

Tank

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USAMRIID DIRP RBT 3014159 RCV RPT

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Transcription of audio recordings recovered 12/13/10

<Shuffling. Sound of throat being cleared. Voice is monotone and very quiet.>

"My name is "Dub" Fletcher. Dub for W. W is for William.

"To whoever finds this, I hope it does some good. I can't live like this any longer. I won't live like this one second longer than I have to. Got the gun picked out, with a special bullet just for me.

"You guys got it all wrong. There ain't no zombie virus, but there sure as hell are a lot of zombies. I used to be a biologist back...before. Before the world went to hell and I went to hell with it. We're all sick – that's what makes us die when they bite us. They're crawling with bacteria. Perfectly normal bacteria. Stress wiped out our immune systems. That's all there is to it. Occam's Razor – the simplest explanation is the best explanation. I hope y'all figured out what brings the dead back to hunt us. That isn't bacteria. It's gotta be something else... Had no idea when I started trying to survive. Never had a chance since then to check anything out. Been hiding for years. Started out like that. Hiding in the dark.

"Not sure how long I hid in that warehouse. I remember being terrified. Utterly and completely terrified. I couldn't think. I couldn't act. I just sat in the corner afraid to move, afraid they'd hear me. Afraid I'd die.

"I had a radio but I was afraid to listen to it. Afraid the dead would hear me and... Anyway, I never found out if the televisions worked or not. I just hid in a back closet on a crate of canned vegetables. Everyone I knew was dead. People I didn't know were dying all around me. I was weak. I did nothing.

"After maybe a week or three, it was quiet outside. No more gunfire. No more screams. No more moans. Nothing. I waited in my own filth for another week before I crept out to peer through a window. Nothing moving. My heart was, well... I know I had a heart attack. But it wasn't too bad, obviously, or I'd be wandering around with the rest of the dead folks instead of recording this.

"Outside I saw my ticket to safety. Safety with a capital S. Some kind of army tank was sitting abandoned in the middle of the street. Nasty looking thing. Sloped armor, big solid rubber tires, some kind of big-ass cannon on top.

<humorless laugh>

I must've watched that tank for days before I decided to have a closer look. So I walked outside. Think I was a second or two away from another heart attack before I panicked and ran to the tank.

"Some kind of personnel carrier, it was. The back ramp was down. No one was inside. Black stains all around though. The crew probably was around too, just not walking in step with each other anymore. There was a lever marked "TURN TO CLOSE". So I turned it, and the door closed. And the dead heard it. I sat there in the dark, screaming 'til my voice was gone while they pounded and clawed on the hull. Ever heard twenty pairs of nails scraping across olive drab primer?

<hysterical laughter>

Probably have, now that I think about it. I was crazy by then, but I got crazier. Almost opened the hatch. Almost. I don't recall finding the internal lights, but I did. Thank God Almighty that the battery still held a charge.

"God? I don't know if anyone believes in Him anymore. Not even sure if I do now. But I did then and there. I prayed and screamed and prayed some more. Then I ran out of steam. The pounding on the hull was almost deafening, but it was like any other noise – you get used to it after a while. There was food inside. There were weapons and ammunition. More importantly, there were manuals.

"I discovered I was sitting inside a Light Armored Vehicle, Wheeled, Divisional Single Point Air Defense System. The cannon on top was a 30mm Chain Gun. The book said it could crank out 6000 rounds per minute. And it described exactly how to find out. Best of all, the manuals described how to drive the damned thing. So that's what I did. The muffled sounds as I ground the dead beneath the wheels made my hair stand straight up, I swear. But I got used to that sound too. Actually, I liked it. I loved it. I howled right back at them, swerving down the street, trying to read the instructions and look out the driver's periscope at the same time. Took out several buildings. Took out even more cars. Damned lucky I didn't flip the LAV over.

"I drove for I don't know how long. Must've been one step away from the Big Empty by then, because the next thing I know I'm sitting in the turret playing with the cannon. 6000 rounds a minute? I think they left off a couple of zeros. It was past dark, and the damned thing looked like a laser beam from all the tracers zipping down range.

