



The Canopy

Issue 10 / Volume 33 / Oct 2025

34 Feet of Terror

Coming to grips with nearly two score of feet in altitude.

Read more on page 4.

Lost in Area J

It was supposed to be night-to-day course, but the day never came...

Read more on page 6.

Archers

Was that an arrow?

Read more on page 8.



Chapter Officers

Position	Name
Chairman	Tony Alger
Vice Chairman	Gary Blasczienski
Treasurer	Heath Davenport
Secretary	Stephen Fern
Service Officer	Joyce Damon
Recruiting / Villages	Tony Alger
Recruiting / Ocala	Tig Blackman
Canopy Editor	Ron Dahlgren

Upcoming Events and Historical Notes

October 11 1100-2000 hrs	GRILL MASTER BBQ COMPETITION	VFW Post 8083
October 11 1300 hrs	Membership Meeting	VFW Post 8083
October 31 2359 hrs	Spooky Halloween Happenings	The World Over

From the Editor



This month's cover comes from my dining room. My wife likes to decorate the house for each holiday. It adds a nice festive atmosphere and helps mark the passing of the calendar each year.

I've done something a bit different for this issue. It's the month for Halloween and witches are in the air. I thought The Canopy might join in the fun. This month we have three spine-tingling tales.

Enjoy, if you dare...

Airborne! All The Way!

Ron Dahlgren

Editor, The Canopy

<https://www.the-canopy.org>

Our 2025 Booster Goal is \$500



Start

50%

Complete!

Chairman's Message

We are in October so please start thinking about attending our Annual Airborne Christmas Party Dec 13 at 1:00 pm. Social Hour will start at 12:30 if you care to come early. The VFW Bar has \$1.00 draft beer and of course soft drinks etc. Please support the VFW. Remember we have our drawing for the Vietnam Wall "Reflection" 2'X3' framed picture and the 82nd Airborne Bourbon along with lots of other baskets for raffle.

I'm asking the Chapter to start thinking about our leadership and Executive Board. Our Vice Chairman, Secretary and a member at large are forming a committee to search out some perspective prospects for leadership positions. Our Election Committee (Gary Blasczienski, Stephen Fern and Thurston Helms) is hard at work coming up with nominees for next year's Chapter Leadership. If you'd like to put your hat in the ring please let them know ASAP! I'm working on a guest speaker for the Oct meeting. Coordinating all these things gets to be complicated and time consuming. I'm pretty sure I got a speaker lined up for our edification and enlightenment. Also the VFW is holding a BIG BBQ Fund Raising Cookoff in the parking lot that day so parking is on the other side of the fence in the field.

You'll see the cars. Our Chapter will support this event by doing lunch with the participants and donating to their cause, so we will not be serving lunch that meeting. Come out for some great BBQ. Please mark your calendar since we only meet once a month. We have been offered some tent space during the BBQ Event so we can sell our raffle tickets so would like a few of our membership to step up and help us sell tickets for our Bourbon and Framed Picture. Remember the next meeting is OCT 11 (That's the 2nd Saturday of the month!) I'll been there early so if you can make it early too look for me. We'll hold the elections at the November meeting. Hope to see you on the manifest for our Oct meeting.

Airborne!

Airborne!

Tony Alger

Chairman

North Central Florida All-Airborne Chapter



10 Most Recent Canopy Boosters – Thank you for your support!

Thurston Helmes
Ken & Linda Hall
Galen Mitchell
Jerry & Robby Brust
Heath Davenport

Christopher Adams
Nick Harty
Regis Rossa
Darla & Jay Tatman
John Kinney

34 Feet of Terror

April 30th



The damned tower.

Image by R. Dahlgren

My heart isn't beating; it's trying to batter its way out of my chest. The line of trainees in front of me, all strapped into these ridiculous mock parachutes, shuffles forward one more step. The sound of my own blood is a roaring ocean in my ears, drowning out the bored instructions from the Black Hat.

The tower. The thirty-four-foot tower. It looms against the Georgia sky, a skeletal gibbet of wood and metal. From the top, I can see the tiny figures of my classmates being launched down the zip-line, their voices a faint, brave chorus: "One-thousand! Two-thousand!" They sound so confident. I feel like my skeleton

is trying to vibrate out of my skin.

We're on the stairs now. A narrow, open-backed staircase that feels like it's leading straight to hell. The guy in front of me, Roster Number 42, takes his turn. I watch him climb the final few steps, disappear through the door, and then I hear it, slightly louder now: "Roster Number Forty-Two! ONE-THOUSAND! TWO-THOUSAND!"

It's my turn next. My mouth is a desert. My hands, clamped on the wooden handrails, are slick with sweat. The mock parachute on my back feels like a tombstone. I try to swallow

and can't.

The Black Hat at the top of the stairs glances at his clipboard. His expression is one of profound, soul-crushing boredom. How can he be bored? We're about to step into the abyss! I take one step up. Then another. The ground below looks impossibly far away, a distant land of safety I will never know again. My knees are literal jelly. I'm convinced I'm going to collapse right here on the stairs.

