortunately, that was not what happened. As the bartender came around the bar, he slipped on spilled beer, fell to the ground with shotgun in hand, and wounded a customer with the accidental gun blast.

The vultures moved in, and the law officials had Hack in an uncompromising position. With a judge in their corner and allegedly plenty of ways to put him behind bars for a very long time, they threatened him with liability. In reality, the police really did not care whether Hack went to jail or not, but wanted revenge for his unyielding behavior toward their earlier demands. They wanted to humiliate him by taking his business. So, in line with their usual way of "enforcing the law," the police cut a deal with Hack to let him walk. Hack had only to sign over his nightclub to the authorities, because according to them, there was nothing else for him to do if he did not want to be charged, tried, and convicted of a crime. He signed the nightclub over to the authorities, but this proved to be a very bad investment for them.

To this day, the location of the club remains an empty lot as a result of a fire that broke out shortly after the authorities obtained the property and released Hack. The day after the fire, Hack left town to become a U.S. Army Ranger with the 1st Infantry Division - The Big Red One. No one has ever been charged in the arson of The Hilltop Nightclub in Louisville, Kentucky.

IV.

The Rangers

Again, David Hack owned nothing. His savings from the Coast Guard lie in the ashes of The Hilltop Nightclub. He had no home but the military, and he had not yet completed his degree. In many respects, he had hit rock bottom, but it did not stop him from climbing back up. He enlisted in the U.S. Army Rangers on April Fool's Day, April 1, 1964. His knowledge of small boats from his service in the Coast Guard from 1957 to 1961 was exactly what the Rangers desperately needed. He was first sent to Fort Benning, Georgia and then to Eglin AFB, Florida where the Army conducted their jungle training, small boat training, and river and beach training. He worked hard as a raw recruit, training to be a Special Forces soldier in the Rangers and completing his Ph.D. in Military Science. The Rangers' training is grueling, and spending every other waking moment studying for a Ph.D. helped make it just a little harder. In spite of his perseverance and fortitude, he seemed to get stuck at one point and did not go through the entire Ranger training as he had expected. Every month he would ask his first Sgt. when he would finish the rest of his

training and was given the answer “soon”. Two years had past, and he was still asking the same question. He decided to write a letter to then President of the United States, LBJ. In Dave’s words, “Bad news...never, and I mean NEVER write to the President of the United States. I was sent to Newfoundland for 6 months and never fully completed Ranger Training. I should have learned never to buck the Brass, but I always did.” Eventually, Hack obtained the rank of Sergeant in the U.S. Army and was stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia as an instructor. Hack was a true Maverick then and to this day. He still is a Maverick “bucking the Brass”.

Sergeant Hack would come to Ivan Shively’s home and visit his mother when on leave. While visiting Viola and Ivan, fate changed Hack’s life again. When he was deer hunting in the Kentucky hill country, a bobcat attacked Hack and tore at him until he became a ragged spectacle. In good humor, Ivan Shively found Hack’s tattered appearance a cause for friendly ridicule and laughter. According to Ivan, The U.S. Army Ranger, Sergeant David Hack of the 1st Infantry, “got whooped by a little old pussy cat.” His ribbing of David sent Viola into tears of laughter as well. Unfortunately, after this day, Ivan would laugh no more. He succumbed to a heart attack while at home with his wife, Viola, and adopted David at that moment.

Ivan’s death and Viola’s grief prompted Sergeant Hack to call his superiors and request an extension of his leave. Luckily, he was reassigned to the Nichols Army Hospital in Louisville, where he administered the army exam to new recruits brought in by the draft. One young recruit to whom he administered the exam was his old friend from the Louisville Police Athletic League Club, Cassius Clay, now known as Muhammad Ali. Ali’s boxing talents far exceeded his ability on written exams. While talking to Ali’s trainer, Joe Martin, Hack commented that both Ali and Martin could have saved themselves a lot of time and trouble fighting Ali’s draft by simply having him take the test first. Ali failed the exam miserably.

There was one particular incident that Hack experienced at his job as a recruit test administrator that set him on yet another path, the one to the Vietnam War. One day, while going through the monotony of a day in the life of an administrator, Hack was approached by a severely depressed and distraught man, who simply walked into the office demanding his right to be drafted. He wanted to go to Vietnam. His brother had been killed in the war, and he wanted to fight. He asked Hack, “Have you been there?” Army Ranger Sergeant David Hack, one of the most highly qualified and rigorously trained soldiers of the armed services could only say, “No.”

