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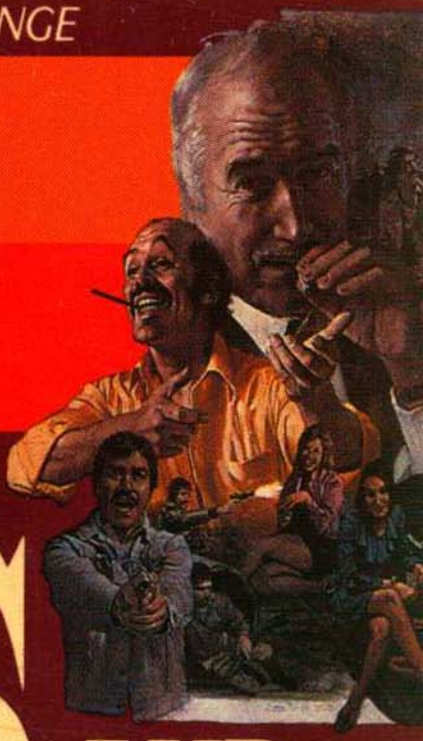

LINES AND SHADOWS

HIS FIRST NONFICTION WORK SINCE *THE ONION FIELD*

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—*The New York Times Book Review*

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Joseph Wambaugh

A PERIGORD PRESS BOOK

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For those who lived it, on both sides of the line

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NOT ONE WORD HAS BEEN OMITTED.

LINES AND SHADOWS
A Bantam Book / published in association with Perigord Press / William Morrow and Company, Inc.

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Morrow / Perigord Press edition published February 1984

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Serialized in Los Angeles *Magazine, January 1984*
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PROLOGUE

THE BRIDAL SUITE

IN 1982, THREE SAN DIEGO AREA POLICE OFFICERS UNDERwent psychological counseling in an effort to assess some traits that might cause either embarrassment to the police department or danger to the officers themselves.

The three officers in question were all convinced that disturbances in their lives were related to police service. At least two had experienced some episodes of weeping, which is predictable in police stress cases. At least two had some thoughts of self-destruction, which is extremely predictable in police stress cases. The only other thing the three officers had in common was that they were all part of a little experiment conducted by the San Diego Police Department. The experiment lasted eighteen months, ending in April 1978. It was a strange experiment, the results of which are still being debated on both sides of the Mexico-United States border.

Ten officers of the San Diego Police Department were asked to walk a foot beat. It may well have been the most bizarre and remarkable foot beat walked by American policemen in modern times.

In addition to being the story of that walking beat, this is also a tale of two cities. Each of the city's metropolitan areas houses about one million people. One city is geographically small and the people live in close proximity. One city is large and sprawling.

In one city, inhabitants still suffer diseases considered exotic in the other: cholera, polio, typhus, tuberculosis, rickets. In the other city, separated from the former mostly by an imaginary line, lies some of the richest real estate in the richest half of the richest state in the richest country on the face of the earth.

Within a two-hour drive north from that invisible line there float unbelievable armadas: yachts and pleasure craft, half a million of them. And no less than 150 *builders* of yachts and pleasure craft striving to fill the insatiable need.

Although it's difficult to say where unusual ideas originate, this one may have been born many years ago in a hag of a hotel near the Mexican border. The top floor of the hotel in San Ysidro housed "the bridal suite." The sole occupant was an officer of the United States Border Patrol. He could cross the floor in two strides. He was a very big man living in a very small room, wryly named.

Dick Snider recalls his days in that hotel vividly. The floor outside his room ran downhill so that he had to *skate* to the slime-green bathroom down the hall. Slipping and sliding back *up* the floor to his coffin of a room was another matter, especially when he'd been putting down tequila and mescal and Mexican beer at The Playland Club, a theater-cum-saloon run by an ex-tightrope walker.

Maybe that's how it all seemed to the twenty-five-year-old border patrolman on his first assignment, trying to live and support an estranged family on $75 a week, reduced to eating cheese sandwiches three times a day, listening to the ex-tightrope walker recall her good old days walking wire.

San Ysidro is not an incorporated town; it's mostly a

Spanish-speaking community within the city limits of San Diego. One can, they say, hit the United States port of entry with an empty tequila bottle thrown from any house in San Ysidro. An exaggeration, but one gets the idea. Back when former border patrolman Dick Snider was pinwheeling down the halls of the little hotel it was mostly cesspools, train trestles, stucco or cinder-block beer bars, and streets as greasy and blistered as fried tortillas.