"I killed the dead. I killed cars. I killed houses. I killed trees and I think even a panicked horse. Then that must've gotten boring because next thing I remember I was parked outside of town on the side of the highway in the middle of the afternoon.

"Beautiful day, it was. The kind I'd always loved before...well, before. I was shaking. I was sick. I puked 'taters I ate when I was a baby. Then I screamed a while longer. Pounded the walls of the crew cabin 'til my knuckles bled. Nasty time, that. I wanted out, but I couldn't bring myself to even move toward one of the hatches. Inside the machine I was safe. They couldn't eat their way in, so they couldn't eat me. It was about that simple.

"So I looked around the interior a little more. Found the spare gas cans and a few more gallons of mobility. Even read in the manual how to gas up without going outside. I had to force myself to open the vents to keep from blowing myself up with all the gasoline fumes that had built up by the time I finished, but at least the gasoline smell was better than smelling...them.

"Them. I sat in the turret and traversed a full three-sixty degrees. Nothing moving except the grass and trees. No sounds except the wind. I could've been the only person in the world. Hell, for all I knew, I was the only person left alive. Guess I sat there 'til the next morning.

"I drove for awhile, no particular destination in mind. Guess I was thinking that Trans-Pecos Texas would be quiet, so I drove west. Left the Alamo City behind me. Sometimes I used the highway. Sometimes I used the good earth herself. I left a rail straight path over cars, through abandoned buildings, across grasslands that had never known the tread of a tire. Still not sure why west and not south. But I began to regain my wits and what little was left of my sanity. I learned that houses were death traps. I learned that towns were worse. Days later I finally came to grips with being able to listen to the radio in safety. That night I listened as the world slid further into Hell.

"Military traffic, civilian broadcasts, private citizens on shortwave and CB. Sank into sleep through a fog of nightmares of teeth and rotting flesh and moldy skin. Woke to muffled hammering on the hull. Took a peep through the periscope. More dead. Always more. Spun the LAV three or four times, crushed them. Kept driving.

"Eventually I was able to force myself out of the LAV. Had to. Damned near ran out of gas. Wasn't sure about the ammo situation in the cannon, but used it to completely obliterate a truck stop before I filled up the fuel tanks and every gas can I could find. Skin was crawling the whole time. Was sick by the time I finished. Passed out once I was zipped up again.

"You Army pukers found me at least once. Sat very still while a helicopter gunship circled me about twenty feet off the ground. Nasty thing, looked like a giant bug, all missile pods and cannons and antennae. Christ Almighty, you made that thing terrifying. To someone alive, at any rate. Wasn't sure if I would be shot for stealing the tank, so I didn't answer the radio. Figured I'd rather take a missile and get it over with. But y'all moved on and left me there. Hope y'all killed a bunch of dead guys with that helicopter. Lord knows, that thing would bring a taste of Hell's Inferno to whoever was on the gunner's receiving end.

"Eventually I made it all the way the hell out here in the middle of nowhere. Found a farmhouse with a stucco wall around it. Drove right up to the open gates and pulled inside. Successfully resisted the urge to level the house. Sat there for nearly two days before I was sure there was no one inside either living or walking dead. Ran out to close the gate. Guess I looked like Rambo. Any of you remember those movies? Tripping over three assault rifles, tangled up in LBE webbing, weighted down by a flak jacket and helmet. Damned lucky there wasn't anyone home – I couldn't've outran a gopher with all that crap on.

"Set about fortifying the place. Dismantled a lot of very expensive furniture to board up the downstairs windows and doors. Sealed the doors with concrete. Came and went through the upstairs balcony. Just drove the LAV up onto the porch and used it as a step stool. Couldn't bear the thought of touching the ground for some reason. Well, hell, I knew the reason – crazy. Afraid. Stark raving mad. Nearly passed out every time I heard the house creak. Heard a car on the highway once and terror gripped me so bad it was hours before I could move. Real hero, huh? Think I was chicken shit? Maybe so. But I was safe, and I was alive, so fuck you very much, thank you kindly.

"There wasn't any food to be found, but I came up with a solution for that. Got in the LAV and, after locking the gate from the outside with the biggest fucking padlock I could find in the place, I drove straight to town. Probably looked like a monster myself. I was grinning, I guess. More like a grimace. Probably panic. Saw the dead moving about. Saw them come toward me. Drove over them. Saw a good target – a Wal-Mart Superstore.. Shop Smart! Shop Wal-Mart!

