

## RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

### CAMERON WINTERS

Summers exhaled and pressed his weight into his MK12. His spotter, Rodrigues, confirmed the target using his RCO.

“Range to target 2 5 0,” Rodrigues said, helping Summers set his scope on target.

“Roger, 2-5-0.”

It was cold, bitter cold, even inside the building. The air burned their lungs as they drew in deep frigid breaths. The sky outside was yellowish grey, the whole world seemed sepia toned. Not like Summers was used to back home in Wisconsin, where green outshines every other color. He breathed deeply trying to calm his nerves and settle his heart, ignoring his body’s longing to cough with every breath. The smell of dip spit and four days of baby wipe showers fermented the air around them, insulting their lungs even more. His rifle’s cross hairs rose and settled in rhythm with his breathing. He tried to get comfortable behind the rifle, his knee ached from the hard floor. A tipped over table was all they had to hide behind here on the second floor. For the time being, they were safe.

“He’s sighting in, dude.”

“Yeah I see it, Rod. Let’s give him a second to change his mind. You know the new ROE.”

The target continued to aim his PKM down the alleyway. Whether he knew it or not, he was aiming down an alley where Marines were patrolling building to building. Summers forced himself to focus, the focus kept his shit together. Sometimes he focused too much, burning a hole in reality and making him susceptible to fuck up.

“Looks like he knows something’s goin on.”

The reticle kept rising and falling. Rod kept checking the target and rechecking wind and distance.

“FUCK! Summers, he’s firing!”

Inhale, pause. Exhale, settle. He flipped the selector off SAFE. Summers closed his eyes.

When they opened he was laying down in the cold snow next to his grandfather. It was November. He was ten years old with a six point buck four hundred feet from his muzzle. The words of his grandfather slowly whispering into his ear...

*Breath steady, you’re in no hurry. Remember what I told you about your*

*foundation. Wait till you’ve got a good heart shot, you have one bullet so make it count. Aim small, miss small. Slow... Steady... Squeeze...*

Bang.

“Hit.”

His grandfather’s voice melted away with the snow.

“Solid hit, man. Dude dropped instantly.” Rod’s voice was slow and smooth,

The spent 5.56 brass rolled across the floor to their right making a faint tinging sound. Summers slowly let the trigger reset with an audible clunk. He thumbed the selector switch back to SAFE. He inhaled. As he exhaled, he whispered,

“Solid hit, grandpa.”

“What?”

“Don’t worry about it, Rod. I’ll tell you some other time.”