

Dogs of War – Korean Recon

“Cry havoc, and let fly the ‘Dogs of War’!...” – *Henry V, William Shakespeare.*



"<Alpha-Lead, this is Charlie Team. Snipers are in position at 'Echo-one', and have eyes on target buildings>".

"<Rodger Charlie. Maintain 'Eyes' until both Alpha and Bravo Teams are in position>".

"<Acknowledged>".

"<Alpha-Lead, to Bravo. You are 'Go' for advance to location 'Echo-two'>".

"<Acknowledged Alpha. Moving to location>".

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"Okay Alpha, let's move to our objective. Johnston, take point".

"Sir!"

As his own team set off, Captain John Mitchell quickly reviewed the mission objectives in his head. Their primary objective was a narcotics factory in a disused industrial complex that CIA Intel had identified as one of the main opium producing factories in South Korea. It was his squad's job to go in and Recon the facilities, identify critical target locations, and cleanse the site with explosive charges.

Charlie team were the squads advance party and had already moved into position on the hillside over looking the facility. They'd dig in and act as the eyes and ears while the others got to their designated ready-points prior to advancing on the complex. The Mitchell-led Alpha, and Bravo fire-teams would move into the outer buildings and identify the factory and packing areas respectfully by observing the traffic between them. Once they'd confirmed the kill-zones, they'd pull back until nightfall when they'd return and set the charges. These would be remotely detonated when all teams had reached a safe distance, and they could be extracted by Helo.

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After carefully trekking through the undergrowth and avoiding the main dirt road, the two teams found themselves at the rear of the complex by some out-buildings. Mitchell's silent hand-signals to Bravo told them to stay where they were and not to advance. He keyed his radio twice, then quietly, but firmly spoke to the sniper team.

"<Charlie, this is Alpha-Lead. We are holding position until you clear us to move in. Advise on traffic>".

"<Roger. Your access towards the centre appears to be clear. One or two bodies using small huts to the West, probably dwellings. Two larger buildings to the South show the most activity. One has trucks, I'm guessing either for the workforce or for moving the product. Could be Target2#. The other building has what looks like 'cooking' facilities>".

"<Hmmm. Confirm again on the cooking-facilities, Charlie>".

"<Wait one... Yeah, your right. It's the pharmacy, not a cook-house. Target1# identified>".

"<Acknowledged Charlie. Keep us covered while we move in to survey>".

"<Roger Alpha. Your clear for about 100 meters. Charlie out>".

Mitchell signalled over to Bravo, who confirmed they'd heard and understood the radio con. The three men were the support team with enough heavy firepower to stop a runaway train. Brown and Sandoval moved cautiously from the bushes, aiming their M16/203 rifles as their eyes scoured the surrounding buildings. Hudson would be 2 seconds behind them with his light machine gun, the MK48. Mitchell watched Bravo team disappear up the side of some huts and out of view; turning, he signalled to his own team to advance.

The heat in this part of the jungle was very uncomfortable and sweat was trickling from Hudson's brow down into his eyes, blurring his vision. Blinking hard to clear it, he cursed the flies that buzzed around them. He stopped momentarily to lean on a hut wall, and wiped his face with his sleeve. The wood creaked slightly under his weight, as he composed himself and took up his weapon again. Brown pointed in the direction they were moving and he began to follow again. A few meters on, and there was an unexpected noise behind them. Hudson turned to see the door open on the privy he'd just been leaning against, and a bleary-eyed militia-man stepping out, holding a long-barrelled automatic rifle by the shoulder strap. Panic kicked in as the two men locked eyes and realised each others presence. The mission could end here before it'd even begun! Hudson raised a hand, almost wishing the man to stay silent, but instead the man fought with the strap to bring his weapon up. If he called out, they would be detected and out-numbered in minutes. The militia-man had his rifle up quickly, but realising he now had three heavily armed targets to contend with, danced his weapon back and forth between them. He obviously didn't want a show down, and neither did they as they'd lose the element of surprise, but he needed help and began to call out. Without warning, his head snapped sideways and his body dropped awkwardly to the ground.

"<Eyes on the hill have your back Bravo. You are now twenty meters from Target2#>".

"<Aaaah, roger-that Charlie. Good shooting...>".

Mitchell let Johnston take point with a ten foot spacing between them, and Levine covered the rear. Their M4 rifles poised and ready to split the air. They'd had a near contact too early into the mission, and it unsettled Mitchell. Unless they tightened things up, someone would get hurt, and that could mean them all being compromised.