<hysterical laughter>

"The store was as crowded as the Day After Thanksgiving Sale, but the shoppers were just standing there being dead, so I drove over them. Right through the wall. Headed for the pharmacy and crushed that. Then bolted to the escape hatch in the bottom of the LAV and opened it up. Guess it was catch as catch can, but I grabbed everything that was lying under the LAV and threw it into the crew compartment. Figured some of it might be useful. Did the same thing in the food aisle. Pickin's were pretty slim, but pretzels beat MRE Mystery Meat any day of the week – you Army boys know that, right?. Picked up a horde of junk before I figured I had drawn enough of a crowd and decided to take my business elsewhere. Drove right over the big hoorah in the parking lot and headed for the residential area of town. Picked out a good target – someone had fortified a house, but the doors were open. Bones and gristle in the front yard. Pieces of bodies in a trail leading away from the house...

"So I drove right in. Didn't find any food. Tried again next door. And next door. And so on. You get the picture. Managed to pick up enough for several days, maybe even a week or two if I was careful. Headed out of town in the opposite direction in case anyone, living or dead, decided to follow me home.

Home? Guess it was. Damned sight better than most folks had. Made a detour to a feed store. Smashed the place flat for a few mixed bags of vegetable seeds and a couple of cattle prods. Had no idea what I end up using them for, though.

"Got back to the house. Opened the gates. Drove in. Locked 'em. Barred 'em. Backed into the garage. The turret tore a hole in the roof, which was fine with me. Climbed out and started to unload. Found the tape recorder and some batteries in the loot. Figured I'd leave y'all a testament, y'know? Maybe. Maybe just doing this for myself. Trying to hold off the Big Empty a while longer. Anyway...

"That's pretty much how it went for a long, long time. Never left the walls on foot. Never left the LAV most days – it had become something indispensable. Hid out again. Watched. Waited.

"The fight against the dead was a lost cause from the beginning. The minute the cities were abandoned, you guys sealed your fates. Should've tried to keep people there, maybe. Dunno. But when millions of people lit out for the country... Guess most of 'em starved to death the first year. Too many people. Not enough food. No way to transport it. Simple population ecology. Figure more died fighting each other than were killed by the dead guys, at first, at least. At any rate, the numbers of the walking dead swelled into the millions within a few months. After that first winter, not a day went by that I didn't spot them wandering down the highway. By then we'd lost. Anybody smart would've headed for the open seas and found themselves a nice cozy little island to live on.

"Some of 'em would come up to the house, but I offed them with big rocks – you see, there was this big patio out back. I pried up the stones and would go up on the wall with a stepladder. The dead couldn't reach me, and I guess I knew it, but I just couldn't stand knowing they were there. So I'd drop the rocks on 'em. I'd kill 'em eventually. Most of 'em were pretty fragile anyway – it was dry out there. Too dry, actually, on the surface. If the house hadn't had its own well, I wouldn't have made it either. Bless 'em, whoever had owned this house. They had a small generator that I could use to pump water. But since I could barely think of leaving to find more fuel for it, I only used it when I had to. Bathed only when it rained. Guess I stank as bad then as I do now. Hell, if you boys could see me, you'd think I was one of the dead guys. Remember that rocker called Rob Zombie? I could pass for his twin any day of the week. Found myself afraid of knives and scissors after a while, so I stopped shaving. Stopped cutting my hair. Who was gonna complain, right?

"I planted a garden. Sometimes I had enough food. Sometimes not. Mostly it was good for attracting birds and jackrabbits. Every so often I'd force myself to leave. Best pickings were along the highway. Found a lot of abandoned military gear. Plenty of fuel. Towed an Army gas tanker back one day – hey, y'all don't mind, do ya? Oh well, fuck you if you do. You Army guys were deserting left and right. Most of y'all were pretty dumb, I thought. Left behind a lot of good stuff. Should've stayed in your tanks. You would've been safe in your tanks.

