

**PAUL LINDSAY**

**Freedom  
to Kill**

A NOVEL OF THE FBI



VILLARD  
NEW YORK

4001872

This is a work of fiction. The characters and dialogue  
are products of the author's imagination and do not  
portray actual persons or events.

Copyright © 1997 by Paul Lindsay

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions.  
Published in the United States by Villard Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New  
York, and simultaneously in Canada by Random House of Canada Limited, Toronto.

VILLARD BOOKS is a registered trademark of Random House, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lindsay, Paul.

Freedom to kill : a novel of the FBI / Paul Lindsay.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-679-45016-5

I. Title.

PS3562.L511915F74 1997

813'.54—dc21

96-40465

Random House website address: <http://www.randomhouse.com/>

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

24689753

First Edition

Book design by JoAnne Metsch

ALSO BY PAUL LINDSAY

*Witness to the Truth*  
*Code Name: Gentkill*

*For my children,  
Larisa and Erik*

Man is condemned to be free.  
—*Jean-Paul Sartre*

## A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

Thanks to:

Gregg Schwarz for his unique perspective on Washington, D.C., without which this book would not have been possible and, while disguised as Captain Bucko, for saving the world on countless occasions from boredom. *Burn it down to the lug nuts, Captain!*

Bill Hagmaier for his insights into cases past, which in turn have inspired many of the villainous moments of these pages, and for his endless work to recover the missing children of this country.

My daughter, Larisa, for her exhaustive work during this effort and for taking our clan, in my lifetime, from sixth-grade dropouts to Phi Beta Kappa.

Leona Nevler for her always gracious support, and for reminding us all that there is still elegance inside and outside the boundaries of fiction.

David Rosenthal for his flawless ear, exquisite patience, and, above all, his maddening contempt for mediocrity.

Esther Newberg for her indestructible loyalty and concussive honesty, and for continuing to bring the wolves to my door, which, hopefully, is what this life is all about.

# Freedom to Kill





# 1

WITH THE PRACTICED invisibility that government agencies were so good at during a time of crisis, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control had spent the previous twenty-four hours quietly but frantically searching for Nate Walker, one of its research assistants, and the two vials of deadly African Lassa virus that had disappeared with him.

The last place anyone expected to find either was Disney World.

The missing researcher sat slouched, frozen in a wheelchair, unable to raise or lower his half-masted eyelids. Walker guessed he had been given a massive dose of some sort of animal tranquilizer. Uncontrollably, his head canted to the right and his neck strained to an unnatural length. He could feel the saliva cool the lower corner of his mouth. The man he knew as William Blake pushed him slowly through the world's busiest amusement park, whistling luxuriously. Through the warm, gray fatigue that had settled over his senses, Walker recognized the heroic strains of Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*.

One of the Seven Dwarfs—Dopey, he thought—walked up to him and waved kindheartedly. Walker gazed blankly at the mammoth head painted in trustworthy cartoon colors. It wore an expression as immovable as his own. He sensed the person inside was staring back, trying

to guess what illness had left him so pathetically helpless. He wanted to scream a warning: Greed, goddamnit—GREED!

Somewhere from within the deep, atrophied well of his conscience, Walker heard an echo of self-mocking laughter: *It was all going to be so easy*. And now, looking back into the closing oval of his life, he understood the lesson he had chosen to ignore: *It had been too easy*.

A month earlier, he had met William Blake while attending a communicable diseases seminar in Washington, D.C. At the end of one of the tedious daylong sessions, he was sitting in the hotel bar finishing a second double vodka when Blake sat down, introduced himself, and bought a third. As the evening wore on, Blake graciously insisted on buying every round. Walker guessed the source of the generosity was some corpulent expense account somewhere. And that was fine with him, because he had been charging all his meals and drinks to his room, hoping that when he checked out, some computerized miracle would cause his bloated credit card to be accepted.