Johnston moved like a stalking predator; careful, methodical, deadly. They'd known each other for years and he'd bring his family over to the Mitchell's for barbeques every other weekend. Johnston

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knew his place, and he knew his job well. He was good at it and a valuable asset to Mitchell's squad. Levine was a large Israeli man who was newer to the team, but every bit as committed as the others, and a formidable hand-to-hand fighter. He was their Demolitions expert, and had prepared all the C4 devices prior to the advance on the complex.

Having passed the smaller huts and shacks, they were among the larger concrete buildings now, and within a few minutes they'd be able to see Target1#. The main complex had once been a processing area for a nearby mine, with a small rail track and loading facilities, making it an ideal site for a narcotics factory. Local labour from villagers and militia was plentiful and it would be easy to transport supplies back and forth undetected. By now, more people were visible going back and forth, carrying boxes, sacks, and crates. It was a real hive of activity, with Militia-men not only acting as security, but also obviously in charge as far as the drugs were concerned. The teams had to be especially careful here as they were running out of ways to stay hidden, and Alpha team were about to pass a long bamboo and thatch shelter that was probably a sleeping area. Although the walls were thin, simple sheets of woven matting, an open door let them see down the length of the room which was scattered with empty bed-rolls and blankets. They could use this room to quickly observe Target1#. Mitchell signalled to the others and they ducked into the doorway, scanning the room in a sweeping motion with the barrel of their rifles, then moving quickly inside. They were now deep in the heart of the factory area, and the noise of engines and vehicles going by was very close. They could be discovered at any time.

"Johnston. Levine. Check our location from the front of the building. Keep your heads down".

"<Alpha-Lead to all teams. I need your 'SitRep'>".

"<This is Bravo. We're behind a fuel storage area but can't get any closer cos' of the locals. Too much activity, although we've confirmed Target2#>".

"<Roger that. Charlie, report.>".

"<Alpha-Lead, this is Charlie. We've monitored your progress and you're safe to pull out. So far all activity is focused toward to the target buildings, except for a few strays. You should be able to avoid them. We are ready to return to the LUP but will cover your retreat to... ..>"

"<Sorry Charlie, say again. I lost you there>".

... ..

"<Charlie? Charlie come-in>"

"<Stand-by Alpha. We have company... ..>"

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"<Bravo, head back to the jungle and get ready to cover our approach!>".

"<Roger, Alpha. Moving now!>".

Bravo quickly chambered fresh rounds and began the race back to the cover of the undergrowth, darting between buildings, pausing at corners and doorways. Checking, listening, moving again. Going from cover to cover. Stopping, checking, listening, moving. Pulses raced, but they were focused. If the other teams were coming out 'hot', then they could lay down heavy covering fire to suppress any one chasing them.

'Crack! Puh-puh-puh-puh-puh!'. Mitchell's mind raced as his team grabbed their gear to leave, knowing only too well what that sound meant.

"<Alpha! We're compromised! Rahnes is hit and we're taking fire!>".

"<Acknowledged Charlie! We're coming to you! Try to get down the hill toward the huts!>".

"<Roger!>".

As Mitchell and his team burst out the door and into the electric air, they could hear raised voices shouting. 'They must have heard the shooting!', he thought; 'No way you could miss that!'. Levine was out first, and turning left down a narrow gap, he ran straight into a man firing random shots up at the tree-line with an automatic rifle. Both of them were surprised and their weapons went clattering across the dirt as they landed heavily on top of one another. The two men

scrambled to get up and wrestled with each other, exchanging punches and strikes to the head. Levine's pack was cumbersome and made it difficult for him to roll properly, and before he knew it, he was on his back with the man bearing down on him. He'd grabbed his jacket and crossed hands to apply a choke, and was pressing down with his full weight. Levine reached up and clapped his hands on the man's ears, pressing his thumbs deep into the eye sockets. The man reared back screaming and holding his eyes with one hand, whilst swinging blindly with the other. Catching his breath, Levine reached up, pulling the man back down again, and shot an elbow into the man's throat. The fight left the man as he dropped to the side, and Levine turned and caught him under the chin, pulling his head back hard until the 'crack' came. Johnston grabbed Levine's weapon and hauled him to his feet, dragging him along as they ran after Mitchell into the trees.

'Boooomph!' – a grenade burst, flashing a cloud of sparkling smoke to their front-and-left. McDowell had managed to throw a few to deter their pursuers, buying them valuable time. They were visible now, staggering down the slope, Rahnes losing his footing and hanging off his friends neck for support. Mitchell dropped to one knee and fired twice into the trees above them, then ran forward to take Rahnes weight while McDowell slung his rifle and readied his own. Johnston arrived and hoisted Rahnes up over his shoulder, while Levine put down a volley of rounds uphill, and turned again to put more rounds into the nearest hut.

