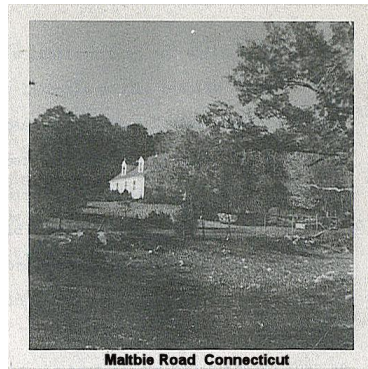


The Mail Woman

By Lloyd Nelson

ONE

I'm on the fag end of my Mail Delivery route. I'm delivering in the Maltbie Road area of Newtown Connecticut. The houses are all traditional New England Salt Boxers, all with the dormer windows on their upstairs floor and many with ponds and big elms. This was a G.I. housing area after World War Two and the blocks run into acres. It's a very wooded area and quite lovely. There are trails and big ponds, all very sylvan when the leaves are on the trees.



My last delivery is at Melvin Hardcastle's beautiful ground hugging house. I'm dropping off a parcel from a Boston book shop and picking up mail. I happen to know that Melvin's, like others he gets from time to time, contains about \$90,000 in used notes. How do I know this? Part of my work is opening letters and parcels at the Danbury Post Office and xeroxing the contents and making it look un-tampered with. It takes a bit of skill and training and the right equipment to do this and most of the work is undertaken and paid for by the F.B.I. It's easier and cheaper to train on the spot workers rather than send out F.B.I. staff to do the skilled grunt type work. However the work I do on Melvin's parcels is strictly my business.

Melvin and I are bed-mates when we feel like it. Melvin's wife went out with breast cancer. My husband is an agent-orange victim from Vietnam. He is quite a deal older than me and bright and very deep, but not up to a lot in this area. I'm aware that Melvin has a long running and very well rewarded scam going. I haven't yet totally found out all the details, but I'm working on it.

As I come over the hill I turn my bike motor off and start to coast down to Melvin's box. I can hear his Suburban burbling away in the still air and know he is off to the airport about this time. I have timed my run to give him his parcel before he leaves. As I coast down the hill I see a startling thing. A tall green bush near his entrance takes a step along his driveway edge and appears to be lifting up something long. I'm stunned, but quickly realise that it's a man in a Gillie suit (synthetic leaf) and he's getting a rocket propelled grenade launcher up for firing, to the top of his leaf-layered shoulder. I brake to a halt. He hasn't heard me. Before I can move a muscle, he fires a head on into Melvin's Suburban as it comes through the gate, there's a huge whoosh and it goes up in a huge pillar of flame and burns like a petrol fuelled bonfire. The shooter lowers his weapon and only then looks around. This lowlife, in one pull of a trigger, has killed my good friend and lover and a big source of my income. I'm sitting there spitting chips and bug-eyed at what is going on. I've reached my Browning Hi Power pistol out of the front bike pannier. I'm only waiting for him to spot me. When he does, he fumbles in his suit. He's bound to have a machine pistol in there. I put a shot through his left eye; he's history. I'm a trained army marksperson and miss very little of what I aim at. Melvin is also, regrettably, history. I restart my delivery bike and loop around the end of the dry stone wall fronting his

house and ride around to the back of the house and leave the area by the pond and path tracks that comb this area of Connecticut. I have just the presence of mind to pick up his flag fall mail from his box as I go. I can just picture myself saying to the inevitable enquirer further down the track, "No Sir, when I picked up the mail everything was normal, I must have just missed whatever happened."

The paths and pond tracks are totally deserted; schools in. At any other time, I would expect to see youngsters in the area. I roll for home and tell Joel what's happened.

TWO

Joel, in his service days, was an outstanding armourer in the Rangers. What he doesn't know about weapons and explosive devices is hardly worth knowing. He still helps his army mates at Fort Benning develop innovative and more devilish demolition kits. They appreciate his help and on the q.t., keep him supplied with power enhanced, dry accelerant added, Cemtex blocks from time to time. He uses these in his work as device supplier to Melvin. Melvin is a former army intelligence officer. He is a sort of removalist. He removes people for money, very big money. We have no idea of how he got involved in this, but we do know that every few weeks, a book shop in Boston posts him books, which I intercept and later open. They contain huge amounts of money in used notes and also the briefing sheets for the next operation. I've spent time in army intelligence and have looked at many job appreciations.