At his first moment of consciousness the next morning, despite vodka's ability to slur conversation and conscience, Walker remembered Blake telling him he represented a Middle Eastern country whose intelligence sources had discovered that one of its neighboring enemies had obtained some Lassa virus and was attempting to develop a biological warfare strain. They were desperate to obtain their own samples to start defensive research. A quarter of a million dollars had been mentioned, and Walker thought he had agreed to help. He jumped out of bed and checked his suit coat. There were fifty hundred-dollar bills in the pocket.

A week later, he started receiving a series of calls from Blake. And then yesterday or the day before—he couldn't remember now—he was instructed to bring two vials of the Biosafety Level 4 agent to a little-used medical laboratory in the Atlanta area, where Middle Eastern technicians would, with all the necessary biohazard precautions, shave off minute samples of the contaminated tissue. Then Walker would be able to return them to the CDC undetected. The remaining \$245,000 would be there waiting.

But the only thing waiting was Blake, a gun in one hand and a syringe in the other.

Dopey was gone now, and Blake was wheeling the research assistant into a rest room. Once they were in the roomy handicapped stall, Blake

locked the door and, after turning Walker around to face him, pulled on a pair of surgical gloves. Gently, he raised Walker's head until he could see his prisoner's targetless eyes. "You are indeed fortunate. So seldom in this nation of homicidal mismanagement does one's death serve such historic purpose. Yours will announce the beginning of the end for the Land of the Free."

Carefully, he lowered Walker's head and unbuttoned the man's shirt. Taking out a slender, double-edged combat knife, he cut a shallow six-inch-long incision just above Walker's belt line. Because of Walker's chemically lowered heart rate, the wound bled slowly. Blake rebuttoned the shirt.

From behind the wheelchair, he took the small plastic cooler that Walker had used to transport the deadly samples from the CDC. Filled with dry ice, it held two white plastic vials marked LASSA OB-5. He studied the containers appreciatively and said, "One for me . . ." putting one back in the cooler, ". . . and one for you." Blake uncapped the frozen vial and dropped it down the front of Walker's shirt.

Walker felt a white-hot terror fall through him. In an hour or so, the diseased tissue would thaw, and he would become infected with the hemorrhagic fever. An extensive breakdown of tissue and organs would follow, causing blood to ooze from every one of his body's openings.

But he knew something Blake apparently did not: Statistically, the Lassa virus, unlike the Ebola, was fatal only about 3 percent of the time. Although he was in for a biological nightmare, he had a 97 percent chance of survival.

Blake turned the wheelchair around and, from behind, slowly slid his left hand around Walker's neck until his middle finger found the carotid artery. He timed its thick, lazy rhythm. "Oh, I know you think that you have an excellent chance of living through this . . ." he said, and felt Walker's pulse quicken. He smiled. ". . . but since you know what I look like . . ." There was another surge in Walker's heart rate. Blake smiled again. "Good, you understand."

Walker's fear struggled desperately against the tranquilizer, but finally, the only defense he could summon was a single tear that slowly crawled down his cheek.

With the patience and discrimination of a diamond cutter searching for the most advantageous entry point, Blake studied the juncture be-

tween the back of Walker's neck and his skull. Then carefully, with his right hand, he pushed the razor-edged blade of his knife deep under the base of the skull, severing the technician's brain stem. He continued to hold the finger of his left hand on Walker's carotid artery for another twenty seconds, waiting for the next beat. It never came. He turned up Walker's shirt collar to cover the wound, unlocked the stall door, and removed his rubber gloves. "Well, Nate, let's take you out among the great unwashed so you can spread your particular brand of sunshine and I can start showing America just how irresolute and powerless it really is."

# 2

MIKE DEVLIN SAT watching the Downriver Gun Shop. The entire FBI bank-robbery squad was nearby but out of sight, letting him take the eye. They were waiting for the "Jacktown Ski Team," a Detroit-area bank-robbery gang. The use of such nicknames, necessary only when criminals were able to maintain their anonymity, was distasteful to the Bureau because it was a glaring reminder that the part-time felons were being more successful than the full-time agents.

While most bank robberies were committed by close-your-eyes-and-floor-it amateurs, the Ski Team brought a cold, brutal professionalism in through the front door with them. Their method was always the same: They wore ski masks, jumpsuits, and gloves, were never inside for more than five minutes, and always cleaned out the vault. The nickname was derived from their clothing, plus some vague informant information identifying everyone in the group as having done time at Jackson prison, nostalgically referred to by its alumni as Jacktown.