This incident affected Hack tremendously. He realized that the war was not very popular anywhere in the world. He realized that millions of Americans in the United States hated the draft. He realized that going to war, especially this particular war as an Army Ranger, almost certainly meant one's death or dismemberment. Yet, the fact that he helped send numerous boys to Vietnam, while he stayed home, opposed his own moral code. He was trained to be a soldier, a very special soldier. He was one of an elite group of highly trained warriors, whose mission was to fight under the most difficult situations. Yet, he stayed home, thanks to a superior's reassignment of him. It was just the "luck of the draw," and most sane men would have been thankful, down-on-their-knees, in-the-church-thankful. But when a man who knew nothing about the service, war, or Vietnam, voluntarily offered up his life, just as his younger brother had done before him, Hack could sit still no longer.

Even though he was now a married man with a child, the next day he went to his Sergeant Major and demanded that he be sent to a fighting unit in Vietnam. At first, the Sergeant Major was sure Hack had lost his mind. "Yes, I think you have lost your mind, Sergeant. You should be thanking the Lord for your good fortune, Sergeant. Your safe little desk job is the envy of every GI in the whole damn Army. I don't know what vacation

guide you subscribe to, but Vietnam is a hellhole. Has the reality of war just passed you by? Do you not realize most of the boys we send over there come back in boxes?" He then gave Hack a direct order to leave his office. But at the risk of insubordination, Hack was persistent, "I have been here six months and have sent a lot of those men to Nam. After yesterday, I know more than ever what you mean." The Sergeant Major then understood perfectly. He had been there when the distraught man had approached Hack due to his brother's death. He granted Hack his request, and in less than a month, Ranger Hack was very much in harm's way.

V.

“Welcome to Hell, Boys!”

Sergeant Hack’s deployment to war-torn Vietnam played out like a scene from a Hollywood action adventure film. Under heavy artillery attack at night, the Rangers’ transport plane was unable to land on the airstrip, but the Rangers would deploy. At the Jump Master’s command, the five-member special teams unit exited the plane out the rear hatch that scraped the runway as the plane lumbered along at thirty-six knots. Each Ranger tucked himself into a ball and rolled out onto the airfield over the sparks, which were sent up by the metal hatch door dragging on the concrete pavement.

Once on the ground, the Jump Master got the unit together, back-to-back in a tight group to face any attacks from the surrounding jungle. This was how Hack spent his first hours in Vietnam; awaiting an unseen enemy to spring from the jungle, whose numbers could have surely overwhelmed the small Rangers’ unit.

As the night passed and dawn approached, the clamor of battle receded into a distant echo, and it seemed that everyone would be alive at first

light. But a war zone is never safe, and to let one’s guard down is suicide. Out of modesty, a Ranger left the group to urinate, and before the Jump Master could reprimand him, modesty was his death. The unseen enemy’s machete cut through the man’s neck so quickly and completely, that only one stroke was needed to remove the head. Sergeant Hack and the others, still squatting, looked on in frozen horror as the man’s head actually hit the ground before his erect body fell, so clean was the decapitation. The Jump Master did not move, nor did he order any one to move. He simply whispered, “Welcome to Hell, boys.”

The next day, Sergeant Hack and his unit were transported by helicopter to Lai Khe, a battle-torn multinational army base. Sergeant Hack was replacing Sergeant Jack Biddix, who gave Hack his first lesson on how to stay alive in Vietnam. “Sleep in the tent during the day, but under the rubber tree at night; their thick roots stop the bullets. Be the only one to feed Rebel, the watchdog, and watch him closely, because he may be the only reason you get out of here alive.”

Rebel, the German Shepherd-looking mutt at Lai Khe, did save Hack’s life and the lives of many others as well. The keen hearing dog would send soldiers running for cover by jumping

into a foxhole first, because he could hear the mortar shell coming in long before anyone else. Regardless of what anyone was doing at the time, if Rebel moved for cover, it meant incoming mortar, and everyone else knew to follow suit.