"Anyway, one day there was a single corpse trying to chew a hole in the wall. It looked kind of fresh, so I left it alone and watched it. It watched me. Creepy thing. Disgusting. Horrible. I puked on it, but it seemed to like it – ate as much as it could scrape up, so I waited 'til I'd calmed down before going back to watch. The smell was awful.

"Back...before...I was a microbiologist. Knew what *Pseudomonas putrescens* smelled like, and there was plenty of that. *Salmonella* too. Lord knows what else, but that thing was a walking bacteria incubator. That's when it dawned on me – there isn't any "zombie disease." Sure, if you get bit you die, but that's from perfectly normal bacteria. It's got nothing to do with whatever brings the bastards back to life. Anyone like me was in pretty bad shape – hell, I was sick all the time. Stress. Malnutrition. Clouds of germs wafting in from cities of the dead. It's a wonder we didn't all die from typhoid fever those first two years. Human bites are filthy anyway. We were just too fucked up to fight off infections.

"Have no idea to this day why the dead get up and try to kill us. I'm not even sure they're really dead. Maybe they're just impaired in a major way. The ones I bothered to study later on were like stroke victims. First they stagger around and act all confused. Then they get more coordinated. Frontal lobes stop functioning, I guess, but other parts of the brain on the inside, the animal parts, take over lost functions. They learn all over again. Still dumb as a post, but smarter than most animals.

"Thing was, the more I watched it, and the more it watched me, and the more calm we both became. I was dealing with it. I think the dead fucker just ran out of steam or gave up. It stopped trying to climb and just watched me watching it. Finally got bored and dropped a rock on it. Dragged it over the wall with a harpoon and buried in the garden. Had a damned good crop later than year.

"Made a flag for the house one day. Used a big white bed sheet. It said "Still Alive". Ran it up the television antenna. Not sure why. Maybe just because it'd been so fucking long since I'd talked to anybody. Started using the radio in the LAV. Was still sleeping in the tank, so figured, why the hell not? Would've welcomed marauders or the US Marines with open arms. No one ever answered, but I caught some Morse code or something a few times. Guess most folks were sending smoke signals by that time. Spent days watching the horizon for smoke or dust. Thought about yelling, but since my only neighbors were the dead guys up on the highway, I didn't feel like that kind of company. Thought I heard a helicopter one night, but by the time I climbed out of the tank, I couldn't hear anything. Cried until I fell asleep. Cried a lot. Cried for my family, my friends, my world. Myself. Fuck all, I was in sorry shape. Hell, I still am in sorry shape.

"Was beginning to think I was the last guy on earth. That's why I left the house. Welded fuel drums on the tank. Filled up everything I could find with either gas or water. Mostly gas. Enough food for a couple of weeks. Visited the neighbors at the highway first. Dumb dead bastards just walked up and let me run over them. I was screaming. I was laughing. I was safe. Let them stand there and get killed again. Fuck 'em.

"Wondered who I'd find. Poor fuckers. Starving. Sick. Very sick, probably, but I didn't care. Was ready to die of dysentery as long as I didn't die alone. Drove for almost a week. All I found were more walking dead. After a few days I stopped trying to run over them – wouldn't have done any good. Kind of like stomping on an anthill. There're just millions more for every one I could've mowed down. Finally turned around and drove back to the house. Found a crowd waiting for me. Lured them away from the wall and shot them. Went back inside.

<Tape stops. Restarts. Voice is very quiet. Intermittent sobbing.>

"So now I'm still sitting in the LAV. My last and only friend. My salvation. Tornado took the house last night. Tried to drive out of the rubble, but the LAV is stuck on a piece of the foundation. No traction. Can't move forward or backward. The wall is gone. The neighbors have stopped by for a visit. Hear 'em? Gotta give 'em credit for tryin'. They're convinced they can tear their way in here. Can't move the LAV. Guess we'll always be together. 'Til Death do us part!

<hysterical laughter.>

<Tape stops. Restarts. Pounding on the hull is noticeably louder. Voice is a whisper.>

"Water gone. Food gone. God forgive me."

<Single gun shot. Sounds of body convulsing. Pounding on the hull continues until tape runs out.>

END TRANSCRIPT 901365 4054359 - 765

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