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Confessions of a Bomb Tech

Harry Mayer

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Confessions of a Bomb Tech Harry Mayer

You are young and reckless, and every EOD mission is like a game of Russian Roulette. You put the pistol to your head, spin the cylinder and let adrenaline pulse through your veins. Then you wait for the world to shrink until nothing else matters. When you pull the trigger, you don't wait, you just do it, you don't hesitate, you do it. You're convinced the hammer will land on an empty chamber because it always has, and you know it always will. You do it because you have faith in your protocols, you know them like the back of your hand, and you believe they will protect you. You follow them with the blind devotion of an apostle, never deviating, never questioning, never doubting. Losing faith in your protocols would be blasphemy and you'd be dead. Adrenaline sustains you, you crave it, you're an addict but don't know it.

You've lost shipmates along the way; good friends and you miss them. But you know the reason they're gone and you're still here is because they were careless. That's on them. It's their fault. Bad things don't happen by chance. There's no such thing as bad luck. Bad things happen because you screw up. They were careless, they made mistakes. You don't. You can't feel sad about your departed comrades even though you miss them. You have convinced yourself that they lived more in their short lives than most do in a lifetime. You celebrate their memory and are mindful in knowing they died doing what they loved. The real victims are their wives who were foolish enough to love them. You pity them because they never realized techs love the job more than their families. My wife was smart, she left me long ago.

Every EOD mission is a war. It's not a crap game, you don't roll the dice and hope you win, because only physics wins in the end. You must outsmart an adversary who has designed a weapon that will kill you. If you believe in luck, you can't do the job.

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You stare at the bomb in front of you. The tail is sticking out of the ground, the nose buried in the sand like an olive drab ostrich. He taunts you, daring you to wake him from his nap. You inspect the ordnance, scan the area for secondary hazards, take measurements and conclude its an air dropped 1,000 lb. low drag general purpose bomb. You've seen this before. You know the procedures. Your safety observer watches you from behind a sandbag bunker with a mirror. He records every step you take in the render safe procedure. He's not there for your safety, he's there to document screw ups so procedures can be revised. It's best to remember that every EOD protocol has been written in blood.

It's raining, and you're cold. You take off your flak jacket and helmet so you can work. With surgical skill you dig, slowly, methodically. You must excavate dirt away from the nose. You must expose it. The cold makes you shiver. Your hands shake, but you continue to dig. The earth is wet and muddy. You dig until you reveal the nose fuze, then you cautiously brush away the wet dirt to try and make out the nomenclature. You can't read it, so you take out your canteen to gently pour water on the fuze to wash away the mud. You still can't read the numbers, but you recognize the fuze. It's aluminum, a three-piece construction. It's a mechanical time fuze which means there is a cocked striker inside. The slightest movement or jarring of the bomb could activate the timer. If you hear ticking, you only have 5 seconds before a high order detonation.

You climb out of the pit and set your toolbox next to the hole. You report to the command post that you have an armed 1,000 lb low drag general purpose bomb and recommend using an explosive tool to neutralize the fuze. The officer in charge approves the procedure, and you meticulously assemble your tools. You have done this so many times you could do the set up blindfolded. You feel the familiar sensation of adrenaline. You don't do this for God or country,

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you don't do it for money or a higher purpose. Your motives are entirely selfish. You do it for yourself. You do it for the euphoria that follows another successful render safe procedure. As the world around you shrinks you focus on what's in front of you. It's just you and the bomb. At this moment nothing else. You climb back into the pit, and with expert precision, you place the tool next to the fuze at just the right angle to ensure a proper attack. Satisfied with its placement, you climb out of the pit to retreat to a safe area. As you climb, you stumble and slip in the mud. You catch yourself before you fall on the bomb. That was close.

While retreating dark clouds start to gather. A cold December rain falls, it soaks you to your core, but you don't feel it. Your adrenaline rush fades, and it is replaced by the warm glow of satisfaction. You love this feeling. The contentment you get from another successful render safe procedure. It refreshes you. You feel alive. You beg God in his infinite grace to allow you to do this again. You don't want this feeling to end. You want to do it again, just one more time.