"Rebel"

During his time at Lai Khe, Hack led numerous reconnaissance missions. He fought with men who killed and were killed. He survived close brushes with death, while men right beside him died. He was wounded by shrapnel, but remained in Lai Khe to heal. Once healed, he was transferred to take the place of Sergeant Van

Zandt, who had been killed in action while being General Keith Ware's bodyguard.

Like Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar before him, Keith Ware was a general who led from the front lines. Being his bodyguard was an extremely dangerous duty, and meant the widow received extra compensation in case of his death while protecting the general. At least Hack would have something extra for his young family if he did not return home, and Hack and Rebel would have earned it, protecting both the general's life and his K-9 "King," the full-blooded German Shepherd. The enlisted man and his mutt proved to be an effective aegis for the general and his AKC purebred.

General Ware and Sergeant Hack were inseparable and became close military comrades. "For the first time in this God-forsaken war, I felt like I actually had a friend other than Rebel," Hack said. He and the general spent many nights conversing about how they felt on various topics. The general, like the U.S. Army itself, was unfamiliar with the guerilla tactics of the enemy and dissatisfied with the politicians' handling of the conflict. General Ware had commanded armies in the Second World War and fought with Audie Murphy, who saved his life. He expressed to Hack the blatant difference of moods between the conflicts. "Things used to be simpler. You

knew where the enemy was. You knew where the front lines were. You knew what to expect and how to defeat it. Now, it's blurred, fuzzy," the general lamented. "All I need is one word, and I could win this war in a matter of days..." General Ware had, however, only "a matter of days." The Tet Offensive began, and American forces were overrun on numerous fronts. Attacks were made on the five major cities of South Vietnam, thirty-six provincial capitals, sixty-four district capitals, fifty villages, and three U.S. military barracks. The Presidential Palace, the embassy in Saigon, the city's radio station and Ton Son Nhut Air Base were overrun and occupied. It took the American forces months to reclaim lost territory, and the U.S. military engagement was escalated afterwards.

A rocket-propelled grenade destroyed General Ware's helicopter while in flight to what was thought to be the front lines in An Loc. In reality, there were no front lines. The country of South Vietnam was being overrun by 100,000 North Vietnamese, and Hack fared little better than the general. He was the only survivor of the ambush on his company, and was debilitated with multiple bullet, bayonet, and shrapnel wounds.

In a wheelchair and bandages, Hack returned home to only his wife, mother, and an Army officer at the airport, who awarded him the Purple Heart

medal. His homecoming was not much of an event for the lone survivor of such a brutal battle, but the Purple Heart medal, "...made the pain seem less," Hack later commented. During his year in the army hospital, he fought off amputation by well-meaning doctors, rehabilitated himself to walk, and even made friends with soldiers who had fought alongside Rebel, the German Shepherd mutt, who had saved so many men's lives in voiceless anonymity.

VI.



The Hackmobile

After a year in the hospital, Hack was assigned to be a recruiter, and he became the very best the military has ever had, before or since. Located in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, a suburb of Akron, Hack became more than just the leading recruiter; his story became legend behind a persona that became famous. He mused once, “I became the poster child for hard core military guys. The Army loved the fact that I was missing parts of my body. It made me seem tough, invincible.”

As a recruiter, in a time the military was extremely unpopular in the United States, Hack thought up an original idea to raise the enlistment statistics. After a lot of phone calls to the Army’s 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, arguing with a Sergeant Major, and

using the tenacity of a pit bull, Hack obtained an old jeep. Its delivery was literally a clandestine, black ops undertaking of the lowest priority. It was delivered to Hack in Colorado, Ohio by a captain whose orders he told Hack, “I’m not supposed to ask any questions. I’m only to give you the jeep and not know anything about this.”

Regardless of the means, Hack was about to make the military famous in the Midwest. At his own expense, he had the jeep painted red, white, and blue with stars and stripes. He had a fluorescent “U.S. Army” printed on it. He put red vinyl seats in it, sixteen-inch chrome wheels all around, and a paratrooper’s logo on the back window. The jeep was an eye-catching novelty to grab the interest of young men who were possible recruits, but it and its driver became icons for military service. Hack drove it in parades, to schools, fairs, drag races, sporting events, and even people’s homes to recruit for the military. Yet, the jeep did more than make kids say “Wow!” As Hack commented years later, “It broke down the communication barrier between me and the young men. They wanted to see me, and during the Vietnam War, not many young men wanted to see an Army recruiter.” Hack had won the hearts and minds of the youth for the military, posing it as a challenge that would train them to do something very well and give them opportunities for an education.