Burl Richard Snider was born in southern Arkansas, in the tiny town of Silva, a crossroads that time and cartographers have obliterated. His family were farmers and mostly raised him in southeastern Missouri, the "lapland" where Missouri laps into Arkansas. It was a Mississippi River backwater which flooded yearly and caused his family to make several trips to California, their "*Grapes of Wrath* trips," to find work in the San Joaquin Valley. One of those trips lasted two years, and during that time the youngster had occasion to play with Mexican children whose families had also made journeys from far places—cruel, hard journeys. The lapland farmboy found they were very much like himself, those Mexican children. He began picking up bits of their language and he studied Spanish in school, discovering that, because of Spanish, other studies clicked.

"For the first time in my life even English seemed to jell for me," he recalled. "Spanish classes were a snap when I later entered the Border Patrol academy. While other guys were washing out because of it."

But there was some living in store for young Dick Snider before joining the U.S. Border Patrol. He got married at seventeen and began working in the California oil fields, making quite a bit of money for a boy—a very large boy to be sure. He and his bride had two babies and everything was coasting along about as smooth as buttermilk. Then his oldest child, Ricky, got a strep infection of the larynx.

A generation later he looked, well, *baffled* when he tried to describe it. Ricky was just three years old. Ricky had

trouble breathing one night. The next morning it was worse. Dick Snider rushed his son to the hospital. Ricky began choking. Ricky began *strangling.* Dick Snider watched his son's face go blue-black before his eyes. His boy wanted his father to save him. The doctors cut open the boy's throat and did a tracheotomy. The life support machine broke down. The boy died six hours later at two o'clock in the afternoon.

"It's confusing," he remembered. "I'd go out a my head for several minutes at a time. Then I'd come back. Out and back. I can't remember the details. I can only remember that he recognized me at the end. The doctors tried to tell me that he couldn't have. I believe he knew me at the end. His hair was wheat-blond and his eyes were brown. He always tried to do what I did. Once he scared me to death by running into a corral full a horses. He was going to wrangle them, he said. He said if his daddy could do it . . . well . . . he was *some* kid."

Dick Snider and his wife also had a baby daughter, but nothing was the same after the boy's death. There were some years of misery, then divorce.

He eventually found himself absolutely alone, in a mean little room in a hotel in San Ysidro, draping his large frame out the window on cool San Diego nights, watching the glow in the sky from Tijuana.

There had been no Hispanics in Dick Snider's border patrol class. In fact he was the best Spanish-speaking recruit in the El Paso barracks during training. The United States government had not thought it necessary to recruit officers who fluently spoke the language of the border. Dick Snider, who always hankered to be in law enforcement, made investigator very quickly.

"I used to watch the San Diego cops chasing aliens down the streets a San Ysidro," he recalled. "I'd sit in that sorry little room and look out at them. It made me think a lot about the alien plight."

And it wasn't easy supporting his estranged wife and

daughter. Hence, cheese sandwiches and some milk when he was lucky. And booze because it was sometimes more necessary than food—that is, when you tended to think of a family destroyed and a dying son crying out for help. It's not hard to imagine the fantasies in a cockroach hotel in the night, always an arm's length from a service revolver, closer than that to the memories of a dead child. *I couldn't save him.*

So, lonely and frightened men must think of other things. They get strange ideas. They drink, and they gaze out the window at wormy mongrel dogs dragging infected bleeding anuses across stippled pavement, dogs who cross the imaginary line at will to scavenge. And they gaze at cops chasing aliens in a crazy game more akin to present-day Pac-Man than anything else. At least when seen from the vantage point of a coffin of a room called the bridal suite.

The idea he got a generation ago was this: *There is not a significant line between two countries. It's between two economies.*

"I kept thinking, what if I'd been born a hundred yards south a that invisible line? As long as it's the haves and have-nots side by side, they're gonna come."

There was a lot of anguish and misery out there in the night on the frontier. And it may be that this is where the idea for the later San Diego police experiment was born. While watching an early version of Pac-Man, where American lawmen ate up Mexican aliens only to spit them back south. And ate them up the next night only to spit them back south. And the next night.

It's easy to see how a young border patrolman might start to identify with these *pollos* driven north by circumstance. And to wonder how many of *them* had seen a dying son cry out. *Save me.*

The border patrolman in the bridal suite began to concentrate on the anguish of illegal aliens. So as not to contemplate his own.