"<Bravo! We've got them! Meet us at the road-side! It's our only exit!>". Mitchell could see the armed militia swarming from the larger buildings now, and they were starting to lose daylight. They weren't supposed to be extracting until later in the night, but he thumbed his radio and gave his call-sign.

"<Oscar-Zulu-Niner! This is Sierra-Two-Zero! We require urgent extraction and Medivac from hot-spot! Do you copy?!>".

... ..

"<Affirmative, Sierra-Two-Zero. Be advised, we are 30 minutes from extraction zone. Hang in there, we're on our way!>".

Mitchell hoped they would all be alive to see the Helo when it got here, but they had a long way to go to get out of their predicament. As they hurried back to meet Bravo, Mitchell, Levine, and McDowell took it in turns to turn and fire, so Johnston could concentrate on carrying the wounded Rahnes. By this time the facility was alive with people screaming and shouting, with sporadic gunfire going in all directions. It seemed that they only knew the general direction in which the soldiers were going, not actually where they were. It wouldn't be long before the militia worked it out though, and they could hear trucks starting up and gunfire getting closer. They pushed on and could just see Bravo near the edge of the trees now.

Suddenly, Sandoval pointed out of view, and he Hudson opened up with their weapons. Brown saw the group approaching and ran forward to urge them on, waving frantically. Pretty soon, Mitchell could see Brown's haste, as rounding the next set of huts he saw more militia with AK-47 rifles massing; many of them taking up strategic positions and working as a collective unit. It was becoming apparent that these guys weren't your average drug manufacturers with guns. They'd had military training as well...

Hudson continued to fire round after round into the huts, and Sandoval was pounding them with launched grenades, but it was time to leave – and quickly. Levine took over carrying the injured man, and Mitchell and Johnston lead the group into the thick forest. McDowell was carrying the spare kit, and Bravo team brought up the rear with the turn-fire-run-repeat cover. The air was humid and the ground muddy here, so making fast progress wasn't going to be easy, especially with wounded. Adrenaline had kicked-in, and all the men were running for their lives. By now, a truck had taken to the road and shots from a rear-mounted heavy machine-gun whistled over head. Tree branches disintegrated in showers of wooden sparks and the undergrowth leapt up at them in ragged clumps.

Up ahead, Johnston had spotted a river and rope bridge leading to the South that should buy them some time and distance from the militia's serious weapons. Taking the lead, he slid down the small hill to secure the approach. So far it was clear, and he paused to both take in some deep breaths and let McDowell catch up to him. They were off the familiar track they'd come in on, but it looked like if they could get across the water here, it would let them cover better ground. The others could be heard thrashing around in the trees just above, so Johnston started onto the bridge with McDowell a few meters behind. The water was reasonably fast-flowing, so it must be fresh, but they didn't want to rule out any possibility of crocodiles. Cautiously they advanced, quickly prodding at planks and checking the bridges sturdiness as they went along.

Mitchell and Levine with Rahnes, began scrambling down the small hill now, closely followed by Brown, then Hudson and Sandoval. They were lucky that they'd made it out with only one wounded, but they weren't out of the woods yet, so to speak. Pausing to allow spacing, Levine followed the first two onto the bridge. He hadn't heard much sound from Rahnes and he feared he'd either slipped unconscious, or had died in the last contact. He was certainly hanging limp now, but he could hardly stop here to check him. "You'll be okay buddy, just hang in there, okay?" he'd say occasionally. Mitchell and Brown paused at the bridge, and then started out together onto the planks. Looking up, Mitchell could see the first two nearing the other side. They were almost across now, and the last two would be starting out any second. The only trouble with the bridge was that they'd be sitting ducks in the open if someone began firing at them. Occasionally Hudson would turn and look back to check their rear.

Johnston and McDowell slowed their pace on reaching the other side, and began observing the foliage for the hint of enemy soldiers. It looked like there'd been activity here recently but it seemed clear. Johnston turned and signalled the all-clear, then stepped forward to adopt a forward observing position. He couldn't believe they'd made it this far and not come across anyone. This area didn't appear to be travelled much, and he could see a path through the trees running for about fifty yards ahead. But it wasn't until he felt the tug at his leg that he realised exactly 'why' people didn't come this way... "Mine!! Get back, get back!!".

'Thooooom!!'