For two years, the Sergeant and his “Hackmobile” not only drove around the Midwest recruiting soldiers for the military, but “Sarge” and his jeep became the impetus behind a recruitment rate that rose drastically. The stations in his area saw their enlistment rise from 13 recruits in five months to 62 in the next four months. Hack was invited to schools as a speaker, featured in the Rolling Stone magazine, and appeared on television talk shows. During this time, he “was on television almost weekly.” David Hack was an icon for the American armed services, and that was during the height of the anti-war campaign of the 1970’s.

After becoming so popular, Hack and his jeep were seen on the news by the division commander of the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. The commander was truly impressed and thought the jeep was a great idea. He liked the idea so much that he wanted a promotional jeep like it for the 101st Airborne recruitment offices, and inquired why his division did not have one. He was then informed that the jeep had actually come from the Fort Campbell’s 101st Airborne Division originally, having been commandeered and made over by Sergeant Hack. With a great lack of appreciation for the humorous irony of the situation, the commander had “his” jeep returned to Fort Campbell immediately.

For three more years, the jeep toured Kentucky and the surrounding area as a recruitment tool for the 101st Airborne Division. It was retired from service in 1975, and was almost lost to history. It was about to be returned to military service in its drab olive veneer, when the Fort Campbell Museum curator, Paul Lawson, spotted it. He was able to convince the U.S. Army that it was something worth saving, and it was declared historical property. It was displayed in the museum for over a dozen years before Hack saw it again, and the years of wear could be seen on the paint, seat, top, tires, etc. The jeep needed to be refurbished, and again Hack paid for it. He even took the time to drive to Fort Campbell, pick it up, bring it to Ohio, and have it refurbished. Six months later, he returned it to the museum.

The loss of the jeep to the 101st Airborne Division did not stop Hack from his recruitment crusade. He later bought a used Corvette, painted it red, white and blue, had the Uncle Sam logo painted on the hood, and put brass Army uniform buttons on the upholstery. The Corvette became his new recruitment tool and, although not a military vehicle, it worked well. He thought up, paid for, and passed out 14,000 “Sergeant Hack Wants You - For the U.S. Army” posters and T-shirts, replacing Uncle Sam’s face with his own. Again, his practical, but innovative approach to

marketing was a success, and the recruitment rates continued to rise. It was this type of business logic and personal savvy, combined with Hack's own commitment to his ideals, that would continue to serve him in other ventures later in his life. The "warrior" in Hack was charging at full force again, or as Hack put it proudly as a seasoned veteran able to still serve, "I was back in it again..."

As a recruiter, there was another story that exemplifies Hack's commitment to his ideals. Hack's friend, Ted Cole, was in Hack's office one day advocating the proposition that Hack should run for a political office due to his popularity. Then, while looking out the plate glass window at the passing traffic, Hack noticed a man in a stopped car staring at him. The man looked at Hack in the eye and insulted him both verbally and physically, saying and gesturing with his finger, "F--- you!" Hack paused his conversation with Cole, calmly walked out to the man's car, pulled him from it and proceeded to beat him. He then turned, walked back to his office, sat down, and continued his conversation with Ted Cole. The driver, who obviously only then realized the full extent of his mistake for insulting a man who almost gave his life for his country, drove away and was not heard from again at the recruiter's office.

Before retiring from the service on a medical discharge in 1973, Sergeant David Hack was promoted to an SFC E-7 rank. His military career had spanned 16 years, beginning with the U.S. Coast Guard in 1957. He completed four years in the Coast Guard, and joined the U.S. Army in 1964. He earned the Purple Heart in 1968 while fighting with the Big Red One 1st Infantry Division in Lai Khe, Vietnam. From 1969-1973, Hack won the title of the nation's Number One Recruiter, using his jeep and Corvette as recruiting tools. The jeep, now enshrined in the Pratt Museum in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, is the only jeep enshrined in a U.S. Army base museum with the exception of General George Patton's jeep at Fort Knox.

VII.