While these shout army training they are light years ahead in quality and depth. They give everything

needed to plan a removal, and plan it Melvin does. Joel fixes the blasting side, Melvin pays him \$10,000 plus expenses for each job. We know it's not over generous from what we unofficially know of the amount he is paid. But with Joel on an army pension and me delivering local mail 9 days a fortnight and working on F.B.I. money 3 nights a week at Danbury post office, any extra is very welcome. In addition, as Melvin prefers to blow up people to shooting them, I sometimes help out with a sniping contract, for which he pays me \$15,000 a throw plus expenses. I've done several of these jobs in the past month, one very easy one and one I just got away from.

THREE

I'm sitting among a jumble of rocks covered by a rock coloured blanket and sweating my heart out. The wait is for our mark, a drinks waiter at the Bright Angel Lodge on the rim of the Grand Canyon, to come out for a smoke. He does and with my magnificent telescoped and silenced rifle, I drill him through the back of the head, There must be about 20,000 tourists at the Grand Canyon today, spread out over a mile or two. I'm pretty safe. The gun gets broken down into as many parts as possible, slipped into strips of Navajo rug, which match the surrounds and I ease over to a projecting bit of the rim and drop them over one by one. They're gone and I safely join the crowds. We overnight in Flagstaff and Melvin comes on to me. We're both pumped with the clean job. Melvin has a large member with an exotic tip up at the end. He is a marvellous lover and his late wife must have loved him dearly, he is so competent and smooth.

The waiter? Probably in the Federal witness protection programme, we surmise. In the next sniping job, I'm in the fork of a leafy tree overlooking the Fairways of the Five Farms Golf Course in Virginia. It's where they play the Walker Cup. I've been in the tree since before dawn. It's late summer and it's a long day, but I've done plenty such when sniping for the Army in Afghanistan and Iraq. A long stakeout is nothing to me, besides I have a good novel with me. Late afternoon my mobile vibrates so I start sighting up. This is going to be a very long shot, as there is no other way to get a crack at the well protected mark. Three men get out of their golf cart to putt the green. I pass on the first two and head shoot the man I want and then the security guard sitting in the cart.

For this job, we have, after a bit of talking, borrowed an extraordinarily long shot Russian sniper special. The catch is, we have to return it, as there's only two of these in the country and Fort Benning needs it back. While the golf course buzzes, I'm so far back and it's getting towards dark, I think there is no chance of my area being scouted, until the following day. I come down the tree like a cat when its proper dark and wearing Vietnam night glasses make my way back towards where the motor bike I came in on, is stashed. I've run a fishing line perimeter 100 feet each way around the bike through leaf and grass coloured upspikes. Someone has been through this although I can see nothing, I move on a half mile to my proper stash, a powerful but light mountain bike. Removing the cover blanket, I slip the Russian borrowed rifle into a silver cylinder strapped above the exhaust. So far so good. I get it ready to fire up, but some sixth sense makes me swivel quick, a large German shepherd dog is coming at me, hard. I use my

close up and personal weapon, a Browning pump action shotgun and give him two sharp stoppers. As he crashes, I sight his handler running down the hill after him. I give him the third shell and he falls hard. I reload and swivel, no-one else has shown yet. I fire up the bike and quickly leave the scene. After a short run, I jump the bike onto the Baltimore and Ohio train track and fairly bore along, headlights on full, shotgun close. I track into the small town and check out my white van standing near the band rotunda in Main Street. I park the bike pulling the pin on a delayed action grenade, which will go off in about 3 hours if Joel is right and fire up the van, stopping very briefly to change the quick remove plates and I'm out of there.

It's the first and last time, I cart a weapon that has been used, away from a hit. I'll never make that mistake again. Of course, without this particular gun, we couldn't have made the hit at all.

FOUR

We now sit over a coffee and ponder our next move. We know from our spy reading, that Melvin has a well paying job on this weekend. We know that although he's an independent contractor, his giver of jobs doesn't accept excuses. Melvin may work for others too. Presumably the man in the Gillie suit represented an unsatisfied client. We don't know. To cut a long story short, we decide to do his weekend assignment and see if the money turns up. Thus the following evening, after some quick late night work by Joel, I'm in Cleveland pushing a long cylinder of Cemtex up the tail pipe of a black B.M.W. outside a gay bar. I set the trembler device,

which is a straight forward job and without haste vacated the area. There is nothing further I can do, so I cab to the airport for the second leg of the job. Thus Sunday evening I'm standing unobtrusively and setting the timer on an incendiary device and placing it, by means of a bit of long dowelling rod, high up the steel shutters of the shop front. It's magnetised. It's a legal firm well down a quiet street.

