

SM 14: In from the Cold

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In From the Cold

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Writer: Larry Hama
Pencils: Herb Trimpe
Inks: Andy Mushynsky
Colorist: Nel Yomtov
Letterer: Phil Felix

Editor: Bobbie Chase
Editor-in-chief: Tom DeFalco

Summary (by Russ Humphress): In a rugged pass in the Himalayas, formerly part of the tiny Kingdom of Chomo Lungma, a Chinese Artillery Crew fires ineffectively at a passing cargo plane. One of the enlisted members of the gun crew complains about the Sergeant's elitist attitude, to which the Sergeant responds he will criticize his un-socialist behavior later, and renews the order to shoot down the "imperialist, interventionist spy plane." Inside the spy plane, we find Iceberg at the controls, with Chuckles as co-pilot. Also along are Snake-Eyes, Scarlett, and CIA Case Officer Anderson (Last seen in Special Missions 8). Iceberg comments on the correctness of Anderson's information, pointing out that according to Anderson, there weren't supposed to be any anti-aircraft units this high in the mountains. We find that they are looking for a Rift that leads into a hidden valley, just as the Chinese Artillery finally gets the range, and riddles the plane with anti-aircraft fire. No one is hit, but the port engine is severely damaged, and the plane turns into a rift trailing smoke as Comrade Sergeant Wu makes an urgent radio call to Comrade Colonel Peng, of the Intelligence Directorate.

In Daufugai, former capital of Chomo Lungma, we find the Comrade Colonel overseeing the forced relocation of Chomo Lungman children to the inner provinces of the PRC. A subordinate asks him what good can come from rending families apart, and he replies it is part of a greater plan to integrate Chomo Lungma into the People's Republic. He also says he does not understand it, or like it, but as a soldier, he must carry out his orders. The message from the gun crew reaches him, and he comments that the CIA have broken a promise made years ago, by sending a plane into the forbidden mountains. He orders a company of mountain troops to be ready within the hour.

Back in the mountains, Scarlett is extinguishing a burning Anderson, and his map. Anderson comments that they need to turn into the next rift, and grabs the controls, being smacked away by Chuckles only after turning the plane into: The Valley of Eternal Mist. The plane passes a Monk, who waves just before he disappears, prompting the Joes to wonder if he was a mirage. Iceberg crash lands the badly damaged cargo plane on a snow covered plateau, and immediately there is a Monk beside the plane, who sends a Yak herder to the Monastery to bring help, in case anyone is injured.

Outside the Valley, Comrade Colonel Peng arrives by helicopter and speaks with Sergeant Wu, whom we are informed is an army intelligence analyst. He tells the Colonel he is currently on special assignment, chasing devils. The Colonel responds he is more likely hunting a specific devil, the "White Devil from Virginia," Cullen Esterhazy of the CIA. The Colonel joins the hunt, and vows to bring down Cullen Esterhazy.

Meanwhile, the monk introduces himself as the Abbot of the Hidden Monastery. After Anderson commits a typical breach of mission security, the Abbot informs the Joes that he knows they are looking for Esterhazy, but that Esterhazy no longer exists. The abbot continues that Esterhazy is not dead, but rather a man possessed by his own legend, that of the "White Devil from Virginia," as armed bandits on horseback surround the Joes. The leader of the bandits is, of course, Cullen Esterhazy, who advises they prefer to be called "Freedom Fighters." Chuckles tells Anderson they've done their job getting him here, now he should do his job so they can all leave.

At the other end of the defile, Colonel Peng is beginning to wonder if he is chasing a phantom, when two soldiers reports finding pieces of the plane deep within a side rift. As the Colonel orders the column into the rift, he comments that it is the perfect spot for an ambush, and we see that he is being observed from above by one of the Chomo Lungman freedom fighters.

In the Valley, Anderson informs Esterhazy that his mission was terminated twenty years earlier, and that he is to report to the Director of Central Intelligence at CIA headquarters to answer charges for his activities. Esterhazy's reply is to laugh, and once finished laughing, he informs Anderson that he resigned twenty years ago. Before anything more can happen, the lookout in the pass flashes a message to warn Esterhazy that the Chinese are entering the rift, and Esterhazy rallies his men to the attack. The Joes mount horses and ride with him, over Anderson's protests. Chuckles explains they have to stick with Esterhazy, or they may not find him again.

In the rift, the Colonel redeploys his troops, in expectation of an attack, which comes shortly thereafter. The freedom

fighters attack the Chinese column from the high ground, pinning the Chinese with no cover aside from their vehicles. However the Colonel gives the prearranged signal of a red smoke grenade, and the mortar platoon which he ordered back toward the entrance of the rift begins firing, setting up a smoke screen over the Chinese column, which allows the Chinese RPG gunners to fire into the walls above the freedom fighters, triggering rock slides. The freedom fighters begin throwing grenades, not able to pick out distinct targets through the smoke. The Colonel orders his men to attack, saying that retreat would expose them to fire, out from under the cover of smoke, and to stay to accept inexorable attrition.

Above, Esterhazy is informed his men are almost out of ammunition, and he comments that he underestimated the enemy leadership, thinking they would break and run at the first volley. Esterhazy orders bayonets fixed, and then he also orders a charge. In face of the Chomo Lungman counterattack, the Chinese column falters, despite Colonel Peng's orders to stand and fight. The Colonel is forced to fall back, and Esterhazy does not pursue, having his men gather up remaining weapons and ammunition, and return to their hiding places within the valley. Minutes later, the Joes are to ride with Esterhazy and his guards, while the rest disperse within the valley. Chuckles tries to convince Esterhazy to return home to Virginia, but Esterhazy tells him that this is now his home, and he has a cause worth fighting, and maybe worth dying for...

Much later, the Chinese column rolls into the Valley of Eternal Mist. The Colonel tells his subordinate that they will interrogate the monks to find Esterhazy, and if they are not cooperative, burn down the monastery. That night, Esterhazy explains that twenty years earlier, he airlifted 2000 Chomo Lungmans to Colorado for training, then brought them back to fight the invading Chinese. The ones with him that day were all that are left. The Chomo Lungman culture is being systematically eradicated by the Chinese, and he felt he had to stay and help them. Then he says that the Joes are a "Hit Squad" sent to get rid of him. Scarlett explains that their orders are to bring him back alive, but he insists that Anderson is the designated shooter, and that his orders are almost certainly not as nice as those the Joes were given. Each side locks and loads weapons around the camp fire, as the issue comes to an end.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Review: Although several of the references in this issue are somewhat dated, namely the always unnamed former president, who is described enough for the reader to be certain it is Richard Nixon, the key points of this issue and the next are the battle sequences. Anyone familiar with Sun Tzu's "The Art of War" will see from the actions of Esterhazy and Comrade Colonel Peng that both parts are written with Sun Tzu's principles in mind.

This issue marks the return of CIA agent Anderson, who underestimated Low Light in Special Missions 8, and while the Joes completed their mission, the CIA mission was a failure due to that mistake. It seems fairly clear by the end of this issue that Anderson hasn't gotten any smarter, but appearances could be deceiving. We're left with a tense cliffhanger, which while not unknown in GI Joe comics, wasn't precisely the norm either. All in all a good issue, but it definitely needs to be read along with the next issue to get the full effect.

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