The Contract

After retiring from the military, David Hack went on to join the Hudson Police Department and later became the Chief of Police in Sebring, Ohio. He buried himself in his work and became very good at arresting middle management drug dealers, raiding drug houses, helping make convictions stick for dealers, and trying to save kids from addiction. His work was so extensive that he was a serious threat to the profits of the upper echelon dealers, and his reputation was now catching the eye of the syndicate in Ohio.

The FBI notified him personally that Albert Peron, a local mob boss, had issued an assassination contract on his life. This was no surprise to Hack, because he knew that he was shutting down Peron's drug houses. He asked the FBI agents what they planned to do about the contract, but they could not do anything about it until Peron had committed a crime. In essence, an attempt on Hack's life had to be made before the FBI could do anything.

Hack took the situation into his own hands. He drove to Peron's home and knocked on the door. He caught Mr. Peron by surprise and explained in quite simple terms, "If you don't try to kill me, I won't kill you. OK?" The mob boss could only shake his head in agreement. Hack later commented just how reasonable a mob boss can be when caught off guard. He never saw Peron again.

While still the Chief of Police, Hack got a phone call at home from his brother, Lloyd. His father, Ellis, was in the hospital dying of pneumonia. He had been found in the pouring rain, soaked to the bone, sick, and dying in a shack in Sun Fish, Kentucky. Everyone thought he had made his way to California and had become well off financially, but no one knew the truth. He was blind, diseased, and lying in a hospital bed when David entered. After all of the years since Ellis had beaten, neglected, and abandoned him and his family, he asked David for forgiveness. David told him only that forgiveness for his sins was in the realm of God. He then alone confided in God to "give him hell."

VIII.

The Missing Years

David's homecoming to an abusive father's funeral and a selfish wife's infidelity pushed him over the edge. "There's nothing here for me anymore," he confided in her and left to the shrill sound of her screaming demands for everything he owned. He agreed to her demands for the house, business ventures, cars, and accounts, and signed everything over to his family before leaving. "I wanted to be lost and never found again," he thought to himself as he left with only the clothes he wore. The one thing he retained from the marriage was his military uniform and gear, nothing else. In a way, his military accomplishments were the proof to Lloyd and him that he had indeed kept his word to his brother and made something of himself.

As a homeless Vietnam veteran, Hack made a living in Fort Myers, Florida selling trinkets on the beach. He owned nothing. His only companion was the recurring nightmare of the North Vietnamese soldier stepping over him to run the bayonet through his throat.

One night as he slept on the beach, Hack was awakened by a policeman during such a nightmare, and he unwittingly attacked the officer thinking him to be an enemy soldier. Because of this indignant behavior toward law enforcement, Hack was not loved by the Fort Myers Beach Security. To them, he was just another beach bum in Florida. For Hack, there was no love lost while avoiding them, and his evasive actions coincidentally led his life in another direction.

While selling his wares on the beach boardwalk, Hack saw both a storm brewing and the same officer he had pummeled coming toward him. He decided to move on and found sanctuary from both the weather and beach security in a hair salon, where a young woman named Lani worked. She had no other customers, so it seemed to Hack the perfect time for a trim. He asked Lani if she had a pair of garden shears to cut through his thick mop and whiskers. Lani was intrigued and told him to have a seat. This was the beginning of a life long relationship that began with Hack's last few dollars and an appointment with his new stylist, Lani. "That sweet girl cut my hair for a year. It was the one appointment I'd never be late for," Hack later reminisced. During this time, David and Lani began seeing more and more of each other, often doing little more than taking walks on the beach and talking. They fell very much in love, and after three years of dating, decided to marry.

Lani was 20 years David's junior, but it was obvious that she loved him very much, because she so staunchly opposed her mother's concern about the age difference. Her mother was infuriated about Lani wanting to marry a man about whom she knew so little, although Lani had known him three years. Her mother would rant and rave, saying that he was just a bum who wanted to live off of her income. Yet, in spite of her mother's objections, Lani became Mrs. David Hack. They lived in her apartment, and soon she became the pregnant Mrs. David Hack.

Even then, Lani had no idea about his past, but before long, the military found Sergeant David Hack in spite of his seemingly total obscurity. When Lani answered the phone, she looked at David and said, "Some Jeb Bush wants to talk to you?" Shortly after this phone call, Hack was inducted into the President's Military Advisory Coalition. At this point, he had a lot of explaining to do. Nevertheless, when Lani saw U.S. Army Ranger Sergeant First Class David Hack in his military dress in the White House shaking President George Bush's hand, she beamed with a pride that exemplifies the military wife's love for her husband.