The first job is deadly serious; the latter one is only to put the frighteners on the lawyers. Both are reported in local papers on Tuesday. I buy a copy in Danbury and am relieved to read that the B.M.W. owner left the gay bar unaccompanied. It seems it just wasn't his night. A wino sheltering in the lawyers doorway, isn't so lucky when, in the dead of Sunday night, the shop goes up.

On Friday, the book shop parcels turn up - \$90,000 for Cleveland plus \$50,000 for the demolition job plus \$10,000 expenses for air fares and ordnance.

FIVE

We now sit pat and wait to see if further jobs roll in. They do. While organising for these, Joel gets a good bit of gun barrel off an old tank and turns this into a marvellous concealed safe, which he later installs in the environs of an old farm house that we own in the wilds of Vermont. His family left it to him and we weekend there from time to time, but more particularly at leaf time.

Back to work, my cell phone rings, I'm in Detroit. It's my Vietnam vet watcher, organised by Joel. The ring confirms the mark is on track. I flash my torch twice to alert the three Afro American kids, who are standing quietly up the street, a bit to my right. They are holding

cardboard Kentucky Fried Chicken containers. These are full of eggs. They lamp the mark's car, step out a bit and literally pelt the windscreen with these. The mark's car almost stops, the driver is probably unsighted. The boys, as told, hare down the nearby alley. I've given them \$200 for their part and they've given me real value for money. Surprisingly, a man jumps out from the car behind and runs into the alley. Its unexpected back up and the first bit of faulty Intell so far. I know he will soon realise that what he's seen is only a diversion and will be back. I don't worry about the boys as there's an early turn in the alley that would make them safe from a shooter. I now step up to the plate from behind a big trunked elm and put a rocket propelled grenade into the middle pillar of the marks car from the modified launcher that I scabbed from the Gillie suit man in Connecticut. The car blows. I run across the park still carrying the tube and get to my chop shop car, start up and drive off. I drop the tube in the river and leave the car with the keys in the ignition near the Greyhound Terminal; 90 minutes later I'm in a town 70 miles south and flag a cab to get to the small commuter airport.

SIX

I'm walking down a narrow black top road in New Hampshire. I'm beautifully dressed in a camel slack suit. My cream blouse is very low cut for a reason. The mark and his secret service grunts are on their way up the hill. My Vietnam vet helper has put up a pencil thin blue flare to let me know that and the fact that he has placed a blocking detour sign on the narrow entry to this road. I have placed a similar sign up the hill a bit, we don't want witnesses to what is about to happen. Cell phones are

too dicey in this rocky country and people listen. I've got a nice little spaniel on a lead and have a dry branch under my arm that I'm using as a crutch. A black town car comes around the corner as I limp along. I pretend to ignore it as a lady should, but they unwisely stop. I shade my eyes with my hand and lean forward to distract the driver with my cleavage. Then, shade my hand to peer at the back seat passenger, twitter my fingers at the following car, which stops a bit far back for my liking and in a harsh contralto voice, I say

“My God Sir, it's you! I heard you speak at the High School gymnasium last night.” (and I did).

I move my hand from my eyes to the top of my head, pull a short stick grenade from my jacket collar and toss it into the car. At the same time I jump back and get in front of the car to avoid the rush of phosphorous and cyanide gas that erupts – whoof - in a second's time.

“Hey!” they yell from the second car, as both grunts jump foolishly out. The driver looks the more dangerous and I hit him at about the heart, with my square H. & K. pistol. The second man splits for the back of their car, but he's too late. I whack him in the back with my second gun, a Mannlicher revolver that chucks out a slug that would stop a bear. He's down. I muddy the waters by standing back and tossing an incendiary grenade into each car, leap over the stone wall edging the road and am gone in the trees. I run back to where I have stashed my trail bike, kick it up and roar off down the trail to the spot where I have a hole dug ready. I toss the ordnance into the hole and rake dead leaves over. It will be hard to find. A quick 15 minute burst, in which I don't see a soul, takes me to the water tower overlooking Pensaville. I step back a bit and pull the strings on two delay-action grenades already fitted to the bike and drive

away, leaving the beautiful little dog tied by her leash to the fence wall, away from the trail bike. Half the town will be up here when the bike blows, so I don't worry too much as I coast sedately downhill to the main road and head north towards Canada. With a change of clothes and my Greyhound pass, I'm soon heading in the right direction. The chop shop van I leave parked in the parking area of the Red Lion Inn. This whole thing has been a dicey deal, but the money for this particular job is just so great and the real risks probably a lot less than I faced every day on the streets of Fallujah. However, I mustn't get too cocky either. I've had a dream run so far. I'm a little bit sad about leaving the beautiful little dog behind. She is all heart and loves scrunching into my lap as we practise fast runs on the trail bike through the woods.

