

A Patriot in Loonieland
by
Gabe Wollenburg

"So you're telling me that you come out here, night after night, to get mocked by college kids while you freeze your butt off, because of the love of woman?" I was incredulous. I knew that each and every one of the Men of Elizabeth II, the Loonies, had to have their own reasons for joining up and coming back night after night to patrol the great Canadian borderlands, but, honestly, love hadn't been one I'd expected to come across.

Robert Ralph, the 62 year-old combat veteran from the decades-past peace wars fought between the Americas, didn't fight to keep the Americans from crossing over into Canada illegally because of some strange love of his mother country, he did it because of a woman. Ridiculous! "It's different than that." Ralph said.

"No. You just said. It was a woman."

"My ex-wife." he said. He glanced across the treeline and squinted, like he was trying to make out something in the cover of darkness. "You can't understand." he said, turning and walking back to the rear of his truck. He popped open the equipment box and rummaged around a bit while chewing on his cigar. "You're a Pat. You can't get it."

There it was. The argument that the Loonies would throw in my face at each and any chance they could. "I'm a documented Patriot, Ralph. I came over legally. For my angioplasty. I've got my papers. You know that."

"Yeah...", he said slamming the gear box down and sliding his night-vision goggles over his head. "But you don't get it. We're a peace-loving people. That's bread into us. You Patriots think that the only thing that matters is 'liberty.' It's hard wired into your thoughts." He slid his ancient scanning goggles over his eyes and started adjusting the lenses manually. "You might have taken the naturalization courses, but inside you're still a red-white-and-blue patriot."

I stammered for a moment. Ever since they learned of my Naturalization, the Loonies never took me seriously. Never mind that I didn't really take them seriously either. I was about to complain about being unfairly stereotyped as some kind of jingoist when he spoke: "Well. Would'ja look at that." he said. He motioned to the south. "Check the peak just under the tall pine at 7 o'clock." "What is it?" I asked, my pulse rate racing upwards.

"A flasher. I swear I can see a flasher."

I didn't see anything. "Are you sure?"

"Sure as shit," he said, walking closer to me and continuing to crane on the aperture on the goggle's eyepiece. "It's a goddamn DHS blinker."

"You want me to radio it in?"

"No." he said. "We need to get a little closer and check it out."

"That's not protocol."

"Sure," Robert Ralph said. "But do you want get the whole fucking crew up here to chase some ghost?"

I wasn't sure if he wanted me to answer.

"Obviously," he said. "We need to confirm the flasher is really there before we call in a strike."

"Obviously," I mumbled. The thing was, Robert had been seeing spooks all night. Flashes of light in the distance that weren't there. He wouldn't usually say anything, but I could tell by

watching his eyes, the way they'd dart from one place to the next, and the way his breath would stop and start when he thought he'd caught something. They say the flash weapons that the guerrilla Patriots had used on the Canadian Peacekeepers left many of the Canadian soldiers who were exposed to them with erratic vision, cursed to a lifetime of nighttime floaters and sparking twinkles haunting their peripheral vision.

We both slunk down the hill, leaving Robert's truck unlocked behind us as we went, slowly picking our way along the dear paths that ran through tall grasses that grew along where the forest line met the roadway. I absently projected the suspected flasher's distance into my GPS uplink, knowing that once went into the forest treeline any hopes of orienting ourselves visually would otherwise require shimmying up a tree.

"You mind if I ask you something?" Robert asked as we walked. "What would your Uncle Sam think of you now?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, why would a Patriot like yourself refuse to go home after his surgery. What made you ask for asylum? You have some kind of secrets?"

I shrugged. "No. Not really," I said, hoping the conversation would die there.

"So what is it then?"

"Look." I said. "I got into country legally. I'm an ex-pat." I said. "An ex-pat. I won asylum the same as anyone."

"But why did you ask for asylum in the first place?" he pressed.

I sighed. "It's not what you think." I said. "Besides, we were talking about you. About your girl?"

"My ex-wife," he corrected. "And before I get back to that, I gotta know where you're coming from, Pat. I gotta know."

I stopped following Robert for a moment, I listened to the gravel scrape and crush under my Canadian Peacekeeper Paratrooper Boots. "Do you put all your new partners through this?" I asked.

Robert stopped walking too, and turned to face me. "Look. The Rancher vouched for you. So you must be Ok. I trust him. And Pauly Toronto said that The BlueJay said you were good people. That's two sources. So you must be on the up-and-up. But what I don't get is, why would a good American like yourself come up here in the cold of night to fight off your former countrymen. What makes you think you need to play a part in keeping your former countrymen from smuggling drugs from our pharmacies and bringing their dirty American diseases and righteousness over into our land of peace and prosperity?"

He was somewhat shorter than I, and had to look upwards slightly to look me in the me right in the eye. "What would make blue run right out of your red-white-and -blue blood, son?"

We sized each other up, then, for a moment. He was rugged and angry looking. His phase-weapon dangled from his belt hook and there was a scrape of carmax crusted around the edge of his tight lips.

"Love it or leave it," I said. "So I left it. I don't have an Uncle Sam."

Robert smiled, and started walking away. "That's what I wanted to hear son."

"Robert, wait." I said. He kept walking. I jogged a little to catch up to him. "Robert. I need you to stop walking now." I said, desperate. "I know about the blinker."

Robert stopped and turned to me again. "What?"

“The blinker. I saw its signature when I ran my first frequency sweeps of the area. It’s really there.”

“What are you getting at, Patriot?”

“I need you to put your hands in the air where I can see them, Robert.” I said, pointing my shooter at him.

Robert stammered. Looking around wildly. “Is that a goddamn shooter?” he asked, his voice climbing.

“It’s a sparkler,” I said of the flash-weapon. “I don’t want to use it on you, though, Robert. Just put your hands in the air.”

Robert looked over my shoulder and back up at his truck on the top of the hill. His vision must have not been as bad off as he made it seem, because he clearly spotted my compatriots who had quietly slipped in and were securing the loonies’ patrol zone as I marched Robert toward the blinker decoy.

“You’re a goddamn patriot spook,” he said, lunging at me with the phaser that hung on his utility belt.

I pressed the discharge on the shooter, blinding Robert with seventeen photon bursts tuned to a frequency that he couldn’t ignore, but I had been conditioned to. The sparkler shut his brain down and dropped the combat vet out cold. I picked him up and started lugging him back up the hill to the rest of the American special forces which were quickly clearing away Robert’s truck and any sign that the two of us had ever been there. It was a good thing they were nearly done because the sparkler discharge was certain to attract the rest of the loonies quickly, if not the full blown mounted police. It was time to scramble.

"I'm sorry, Robert," I said to his unconscious body as I dragged him into the woods. "My Uncle Sam is sick. She needs medicine. That's what would cause a man to turn on his country. My baby can't wait around."

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