A couple of years later while living in Florida with Lani and their daughter, Hack received word that his brother, Lloyd, was in the hospital

in Phoenix, Arizona, dying of lung cancer, likely caused by heavy smoking. When David entered the hospital room, his brothers, Lambert and Hoppy, were there. Lloyd was still coherent and reminisced jokingly with David about Ivan, the bobcat, and the use of a "church key". Yet, near the end, Lloyd addressed David on a more serious note. He told him that he was very proud of what David had accomplished, and that he would gladly take the false conviction for him again. Prior to his visit, David had spoken with the Governor, and got him to agree to repeal the conviction and grant Lloyd a full pardon. "You're now a free man," David told him.

Finally, Lloyd made one last request of David. He told him to stop smoking. He knew David had a beautiful wife and daughter now, and that he should stop for them. This was Lloyd's only request, to which David agreed, as he held his dying brother in his arms and heard him speak his last words, "It feels good to be free."

Many people attended the funeral, but the brothers' mother, Viola Hack, was not able to attend. She had acquired Alzheimer's disease and was unable to remember many things, even sadly, her own sons. Her decline was but a few years away as well, and before she passed on, the Hack brothers lost their mother to her forgetfulness, before her actual death. Viola Hack was her sons' greatest loss.

As David stood over Lloyd's unfilled grave, he remembered his promise to his brother to stop smoking, and in a ceremonial gesture to honor that vow, he crushed his last pack of cigarettes and dropped them into Lloyd's grave. David Hack never smoked again.

IX.

US Wings

After his brother Lloyd's funeral, David returned to Lani and their daughter, Brittany, in Florida and continued to sell trinkets on the boardwalk in Fort Meyers. One day, out of nowhere, his old friend from Ohio, Ted Cole, stood on the boardwalk and asked him, "David Hack? What the hell are you doing?" Hack did not have an answer as Ted walked away shaking his head and saying only, "Go home, Sarge. Go home."

Ted Cole's unexpected visit made Hack think about his present situation, and he took the long way home to contemplate his life and his family's future. As he was strolling along the boardwalk, still deep in thought, he saw a sign on a store named "US Wings." In the window was another sign that said "Going Out Of Business." Hack went in to ask whether the owner wanted to sell any of the jackets cheap, because he sold things on the street. The owner found Hack humorous and told him he could buy the whole business, including the stock, wholesale contacts, and US Wings trademark for \$500. Hack thought a minute and simply asked whether he took credit

cards. The owner looked at Hack as though he might be some kind of a mental patient who had absentmindedly wandered into the store. "My wife has a credit card," he informed the store owner.

That night David asked Lani how much credit she had left on her card. The plane ticket to Phoenix had taken about half of it, so there was almost exactly \$500.00 remaining. David got a big smile on his face. The Hacks were going into the flight jacket business. A few weeks later, David, Lani, and Brittany were packed and ready to leave Fort Myers, Florida for Ohio. David placed the last item into the little U-Haul trailer hitched to the car: the US Wings sign from his newly purchased business. Meanwhile, Lani's mother, Judy, stood in their midst like a raving mad woman, cursing the day David Hack was born and swearing revenge for stealing her daughter away from her. "You'll regret this! I swear, you'll regret this!" The mother continued to rage as the car pulled away.

As promised, his mother-in-law took her revenge, and she did it in the most insidious manner. When refused a V.A. loan to buy a little house for his new family, Hack wanted to find out why. He waited in the lobby all day until the bank closed, and was finally able to talk to Mr. Edwards, the loan officer, who told him that he

had received a phone call from someone saying that Hack was a military imposter, a communist, and was under investigation. David realized that Mr. Edwards had received this information as a result of a bogus phone call by his mother-in-law. The matter was straightened out, and Mr. Edwards realized that he had known Hack previously, and that he was a man of integrity. He immediately granted Hack his loan.

Now, with a place to live, the Hack family went to work on their new flight jacket business. Lani worked tirelessly to recreate the US Wings logo and began the advertising. David worked hard to figure out how to do business on a new invention called the "Internet" and make contacts with the suppliers, distributors, and business people of the flight jacket business. Together they traveled, met people, went to exhibitions, flea markets, fairs, etc., any place to sell their wares. At first it was hard, very hard. Bankruptcy hovered over them like an evil specter, David was diagnosed with ailments related to Agent Orange exposure, and Lani was pregnant again. So began the family business.