SEVEN

I'm running across a Washington D.C. park, running quite hard. I've reduced the number of bureaucrats by one in the past 10 minutes; we read later, he was a senior military procurements officer who must have been procuring the wrong stuff. It's latish and the light is going, but not fast enough for me, as two young sprogs are giving me a hard chase. They don't seem to be armed, but anyone who can push me at running is quick and super fit. I reach some park trees, put on a burst, then stop; drop to one knee, levelling the long-barrel silenced .22 pistol I'm carrying.

"Stop or you're dead," I call. They don't even hesitate, but keep coming, I head shoot both and they fall to the ground. I can see a police cruiser in the far

background jolting across the curb into the park, but the trees screen me enough for me to make it to my chop shop motor bike, which is chained to a park entry sign. I'm away in seconds and in the clogged up nature of Washington streets, I roar down the median strip and quickly leave the scene.

This is my second job in the Washington area in two weeks. Last Friday we had a job-book detailing a house in Towson, Maryland, that was to be blown up. This was quite a cerebral job really. The job-book pictures showed the house is very tastefully furnished with antique pieces and it is, in my opinion, owner interest. It didn't have the slickness of a designer job or rather the sameness of a designer. Anyway, we located a mouth-watering little piece of French furniture in a Baltimore antique centre. It had all of the medallions, enamel plaques and general ornamentation of a French Empire piece and a green marble top which was held on by concealed clamps. Joel worked the 3 leg table over beautifully and fitted a false floor under the green marble, which he filled with Cemtex plus an accelerant of a dried nature. To this he added a cell phone activated device.

We had a vet drop it off with a letter that I took time to compose, saying, roughly, that my profession is in placing good looking antique pieces in homes that suited them. Would she try this piece out and I would ring her in 3 days time, when I got back from a weekend away to either complete the sale, or take the piece back into stock. I tell her the approach is unusual, but many people buy. The piece is such a little mouth-waterer that she takes it in to try. It is an ideal size to display silver or ornaments, perhaps an Ormolu clock.

We have a vet chart comings and goings and when we are convinced no-one is home, we activate the cell phone and disintegrate the house. It's a very fine old house built in the 1960's, when the best people were moving out of Baltimore as the Negroes moved in. It's a split level, sheet rock inside, aluminium siding and simulated used brick outside. All very pleasing to the eye, despite its age. It just goes to matchsticks and the only casualty according to the papers, is a very old dog which was in the garage.

EIGHT

We've gone International. This is our third foreign job in 8 weeks. Perhaps the others don't count as they were only in Mexico.

This time I'm in Brompton Road Oratory in London. The mark is the priest at present giving me penance; he has previously remarked on the scent I'm using, it's actually Estee Lauder Private Collection bought in Bond Street yesterday.

"You should always wear it" the mark says. He leans forward as I whisper harshly and I get a beautiful head shot with my silenced .22 pistol. I put two more in as he slumps, just to be sure and immediately push the pre-set button on my new card cell phone. Joel has come over with me and attended to the device. There is a huge 'foof' from the back of the church, where I have left a Harrods bag under a pew. The Oratory quickly fills with acrid smoke. I leave hurriedly and place the pistol, now in a plastic shopper, behind a statue of St. Joseph, as I rush to tack onto the crowd departing the Oratory. I step out over to the Victoria and Albert museum, where I reverse

my coat in the loo and go out to catch a bus. Three hours later I'm on the Concorde and well towards home. Joel will follow by regular flight later that evening.

NINE

We sit quietly for a while. We are very much on the look out for anything out of the ordinary in our living and working environment. Between the steady business of regular jobs and the big payolas of the politician and the priest and the even bigger payment for the bureaucrat, we have a huge cash stash of used notes. We have not spent a cent of the contract money. We can't take the risk; it's so easy to see if any over-the-top spending occurs. I'm cautious to a fault and the very good clothes that I buy for each job on expenses, are never worn again or kept. I dump them in a Good Samaritan's bin the next day and never later.

TEN

Our edgy world gets a bit edgier, when the chap who looks after security at the Danbury Post Office tells me we have a watcher. He knows that I'm the F.B.I. letter opener so he tends to confide in me a bit. We run through the security video of the watcher. A solid and watchful man, past middle age. He dresses differently, changes during the day and so on, but it's unmistakably the one same chap. My personal observation, is that he's probably watching to see who is picking up the money from Melvin's box. What obviously he doesn't know, is that I'm clearing this regularly from inside the Post Office.