The targets they chose were always in some sleepy Detroit suburb that, because of commerce in the area, kept a couple hundred thousand dollars in the vault. The small towns were also attractive because they would have only one or two single-officer cars that could respond to the robbery. And these officers were far more practiced in handling barking-dog complaints than stopping armed felons.

The gang had already netted over a million dollars, and until a week ago, the FBI had no idea who they were. But then the subject of a Bureau drug case decided to transfer some of his impending prison time to the ski mask crew by informing on them. He did not have a lot of details, but he had sold the gang's leader, Frank Butler, the guns that had been used in four of their previous robberies. He also knew that just before every job, they met at the Downriver Gun Shop. It was run by an individual who had served time at Jackson with both Butler and the informant. The only people Butler trusted were those he had known in prison, and the gun shop's manager was paid a thousand dollars to keep the business closed while the gang made last-minute plans and test-fired the guns they always left behind in their stolen getaway car.

For the past week, the bank-robbery agents had taken turns surveilling the shop, waiting for the gang's van to show up. Today was Devlin's turn, and as he was lifting the lid off his first cup of coffee, it pulled up. According to the informant, the vehicle's presence at the gun store meant that, in all likelihood, the crew was about to rob another bank, their ninth in the last five months. The rest of Devlin's squad had responded quickly and now sat waiting, nervously checking their handguns and M-16's.

THE BASEMENT OF the gun shop housed a small target range. The four members of the Ski Team were there alone. Frank Butler leaned against one of the shooting-booth walls and let his blazing eyes measure Benny Wilson, the gang's new getaway driver. Having witnessed Butler's self-validating need for violence on several occasions in prison, Wilson shifted uneasily in his chair and spoke with forced nonchalance, attempting to interrupt whatever paranoid delusions might be growing behind those shrinking, retaliatory pupils. "Tommy says you been doin' real good."

Although Butler was convinced Wilson was more afraid of him than of any problem his crew might run into during the holdup, he continued to stare at him for another fifteen seconds. Wilson tried a number of different positions for his hands but could not find a comfortable place for them. Butler noticed that he could, by moving his head slightly, make Wilson nervously shift his hands and feet. It was as though he had him on strings. He really missed the intimidation of

prison life, the sweet smell of fear. On the outside, it was far less useful.

Butler let his knotted eyebrows relax, which was as close as his face ever came to a smile. "Yeah," he answered condescendingly, "because we're the best at what we do. Hitting the tellers and coming away with twenty or thirty grand is a punk's move. The vault is what pays the freight to Vegas."

Wilson said, "You guys like Vegas, huh? Afraid I'm not much of a gambler."

"What about all those *nasty hookers*? Or don't you have a dick, either?" The other two men laughed.

Wilson forced himself to laugh. "No, no, I like women fine. It's just—"

Not seeming to hear him, Butler went on. "Last time, I had one tell me what a *big dick* I had."

"What she said was"—Tommy Nolo smiled—"what a big dick you had—for a white boy."

Butler gave a short, joyless grunt that served as his laugh. When he had been released into the general population at the State Prison of Southern Michigan at the age of eighteen, he decided he needed to do two things to survive his fifteen-year armed robbery sentence: lift weights every day and constantly think violent thoughts. The results could not be argued with. Nolo had once likened Butler's unabated hatred to driving a car with the accelerator locked to the floor, using only the brake to control the speed. It was always at full throttle, and the least little nudge was all the gang leader needed to remove all restraint and become homicidal.

Nolo was the only person Butler would allow to kid him. They had been rap partners for eight years in Jackson. During their first year together, Nolo had demonstrated his loyalty to Butler by taking a Black Muslim shank meant for him. While Nolo was recovering in the prison hospital, Butler returned the courtesy by isolating the Muslim and then taking a full twenty minutes to methodically beat him to death with a mop handle.