Levine's gaze snapped up to see Johnston disappear in a cloud of dirt, and McDowell being flung to the side like a rag doll. He was being peppered by ball-bearings himself and he collapsed to the floor to shield his head, dropping Rahnes' lifeless body. Mitchell was screaming in the background but all he could hear was the ringing in his ears. Brown and Sandoval stood over him in an instant, checking him over and applying patches. Was he bleeding? Everything was in slow motion. Voices were slurred. Where was he? There was Hudson, flashes jumping from the muzzle of his LMG. Suddenly, everything met him in one almighty rushing sound. Gunfire, shouting, voices. He was being dragged hurriedly into the bushes and was disorientated by the spinning sky above them.

Mitchell had been screaming into the radio for 'Oscar-Zulu-Niner', who were now about five minutes away. Brown and Sandoval each hoisted Levine over a shoulder and hurriedly steamed down the path. They weren't far from the Extraction Zone now and Mitchell bit back the tears at losing his friends so close to it. A supportive slap on the back brought him back to his senses, and he joined Hudson in alternately laying down cover-fire. Another two hundred yards or so, and they should see the clearing for the helo. They were heading down a path with the river now on their left, with dense foliage and bushes. The frequent, low branches and small streams meant they had to slow their pace; it was especially hard on the guys carrying Levine with the ground constantly changing. They'd slip and stumble, but kept going, dragging their colleague with them. Without warning, bullets whipped over-head, and tree bark shattered above them. Shots came unexpectedly from somewhere in front, and they could hear voices ahead. They dropped to the ground in the sullen hole of an up-rooted tree. The hole was big enough to give them some

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protection until they could see where the enemy was. The black water that had collected there soaked their legs and stomachs, and the smell of rotting vegetation was repugnant.

“I’m out!” said Brown, which prompted them all to check their weapons. Mitchell tossed him a spare clip, which he slapped into his rifle, but he was now painfully low on ammunition himself. Sandoval had dropped his M16 picking up Levine, and they were out of grenades. Hudson unslung his LMG and tore back Levine’s shirt to check the wounds. He was conscious and coherent, but the rush through the jungle had exhausted him, and made the bleeding heavier. Most of the damage was to one arm and part of his chest, but leeches and dirt made it difficult to inspect it further. Brown and Mitchell peered round the edge of the roots, only to be met by a volley of fire. This time they’d seen men moving in the trees and returned a barrage of their own. A man screamed and fell, but they’d soon be outflanked. Sandoval loaded his pistol and chambered a round. The odds for a last stand didn’t look good. A familiar noise caught their attention and the remnant looked up, searching for the helo, as it circled above them in a wide arc.

“<This is ‘Oscar-Zulu-Niner’, we are approaching the ‘EZ’ and are ready for extraction>”.

The trees here were sparser, and the team could see the helo drop out of the sky in a low curve to survey the area, then climb quickly again to protect itself.

“<Acknowledged-Niner! We are coming in with wounded, and need supporting fire!>”, Mitchell called back.

“We’re moving!”, and with that they took up their weapons again and scrambled out of the watery hole. A few militia were almost on top of them now, and the front-runners opened up with their rifles, dropping two to the left, and one in the ditch to the right. It was a race against time, with possibly more enemies between them and where they’d get the helo. Sandoval and Levine staggered after Mitchell, Brown, and Hudson, who were protecting their front advance, pausing only when cautioned, then rushing on as signalled.

Up ahead, the tree-line broke into an open area, where a dirt track ran past stumps and log piles. The Helo was still circling above them, but had taken fire from the forest floor, and was forced to move on and make another pass. This time, it’s gunners sprayed the trees with the on-board mini-guns, and chaff and smoke burst from it’s launch pods to give cover. Zip-lines were dropped, and two soldiers fast-rappelled to the ground, releasing themselves, and taking up defensive firing positions. Mitchell and the team headed straight towards them, scanning left and right, with quick glances over their shoulders. Smoke swirled all around them as the helo began to touch down; it’s rotors churning up dirt, grass, and leaves in a small storm. Mitchell mentally counted down the meters as they wearily approached the soldiers who were shooting off to the side at an unseen enemy.

“Is there anymore to come? Anyone still behind you?” the first rifleman called.

“No, this is it. No-one else”, Mitchell replied sadly, looking back.

“Right, get in the chopper!”.

Brown joined him, and running to the side door, they were helped on board by the gunner. In turn they helped pull Levine inside, then Sandoval and Hudson. The two riflemen fell back and climbed in, clipping themselves into harnesses and signalling to the pilot. Then with a lurch, they were dusting-off again, gaining height and speed. The jungle canopy tilted, then disappeared below them, out of view. The air rushing in the doors was cool and refreshing; each man lying back physically and emotionally drained, drinking it in. But the excitement and horror of what they’d endured quickly caught up with them, and with bewilderment they lamented in silence...