I'm at the door. It's a small, square opening of pure nothingness. A void. The zip-line cable stretches off into the distance, a thin, cruel thread over a sea of sawdust.

The Black Hat looks at me. "Roster number," he drones, as if asking for the time.

My mind is a white-hot blank. My number. What is my number? My social? My birthdate? I can't remember my own name. My brain is screaming one word, over and over: NONONONONO.

"Fifty-Seven," I squeak. My voice is a mouse being strangled.

"Louder, trainee."

"ROSTER NUMBER FIFTY-SEVEN!" I shriek, the sound tearing from my throat.

"Good. Hook up."

With trembling, numb fingers, I fumble with the snap link on my harness, clipping it onto the cable. It feels flimsy, like a paperclip holding up a battleship. This is it. This is the moment I die. I'm not ready. I want my mom. I am absolutely, categorically going to die.

And that's when I feel it. A sudden, warm, shameful rush of wetness spreading down my leg, soaking my trousers. I've lost control of my own bladder on the 34-foot training tower at Fort Benning. The warmth is a stark, horrifying contrast to the ice-cold terror freezing my veins.

The Black Hat doesn't notice. Or doesn't care. He's already placing his hand on my back. This is it. The final push.

The world narrows to that open door. The smell of pine wood and fear. The sound of my own ragged, sobbing breaths. The Black Hat's voice is a distant echo: "Prepare to exit."

My body locks up. Every muscle is a clenched fist of pure refusal. No. No, I will not go. But my body is no longer mine to command. The panic is a physical force, a nuclear reactor overloading in my soul. The scream I've been holding back is a living thing trying to claw its way out of my throat.

His hand pushes.

The scream finally breaks free, a raw, silent shriek inside my head as I'm propelled into the emptiness. I have a fleeting, crystalline thought: I have to count. I have to count or I'll be recycled!

I open my mouth. "ONE—"

But the void rushes up to meet me. The edges of my vision turn to black velvet, swiftly closing in. The roaring in my ears becomes the only sound in the universe. The zip-line, the sawdust pit, the bored Black Hat, the shameful wetness in my pants—it all gets swallowed by the darkness.

I don't feel the harness catch me. I don't hear the instructor yelling. I am simply... gone.

I come to on the ground. A different Black Hat is unclipping my harness. "You okay, troop?" he asks, his tone suggesting he's asked this ten thousand times.

I'm lying in the sawdust. I can feel the cool air on my wet trousers. The terror is gone, replaced by a hollow, washed-out emptiness. I fainted. I actually fainted on the goddamn 34-foot tower.

I stagger to my feet, avoiding all eye contact, and stumble out of the pit. I can feel the grins of the other trainees, the veterans who did this for real from a plane five hundred times higher. My face is on fire with a humiliation so complete it feels almost philosophical.

I look back at the tower. It's just a wooden structure. A small, pathetic little hill. And I, Roster Number 57, had just provided the day's best entertainment.

Lost in Area J

April 30th



A foreboding forest, at night.

Image by R. Dahlgren

The red lens of the instructor's flashlight lit his face from below, turning his features into a skull. "The woods have a long memory here," he said, his voice a low gravel in the absolute dark. "Some places, they just... don't let go." Psychological ops. We all knew it. But the words stuck to me like the chill as he handed me my scorecard.

Under the weak crimson glow of my own headlamp, I plotted my points. 89, 34, 12, 67. Four orange and white stakes waiting in the void. My confidence was a solid thing, forged on night jumps and countless training exercises. This was my element. Area J was just a patch of North Carolina dirt. I knew it.

The first point was easy. A reentrant near a powerline cut. I used the wire as a handrail, my boots crunching unnaturally loud in the preternatural silence. No insects. No distant hum of Bragg's traffic. Just me and the dark. The stake was ice-cold. The punch made a dull, dead *click*.

Point 34 was a pond. I found it by shooting an azimuth from a trail junction. My beam hit the water, and it wasn't right. It was a sheet of black glass, perfectly still. Not a ripple. I punched the card, and from the center of the pond came a faint, wet *sloshing*, like a heavy body turning over. I froze. The sound stopped. Just the silence, heavier than before. My confidence, for the first time, had a crack in it.

I turned toward Point 12, the hilltop. That's when the fog came. It wasn't normal. It was a cold, cloying mist that swallowed my light, reflecting it back into my eyes. I was blind. All I had was my compass and my pace count.

Five hundred meters. A thousand. I should have been climbing. The ground remained flat. I should have crossed a road. I never did. According to the map in my hand, I was walking on a hill that didn't exist. Panic, cold and sharp, pricked at my neck. I pushed on, counting another five hundred paces.

And then I saw it. Point 12. The orange and white stake was right there, driven into the flat, pine-needle floor. No hill. Just the marker, sitting in the wrong place in a world that had stopped making sense. The map was a liar. My tools were useless. The crack in my confidence widened into a chasm.

Forget the hill. I had to get to the final point, 67, in the swamp. Surely the soggy, distinct terrain would be real.