X.

The Site

The flight jacket industry is an extremely difficult business in which to gain footing as a newcomer. The major manufacturers have long and protected lineages, some of which have been in business since before the Second World War. The patterns for the jackets are corporate secrets that are trademarked and insured for large amounts of money. Many flight jackets are still made in the United States, and some are of the highest quality. Many of the companies have long standing contracts with the military and other government agencies, which are some of the most highly prized business agreements of any industry.

Nevertheless, David Hack, a man who knew what it meant to have everything and to have nothing, was undaunted and unstoppable. David and Lani's self-determination, confidence, and a quality product spurred on US Wings. David made contacts with manufacturers, distributors, and the government. He collected patterns, expanded the site's offerings, and continually updated the website.

He offered a free pilot's cap and scarf with each jacket purchase. He worked tirelessly to insure the satisfaction of every single customer, even if they were not satisfied, which happened seldom. The testimonials were put onto the site and still increase yearly. He catered to the troops stationed all over the world by offering them free postage and handling, regardless of where they may be living. US Wings mailed out beautiful postcards that displayed various jackets such as the A-2, B-3, or G-1, and created a beautiful catalogue that every customer received.

US Wings, founded in 1986, became a soaring success. Their website has proven to be a founding landmark in "dotcom" commerce, eventually obtaining over a million hits, i.e., visits, each month. It has been featured in numerous magazines, business journals, newsletters, television shows, and the Wall Street Journal. It is one of the largest suppliers of flight jackets and sells to more government and business interests than most other suppliers in the industry. It is among one of the twenty-three Internet businesses appearing in Jaclyn Easton's book *StrikingItRich.com: Profiles of 23 Incredibly Successful Websites You've Probably Never Heard Of*. The site recently received the Ronald Reagan Presidential Business Award for excellence, and Hack sends each President a new jacket every election.

The US Wings' customer list reads like an invitation roster for a red carpet event and includes many U.S. military top brass, Hollywood movie stars, political dignitaries, corporate CEO's and working class people the world over. Also found on the list are more than a hundred different corporations which use US Wings jackets as incentives and rewards.

Their products have been used in films such as *The Tuskegee Airmen*, and more recently *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*. Angelina Jolie, who starred in *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*, to which Hack supplied the goggles, was presented a flight jacket from US Wings on The Ellen DeGeneres Show. Dick Rossi, the ace fighter pilot of the American Volunteer Group, better known as the Flying Tigers, recently donated his new US Wings G-1 flight jacket to the newly constructed Flying Tigers Museum in China, which is dedicated to commemorating the sacrifice of American blood in the defense of China and Burma, and the fight against Japanese imperialism in WWII.

Visiting the website (www.uswings.com) provides a great adventure in the purchase of a leather bomber or flight jacket and is rich with the ambiance of American military history. There are sections devoted to every type and style of flight jacket. Styles can be based on standard

military specifications (true to the patterns of the Second World War) as well as modern designs. Every jacket's history and development is charted. Visitors can learn about the Flying Tigers, the Tuskegee Airmen, the Women's Air Force Service Pilots (WASP), Audie Murphy, and General Keith Ware, among others, while they browse. The most unenlightened person can quickly learn how to distinguish between a flight jacket and a bomber jacket, know the difference between the A-2 and G-1 flight jackets, and grow to appreciate what men had to do in the B-3 bombers of WWII. The site boasts links to several prominent military, patriotic, and aviation organizations and even offers its own "Gold Site Award" to other websites that meet its criteria. A visit to the website can be interesting, informative, and addicting. David Hack's US Wings website is dedicated to preserving the memory of U.S. military artifacts and important American military history.

US Wings has become a leader in the "dot-com" industry by setting the highest standards for business conducted on the Internet while honoring the traditions and sacrifices of the fighting service men and women of the United States.

XI.

The Castle

The story of David Hack and US Wings has a fairy tale quality to it, and no fairy tale is complete without a castle. As the years passed, both the Hack family and their business grew. Eventually, Lani had given birth to three healthy children: Brittany, Brenton, and Brooke. Visits to the US Wings website increased daily, and its sales expanded internationally. The Hacks were now owners of a very profitable business, and then, like in a myth, Sarge found his castle.