Although Wilson feared Butler, he admired his reckless confidence. There was something appealing about an individual who took great chances to live the way he wanted to. Wilson knew he wasn't equally

courageous, but at this moment, that kind of life seemed within his grasp. With as much confidence as he could manufacture, he said, "Let's do it!"

But Butler could see the tiniest flickering of reluctance in his eyes. His words were now quiet, measured, dangerous. "You're only here because our driver had his parole violated, so understand something, and understand it good. This is our business. When we go in that bank, our lives are on the line. This *ain't* no fucking rodeo, so we don't need any cowboys, or clowns."

"You know I'm a good wheel, and that's what you need, isn't it?"

"What I *need* is a guy who'll stand up when everyone else's assholes are slamming shut. And I'm not sure that's you."

Prison had taught Wilson how to keep fear out of his voice, but now he intentionally let it creep into his words, because he knew Butler needed its reassurance. "Frankie, you know me; I'm stand-up."

"If you're not and we go back to the joint, guess what my first piece of business is going to be?"

"It's just that I never did a stickup before."

"And that's exactly what's starting to worry me."

Wilson's eyes darted around the range. His lungs were taking in more oxygen than he needed. For the first time, he noticed the smell of cordite from previous target shooters. It reminded him of the deadly reason they were there. He had made a mistake. He was only a car thief, one of those criminal occupations that were usually the end result, as was his case, of a drug habit. But these guys were hard-core, puberty-to-postmortem felons, who believed that bank robbers were the warrior class of society. Wilson looked down at the four weapons on the bench and realized he had no way out. He chanced a look at Butler, whose eyes bore into him. Defensively, he blurted out, "Since I don't go inside, do I have to wear a mask? I can't stand the itching."

In a blur, Butler stood up and knocked him over the back of a folding chair he was sitting on. "Goddamnit, you'd better start thinking. What do you think? There are no witnesses in the parking lot?"

Wilson was barely aware of what Butler was saying. As he struggled to his feet, a school of flashing white disks swam crookedly before him. His survival instincts took over. "Sorry, Frankie, I wasn't thinking."

Butler turned and stared hypnotically downrange at the four black silhouette targets that hung from metal clamps. After a few seconds, he



turned back to Wilson. He had made two decisions. The bank, because of the armored car delivery, had to be hit today, so he would use this driver. And because of Wilson's obvious weakness, if anything went wrong during the robbery, the first thing he would do was shoot him through the head. Calmly, he said, "Tell me again what you're doing while we're in the bank."

"Listening to the scanner."

"That's right. When we're inside, you're our lifeline. You stay in the car and listen. You hear anything that sounds like we have a problem, you call us on the walkie-talkies. If the cops pull in, you got to open fire on them until we can get to the car." Butler looked at him hard. "Think you can do that?"

"Hey, Frankie, I want to get out of that lot too."

"Just make sure we're in the car when you do." Butler picked up one of the weapons from the bench, a .45-caliber automatic, and threw it into Wilson's lap. "Convince me you know how to use that." The car thief knew the basic procedure for loading and firing an automatic handgun, but he was also aware that Butler would not allow any more mistakes. His fingers felt thick and confused as he pushed the fat bullets into the spring-loaded magazine. Finally the clip was full and Wilson anxiously slammed it into the weapon. With a mixture of bravado and relief, he pulled the slide to the rear and let it go home, chambering the first round. He held it out to Butler in an open palm as if offering an instructor a completed project. "That's fine," Butler said sarcastically, "but I meant actually shooting it at something." Wilson turned toward the target. He picked up a set of ear protectors and started putting them on. "Shoot without them," Butler ordered. "You'll need to get used to the noise." As Wilson lined up the .45's sights on the paper outline of a human being, Butler gave him one last instruction. "If the shooting starts, the first thing you do is shoot as many civilians as you can. That really keeps the cops busy." The other gang members laughed in agreement. Wilson held his breath, trying to get the gun's front sight to stop shaking.

A HALF HOUR later, Butler came out of the front door of the gun shop and scanned the street. He spotted Devlin's car a block away and studied it for a split second. Because of the distance, he couldn't see the driver, so he disregarded it as a threat.