

## SM 03: Burn-Out

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G.I. JOE: Special Missions #3

Burn-Out

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Summary: "Somewhere in the strife-torn Middle East", an armored column of Royalists fighting Colonel Sharif winds through the city streets. At a sidewalk cafe nearby, Joes Stalker, Slip-Stream and Leatherneck are sitting at a table with Deke, a American fighter pilot who now works for Colonel Sharif. The Joes are there to receive maps that detail the defenses of Sharif's airbase. Deke is happy to oblige the Joes, but he speaks too loudly and makes it easy for anyone nearby to hear. As Deke leaves, Leatherneck reminds him to stay away from the airbase, fearing that he'd fly against the Joes. "Give me a break, Leatherneck," Deke says. "How low do you think I've sunk?" Inside the cafe, the Joes' waiter makes a phone call to the security police.

Later, one of Sharif's officer's, Captain Habib, reports to the Colonel that Deke has been passing information to American spies. Sharif tells Habib to question both Deke and the spies -- and kill them all.

In another part of the city, the three Joes make their way to the garage they've set up a makeshift base in. Discussing Deke, Leatherneck asks Stalker how they can trust any American who would work for Sharif. Stalker reminds him that Deke didn't hesitate to help them when they asked. He tells Leatherneck that Deke was a fighter pilot during the Vietnam War who was shot down and captured. He was a prisoner of war for three years before his release. When Deke returned home, no one wanted to let him fly again due to "psychological instability". Sharif had been hiring experienced pilots with no background checks and Deke signed on. The Joes reach the garage to find Crankcase inside, turning a van into an armored vehicle. He complains that they're "letting out the air-conditioning".

Hours later, at Security Police headquarters, Deke is tied to a chair, being "interrogated" by Captain Habib and his men. The interrogation consists of beating him and asking him where the Americans are hiding. Deke refuses to answer any questions and gets another beating. Deke holds out until Habib threatens to blind him with a screw-driver. Deke finally gives in and tells Habib where the Joes' garage is.

At the garage, Stalker radios Ace, who is flying his Sky Striker somewhere above them. He transmits the coordinates of the SAM (Surface-to-Air Missile) launching sites that defend Sharif's airfield. The Joes are now helping Crankcase armor the van and line the interior with Kevlar, as well as add a new engine. Leatherneck comments on the mission being thrown together very quickly.

Back at Police headquarters, Habib has typed up Deke's "confession". All that he needs is for Deke to sign it. He unties the pilot's arms to do just that. As Deke begins to sign it, Habib tells him that there was one more SAM site at the airfield that no one knew about, disguised as a tool shed. He continues to mock Deke: "It's too bad for your friends that you're such a weak-willed coward. You didn't even have the guts to keep your mouth shut to save your fellow American pilots." It's the last straw for Deke. "Nuts to you!" he shouts, jamming his pen into the desk and right through Habib's hand. He kicks Habib in the face from his seat, and quickly smashes the guard over the head with his chair. He takes the guard's rifle and runs for the door.

Back at the Joes' garage, a group of Sharif's soldiers in armored vehicles have arrived. Their sergeant shouts through a bull-horn, demanding that the "running-dog agents of the imperialist war-mongers" surrender immediately. The Joes' van (now sporting a door-mounted machine gun) smashes through the door, right past the soldiers. From the van's opened sunroof, Leatherneck fires his grenade launcher into one of the armored personal carriers, destroying it and letting the Joes escape. The remaining vehicles chase the Joes through the streets. Overlooking the streets from a nearby building, Royalist troops fire rockets and destroy the Joes' pursuers, believing the Joes are actually Royalist troops. Stalker had sent them a radio message in advance, telling them just that. "It always pays to call ahead..."

Back at Security Police headquarters, Deke steals a motorcycle and a rifle, shooting his way through the guards and smashing through the front gate. Inside, Captain Habib comes to and shouts for the guards.

The Joes in the van are telling Crankcase to hurry. They're nearly late for their "heavy date" at the airbase. Suddenly, sirens blare. The city is on a full-scale air raid alert. As they approach the airbase, Leatherneck wonders if the alert blows

their chances of sneaking through the main gate. "We never planned on sneaking through," Stalker responds. "We were counting on speed, firepower and guts!"

High above, a squadron of fighters and bombers led by Ace is on approach. He reminds the pilots that they are to hit only assigned targets and nothing else, and that the Joe team provided them with the location of all the SAM sites.

On the ground, the Joes' van nears the main gate just as the planes arrive overhead. They fight their way through the guards at the gate, then smash through it. As they drive on, the bombers begin to hit their targets, destroying several buildings. A soldier with a rocket launcher hits the Joes' van. They bail out and use what's left of the van as cover while they fight the remaining soldiers.

Outside the nearby fighter pilots' barracks, a jeep carrying Captain Habib pulls up. Habib rushes inside, screaming at the American pilots -- mercenaries like Deke -- and asking why they aren't in the air shooting down the Americans raiding the base. Despite Habib's orders, they all refuse to fly against other Americans and one pilot resigns. Habib promptly pulls out his pistol and shoots them all. He jumps back in the jeep and shouts to the driver: "To the SAM site at the end of the main runway! Hurry!"

Meanwhile, the Joes reach the real objective of their mission: a YAK-36 fighter parked on the runway. It's a Russian VTOL aircraft, and the Joes mean to steal it. Slip-Stream is ready to fly it out, but there's one problem: the hydraulics have been pulled out for repairs. There's no way it can fly, and with the airstrike almost over, Sharif's troops will arrive soon. "Well," Leatherneck says, "We'll have to shoot are way out of this mess!"

Ace leads the fighters in to destroy the SAM missile sites. As the bombs fall, Slip-Stream spots a Russian transport plane with a cargo bay big enough to hold the YAK-36. They head for it. The fighter pilots have finished destroying the SAM sites and move on to their primary targets -- a row of transport planes, including the one the Joes are after.

Back on the ground, Deke arrives via motorcycle, realizing that the fighter pilots don't know about the final hidden SAM site and could get shot down any minute. He climbs aboard one of the MIG fighters on the runway and puts on his helmet. At the transport plane, the Joes are towing the YAK-36 onboard, while Slip-Stream starts up the engine and tries to figure out the flight manual reading the pictures only -- it's written in Russian and Farsi. The American fighter is bearing down on them as the Joes secure the fighter and Slip-Stream readies the transport for take off. With only seconds to spare, they finally take off, barely escaping the fighter's bombs.

Further down the runway, Habib and his men uncover the hidden SAM launcher. He spots the transport plane and orders them to fire on it. In the cockpit of the transport plane, a warning light flashes. Even in a Russian plane, Slip-Stream knows what it means. "Somebody's got a weapons system lock-on on us!" Suddenly, a MIG fighter comes up alongside the transport plane. Slip-Stream spots Deke in the cockpit. One of the missiles fires from the ground. Slip-Stream releases the chaff counter-measures to confuse the missile. The missile explodes, just barely missing both Deke and the Joes. Turning his plane back towards the airfield, Deke radios the Joes: "I am circling back to deal with missile threat. Keep going and don't look back..." On the ground by the SAM launchers, Habib sees Deke's fighter coming right towards him. He tells to soldiers manning the launchers to traverse the launchers. "That MIG isn't even armed," he shouts. "It can't harm us... unless... unless..." At the last minute, Habib realizes his wrong. Deke is diving straight at the launchers, and he isn't pulling up. Habib runs for it, but it's too late. Deke's fighter crashes into the missiles, destroying them, Habib and himself in a huge explosion. Back on the transport, Slip-Stream salutes Deke's sacrifice as the others watch the explosion from the cockpit. "Poor Deke. He never even knew what this was all about... Ain't that the way it always is?"

Review: A fast-paced story and a little more depth than many Joe stories make "Burn-Out" memorable. We return to the land of Colonel Sharif, which was also visited in G.I. JOE #1 and #58. The story spends a considerable amount of time on Deke, a down-on-his-luck American fighter pilot who was forced out of the cockpit after returning home from Vietnam. Deke (and apparently other American pilots) took the only job that would let him fly a fighter -- as a pilot serving Colonel Sharif. Deke is still a good guy deep down, and when the Joes come asking for help, he's happy to oblige his fellow Americans. When he's captured and beaten within an inch of his life, he turns the Joes in. But he eventually has a change of heart, and becomes a last minute hero. Deke is an interesting character, making it all the more tragic when he dies.

The issue has a lot of violence in it for a G.I. Joe comic. Special Missions tends to be a more brutal book, and often ends in a happy but not-so-happy ending. The series' darker tone is seen here, with Deke's beating (though actually off-panel) and his stabbing of Habib, which is again barely seen. Also off-panel, Habib apparently shoots all the American pilots. Habib is a fairly text book villain. He's arrogant, overconfident and feels the need to taunt Deke until he finds a way to escape. Sharif is seen even less here, but it's made obvious that he's assisting terrorists, and implied that Cobra is involved, since this is G.I. Joe. The last scenes of the book move very quickly and lots of things happen, building some suspenseful scenes. The Joes break into the airfield, while the pilots bomb the airfield, while Habib tries to stop the planes, while Deke desperately tries to make up for what he's done. That's a run-on sentence, but all the scenes fit together well, and Larry Hama manages to make it all easy to follow. "Burn-Out" is one of Special Missions' best issues.

Reprinted in:

- G.I. JOE: Special Missions (1988). A trade paperback from Marvel Comics collecting issues #1-4, along with the back-up story from G.I. JOE #50.
- G.I. JOE: Special Missions, Volume 1 (July 2010). A trade paperback from IDW Publishing collecting issues #1-7.