When Brittany Hack was 12 years old, she was in her father's study perusing an extremely old book in order to do a school project on her family history. The book, which had belonged to her grandmother, was a study of the history and heraldry of the French family lineage. Viola French was an illiterate, working class woman, who knew neither the history nor heritage of her bloodline, which was documented in the book now held by her granddaughter.

Ellis Hack had guaranteed his wife's condemnation to ignorance and poverty through abuse, neglect, and abandonment. She never

knew that her bloodline was originally one of conquering Norman royalty, located in Ireland after the Norman conquest of 1066 under William the Conqueror. French was one of the most prominent tribes of Galway, settled in Wexford County, Ireland. By 1400, the French family had built a functional, medieval-walled castle in Wexford County, and the family heads gained the title of Sovereign in Galway by 1444. For the next three centuries, the dominant male family member of the French family was the "mayor" of Galway, Ireland.

By the 17th century, the socioeconomic situation in Ireland forced the migration of numerous Irish to the New World, and James French, born in Galway in 1650, left for America in 1671. His arrival in Maryland was recorded there, and the migration of his bloodline to Kentucky over 100 years later in 1785, with sixty other Catholic families, was documented in Saint Mary's Parish records. Ignatius French was the head of the French family contingent that crossed the Appalachian Mountains and settled in Sunfish, Kentucky. According to birth records, descendants of this bloodline lived in Sunfish and its region until 1911, when Viola French, David's mother, was born.

Since it was documented that David Hack was a direct descendant of the French bloodline of Galway, Ireland, he was a family member entitled to a percentage of the profits made from the sale of any property of French land, or in this case, the castle. It was an unbelievable coincidence, but the French castle was actually being shown to potential buyers when the Hacks discovered their lineage. So, without much fanfare or legal wrangling about the actual sale of French castle in Wexford County, Ireland, David Hack and the new owners soon came to an agreement about both the property's ownership and Hack's family's royal recognition.



French Family Crest

He did not need the castle, but he did want any title that he was eligible for that would prove his lineage. He wanted his mother's name verified and his children's ancestry recorded and attributed to them. There was a standard legal procedure to settle the estate, and The Republic of Ireland bestowed the title of knight on Hack. David Hack was now Sir David Hack, and the family crest, the French shield, surrounded by tree leaves and crowned with a dolphin over a helmet, became an icon on the US Wings website along with documentation of the family's ancestry. Viola French, the woman who had worked like a peasant all her life, died never knowing she was heir to a royal title.

XII.

The Pilot Shop

In the same year Hack was knighted, the river near the US Wings warehouse flooded and damaged over a half million dollars worth of inventory. Unbeknownst to Hack, during the building of his business, their insurance did not cover flooding, so it appeared as though US Wings was sunk, both metaphorically and literally. As David and Lani stood knee deep in the floodwater of the warehouse while jackets, furniture, and computers floated about in ruin, the situation seemed hopeless and the battle appeared lost, but the warrior in Hack refused to accept defeat.

His next move? Find higher ground, build a store, not just a warehouse, and have a shop that commemorates the sacrifice of every branch of the armed services. Most importantly, continue fighting. “Every good thing I found in life came out of the hard times. The flood was just another one of those hard times.” With fervent resolve, the new US Wings headquarters and retail store was built in Hudson, Ohio. “The world is our customer.”

The “trendy” new shop gets its ambience from Hack’s extensive collection of memorabilia dedicated to the fighting men and women of the

USA. It is, in essence, a military museum in miniature. The store is filled with every flight jacket imaginable. Also, every form of military issue clothing can be purchased. The windows and shelves are filled with hand carved flying machines of every era, pictures, posters, and gifts of military style. The walls are filled with information about military men and women, battles, and other US Wings memorabilia. It is a tribute to all of those who served the United States of America; those who came home and those who did not.

David Hack’s life, sacrifices and accomplishments in the face of extreme adversity are examples of the spirit of anyone who has feared, doubted, suffered, and even failed, but refused to quit. And is this not an embodiment of one of life’s great lessons? One is never really defeated, until one gives up.



Lady Lani and Sir David