I navigated to the coordinates, my heart hammering a frantic rhythm against my ribs. But there was no swamp. Instead, a clearing opened up, and in its center stood the skeletal, rusted iron of an old substation. The air here was unnaturally warm and still, a dead breath held for decades.

No Point 67.

I looked up from my wavering map and saw it. A silhouette.

Man-shaped, but impossibly thin and tall, standing motionless between the pines. Just watching. My breath caught. I fumbled for my rifle, a rubber ducky, but when my light swept back, it was gone.

A sound replaced it. A low, rhythmic *creaking*. Not a tree in the wind—there was no wind. It was the sound of an old house settling, of weight on rotten boards. It came from everywhere and nowhere.

I ran. Not with purpose, but with blind, animal fear. I crashed through undergrowth, my compass needle now spinning lazily, uselessly. I should have hit a road. I should have seen the sky lighten to grey. I checked my watch. 0530. 0600. 0630.

The sun never came up.

The sky was a seamless, eternal black. My red headlamp began to dim, the battery dying. The *creaking* kept pace with me. The wet *sloshing* sound from the pond echoed it from the other side. A horrifying, syncopated rhythm in the dark.

My panic burned itself out, leaving only a cold, hollowed-out feeling. Resignation. This wasn't a test I could pass. This was a place.

I stopped running. I stood in the darkness, listening to the sounds of this wrong version of Area J. I was off the map. I was off the roster. I was just. . . lost.

I started walking again, not toward anything, just moving to keep from screaming. The dark pines watched me, judges in a trial I never agreed to. My confidence, my skill, my identity as a paratrooper—it all felt like a costume I'd been wearing, now stripped away in the endless night.

I walk still. My flashlight long dead. The sounds follow, my only companions in the void. I don't look for points anymore. I just listen to the rhythm and whisper the only question that remains.

"Where is the sun?"

Private Miller's Notebook - Story by Matthew S. Richards

June 7, 1944



Image by M. Richards

I made my first combat drop. Thought I was lucky as I came down into an empty field by a broken chapel. Then my chute dragged me into a stone wall. Landed hard, got dirt in my teeth and my knee was twisted good, but I'll manage.

The place was quiet, too quiet, like the world was holding its breath. I low-crawled across the open field until I got to the cemetery and a stone wall. The old stone tombstones poked out from the mist like they were coming from the other side.

I ducked into some weeds when I saw moonlight reflect off a metal helmet. Thought it was a German creeping in the shadows. But no rifle. He had a weird cooking pot tipped on his head and a long stick in his hands. Took me a moment to see it wasn't a stick. It was a bow, but much bigger than any I'd seen before.

He pulled it back and it moaned like an old door hinge. Then—zip. A glowing arrow shot through the air. I swear it passed so close to me I felt the wind of it. It hit a sniper hiding up in the bell tower. Quiet as the graves around. The man dropped out of sight like a rag doll and thudded on the ground.

I crept after, my heart hammering. I checked the body. Dead as can be with a narrow slit hole through his neck. I looked up at the archer. He was glowing with the light of the moon, soft and faint, and he pulled another arrow from his quiver.

The bow creaked again. I strained but I couldn't see what he was aiming at. It was somewhere in the dark side of the cemetery. A second later, my eyes adjusted and I could make out a stone wall before I heard the whoosh of the arrow.

Another German slumped over the wall face-first. I could see from where I was that he was as dead as the first.

I tried to follow the archer but he was over the wall in a flash. That German had the same hole but where was the arrow?

I turkey peeked over the wall and saw him loose another arrow into the back of another German. That poor bastard thought his rear was covered.

It was quiet for a moment. I took my chance and climbed over the wall. He was gone.

Found more dead Germans in the hedges. But not shot

with our guns. They had those narrow holes, punched straight through. Must have been the glowing arrows. Big ones, long as my arm, flying through the air, but they were nowhere around. I followed the trail till it ended in fog. Just stopped. Like he had walked off the earth.

Across the street, I found the other guys and hustled to the platoon sergeant as quick as I could. They were patching the shrapnel wound on his arm but he was grinning and chomping his cigar.

I told him what happened but he wouldn't believe me. Kepy saying, "Good shooting kid! You really saved our skins!" And they are going to put me in for something shiny. Those Germans were just about to unload an ambush on the rest of the platoon.

The boys laughed till they coughed. They call me Robin Hood now. Corporal Smitty said I better share any more booze I find. He thinks I was drinking. He keeps making me dump my sack, and that is such a pain to repack all the time. I think he's

jealous.

But the LT didn't laugh. He didn't say a word until he pulled me aside later. Said there's an old ghost story from the Great War. Ghosts of English bowmen from Agincourt showed up at Mons, firing arrows at the Germans. Said it was the only way the English survived. He never believed it but maybe I saw the same thing.

He looked as white as a ghost. Told me to keep it quiet. I told him no problem! I didn't need any more extra attention.

I try not to think about it. But when the night goes still, I swear I hear it again. The wood, creaking like an old rocking chair and the twang of a string. No shot. Just a thud from the body in the silence. Like he's out there, aiming, with his disappearing, glowing arrows. Gives me shivers.

I'm glad he was on our side.

— Pvt. Miller

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