

MC 053: Pit-Fall

Saturday, 22 November 2008

G.I. JOE #53

Pit-Fall

Cover Date: November, 1986

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Summary: "In the massive elevator system that links the G.I. Joe subterranean headquarters with Fort Wadsworth, Staten Island", Hawk and three military officers travel down to the now empty Pit. Hawk tells the others that he sees no reason for an on-site inspection by the "special committee" itself. Marine Corps General Ryan tells Hawk that he doesn't see a lot of things, and that's why the Joe team is suspended. Army General Hollingsworth thinks Ryan is jumping to conclusions before the investigation is complete, while Navy Admiral Dyson thinks it was a good idea to shut down the Joes in order to find out the truth. Below, Ryan angrily regards the Joes' computer set-up, saying it's more lavish than the Pentagon. He also believes that "this Cobra nonsense has been blown all out of proportion!" He adds that the only hard evidence they have is the all but leveled town of Springfield with no Cobras left behind. Hollingsworth points out the file footage of a "guy with the snake cowl", the empty armored vehicles at the airport and wounded Joes. Ryan thinks it's all circumstantial evidence without any "living, breathing proof".

Above ground, in Fort Wadsworth, the chaplain's assistants are upset to find their tea room and reading room has been overrun by ruffians from the motor pool, who are really the Joes. Some Joes are in the middle of Army vs. Marines arm-wrestling, while Spirit and others are using one of the walls for hatchet-throwing practice. Two chaplain's assistants -- Cecil and Clarence -- walk out "in a huff". Outside, a jeep pulls up followed by two trailers full of "spare parts" for the motor pool. The officers inside ask for directions. Spirit overhears out the window and is surprised to hear about the delivery.

In another part of Fort Wadsworth, near the river, Flint is trying to convince Lady Jaye why it's such a good idea to start dating him. She interrupts his come-ons by yanking him to the ground behind some bushes. Flint seems happy about the situation until Lady Jaye points out why she did it -- to hide from the contingent of Cobra Eels coming ashore. At the motor pool, it becomes evident that the trailers aren't full of spare parts. They're full of Cobra troops and Battle Android Troopers. Zartan and his siblings are there, along with Serpentor, Cobra Commander and Destro. The Commander can't bear to see Serpentor gloating over their imminent victory and his takeover of Cobra. Destro gives the Commander some advice. Serpentor could still lose if the victory isn't his alone.

Inside the Pit, Hawk and the other officers see the BATs enter the elevators via surveillance cameras. Hawk hits the elevator override switch, stopping the elevator dead and forcing the BATs to cope with a fifty-foot drop. The BATs hit the floor and start breaking, but the mindless androids keep coming, their broken bodies crawling into the Pit with guns blazing. Hawk and the others head for the weapons lockers and grab as much heavy artillery as they can carry, and retreat to the lower levelsof the Pit.

Back above ground, Flint and Lady Jaye overhear the Eels' plan and learn about the BATs. Flint tells Lady Jaye to go warn the others and runs into the midst of the Eels to "distract" them. As they start beating on Flint, Lady Jaye runs to tell the others, and maybe reconsiders her opinion of Flint. "Ok, tough guy, live up to your act..."

In the Pit stairwell, Hawk and the officers are fighting hard against the BATs. They're forced to continue their retreat, while firing along the way. Hollingsworth thinks their giving up too much ground. There's only two levels below them and one houses heating and air-conditioning with difficult to defend wide-open spaces. As the firefight continues, a BAT transmits that they need reinforcements. In the motor pool Destro advises that the BATs don't have the imagination and initiative to win on their own. Serpentor agrees and prepares to lead a group of Cobra soldiers into the Pit, but Cobra Commander stops him: "No! I've had it with your heavy-handed interloping! These are my troops! They signed on with Cobra while I was commander! If anybody is going to lead them into danger or glory... it's going to be me!" Destro is impressed with the Commander's speech and decides to join him. All the while, