

SM 08: Ambush

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G.I. JOE: Special Missions #8

Ambush

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Writer: Larry Hama

Artist: Herb Trimpe

Colorist: Bob Sharen

Letterer: Phil Felix

Editor: Bob Harras

Editor-in-chief: Tom DeFalco

Summary (by Russ Humphress): Somewhere in Southeast Asia... A black C-47 transport plane flies low over a strip of water filled with sailing vessels, on an almost moonless night. We are told it is covered with radar-resistant paint, electronic counter-measures, and that it is heading into "unfriendly territory." The plane has been fitted with several other gadgets to reduce the engine and propeller noise, as well as the heat signature, to almost nothing. As the plane passes over the heads of the last of the river traffic below, we learn that they are no longer over Thailand. Wild Bill and Lift-Ticket discuss the flight altitude, saying it's good they weren't spotted, as they could be easily shot down with small arms fire. Agent Anderson with the CIA interrupts the conversation to ask how far to the drop-zone, then returns to the rear of the plane to advise the assembled jump team: five minutes. Leatherneck, Tunnel Rat, Flint, Wet-Suit, Low-Light, Beachhead, and Footloose comprise the op team, with Duke acting as jump master. Anderson reviews the mission one final time. The team is to find a traitor and spy named Theron Portland, who was working on a top secret electronic surveillance site in Thailand, but skipped over the border with a very important computer chip. The team is to bring him back alive if possible, or, if Low-Light deems the target to be un-extractable, he is to render him "un-operational."

After equipment checks, the C-47 gains some airspeed, and the team executes a low altitude jump. They are to send a squelch signal once they make contact with the target. On the ground, the team buries their chutes and moves out toward the ambush site. On the way they encounter an empty village which isn't on their map of the area. They soon discover a pile of skulls, explaining that the village was "re-educated." Camping for the night, Flint has Wet-suit and Footloose check out the radios. They find a component in both which they can't identify, and Flint comments that the radios were given to them by Anderson, and Low-Light says it's almost certainly a setup. Unfortunately, there's not much they can do but carry through with the plan. Leatherneck tries to convince himself the freeze-dried rations are delicious...moderately good...not too nauseating...but has no such luck.

In the morning, the team moves out for the ambush site, and arrives, getting into position. Once setup, they have nothing to do but wait. Hours later, all the Joes are still waiting. Eventually Footloose thinks he's beginning to crack up, as he hears bells, but Flint quickly tells him the bells are real. A young native boy comes up the road, riding a water buffalo, and singing a song, pretending to be a prince riding a golden chariot. Flint begins to muse that kids keep dreaming even as the world goes crazy, but is interrupted by the sound of the convoy. The Convoy stops because they can't pass the water buffalo on the narrow trail, and the troops begin to spread out to look for a trap. The Joes realize that the "small convoy" is a heavy armor column, and much bigger than they can reasonably handle. Flint gives the sign to signal that they have made contact.

Meanwhile, the Colonel in charge of the column tires of arguing with the boy, and shoots the Water buffalo, as a loud noise fills the air. The Joes CIA supplied radio has started screeching as soon as they gave the contact signal. Flint takes out one radio with his machine gun, and then orders the other to open fire on the column. Low-Light sees that the target is un-extractable, and is about to take him out, but Portland runs off into the jungle. Low-Light chases after the target. Leatherneck pulls the extra component from the remaining radio, and the team heads for the extraction site. The Colonel from the convoy is about to execute the young boy, but Low-Light terminates the Colonel first, telling the boy to get out of there and have another adventure. The boy runs off into the jungle.

The rest of the team makes it to the extraction site, and calls in the Tomahawk for pickup. With everyone aboard, they are about to take off, when Low-Light appears out to the tree line, with unfriendlies in pursuit. He makes it aboard as the others lay down covering fire, and the helicopter lifts away back toward Thailand. The Joes turn immediately to the problem of Agent Anderson, only to find that Wild Bill and the others have already worked him over. Wild Bill tells them that Portland was setup by the CIA. He was meant to defect, and to take the computer chip with him, as the chip contains a virus that will disable every computer it is installed in. The ambush was to give him credibility in the eyes of the KGB, and the Joes were supposed to fail. Footloose asks Low-Light if he completed the mission and Low-Light responds that he caught up with Portland, but just couldn't kill a man who was begging for his life. Portland begins laughing sarcastically, and says they were counting on Low-Light to freeze on the trigger. Low-Light pulls something from his jacket, explaining that he couldn't kill Portland, but he did knock him out and take...the chips, which he dumps to the floor of the helicopter as they fly back toward Thailand.

Review: "Ambush" is a good Special Missions story. The entire series was predominately about what the Joes do other than fight Cobra, and this is a good example. The thing the CIA planners didn't count on was that the Joes are used to thinking about ways to solve the problem at hand that don't rely on blind obedience to orders. The setup made the chips seem more important than the actual spy, so Low-Light recovered the chips, and let Portland go. There are a couple of other instance over the course of the marvel comics where someone underestimates the Joes in exactly the same way. Contrasting this with the previous issue, it seems that unlike Psyche-Out, the CIA's psychological profilers might want to do a little more analyzing when they try to use the Joe team as a diversion.

All in all a good issue, although it exhibits a problem which plagued Special Missions from the start. These were supposed to be "the missions we couldn't reveal until now," only they almost always involved new characters. This was unfortunately a necessity from a marketing standpoint, but it strained the premise past the breaking point at times. [Editor's note: CIA agent Anderson later appears in issues #14 and 15 of Special Missions.]

Reprinted in:

- Action Force #36 - #40 (Nov 7th - Dec 5th, 1987). A Marvel UK series featuring the UK's version of G.I. Joe reprints this story in five parts, alongside an original story. All references to "G.I. Joe" were changed to "Action Force".
- G.I. JOE: Special Missions, Volume 2 (November 2010). A trade paperback from IDW Publishing collecting issues #8-14.