However, some generous cash money may make it possible for him to find out from amongst the staff. Joel and I decide to act decisively. We have, over preceding weeks, had the Boston vets stake out the book store where our jobs and payola come from. These guys are ex Rangers, deep cover men and they've got pictures. It seems every second Friday evening, about 8 guys meet at the book shop, probably to decide on the next jobs. We are sure we are not dealing with the Mob. We think it's a set of jobbers, who take in the work and farm it out to contractors like Melvin was and we now are.

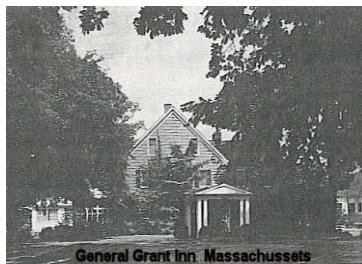
I quietly risk stirring the tiger and use my security key to access Melvin's den. The house is still sitting empty, but has a very good alarm system, to which I have a key. Joel and two other vets, armed with night glasses and silenced guns, are keeping watch. I have a good scout around the den as Melvin told us at least a year back, that if he disappeared, we would find the answers in the den. I bring out in a bag, some first editions from Melvin's collection. He was a real discerning book collector.

ELEVEN

Over the next few days, Joel constructs a small, but heavily timbered book crate. We fill this with mouth-watering first editions. I nearly change my mind on the draw card, a first edition copy of *The Wind in the Willows* in its original dust jacket. Next Friday, we deliver this via the vet's courier service to the book shop about 4:00 pm. Attached is a lovely little note that I spent hours crafting. It's from Mrs. Lucien Sanders in Silver Spring, Maryland, asking for a valuation and possible sale price for this job

lot. Mrs Sanders died a few days back, but our letter and consignment note pre-dates her demise. I know there is no way book lovers will send these back.

Joel has false sided and false floored the book crate and added a surprising amount of the new super Cemtex and an ignition device. About 8:00 pm following confirmation from the watchers that the usual 8 are there, we tell them to get very well back, but to watch in case there is any movement. From the far end of the street, we then dial the cell phone number. The book shop blows up like a



Roman candle. We motor back down the Massachusetts Turn Pike and stop for a pleasant meal at the General Grant Inn. Joel is both pleased and introspective. He thinks we may have cauterised our possible problem. I'm not so sure, but I have to agree with him, there hasn't been the slightest sign of any stake out near our home and this we have both thought all along would be the litmus test. We return quietly to Newtown and get back to work and normal life. Nothing seems to happen.

TWELVE

We now take a big punt and negotiate a deal to buy Melvin's old house. We have the money stashed in astonishing quantities, mainly vacuum sealed in strong plastic and stored in tank-barrel safes, but we think it safer to appear up against it. We have a devil of a job with finances, but in this land of easy credit, swing the deal.

Once we have the keys, we hunt for his safe and eventually find it. It's quite a find, but it's not the main lode. I moon around the house and particularly the den, where we have been told by Melvin the key lies. I look behind all the picture frames; nothing. Eventually I make myself up a whisky sour with Melvin's whisky (Rebel Yell old Bourbon) and Melvin's Eureka lemons from the garden and sit down with a pitcher of this. I look reflectively at his pictures and at a nicely worked old tapestry, which says 'If you really seek, the answers lie in your Pillars of Wisdom'.

"What the f*^k," I ask myself, "is that all about?" Clang! The penny drops. I discard the whiskey sour, race for home, race past Joel to our library shelves. I open my copy of T. E. Lawrence's 'Pillars of Wisdom'. There, glued to the inside cover is a tiny, grainy envelope, and written on this in Melvin's flowing hand is, 'Bingo, have fun kids.' Inside, is a safe deposit key and an authorisation for us to have access. Eldorado, Eldorado found.

To fast forward a bit.

These days, we summer a bit in Connecticut and sometimes, look in on our money in leaf time in Vermont. Mostly, we work our Spanish vineyard. Views of the Med and the mountains. The house is rustic, but cool and wonderful. Two storey, tile floors and the climate is humidity free, snow free and absolutely tops. Joel's health has improved out of sight and he has lost weight through his active regimen. We don't swan around a lot, we are always armed. The villagers have accepted us and work for us in the vineyard. Life is good. You can bet that if anyone, anyone at all, ever comes looking for us, our suspicious village friends will let us know in minutes.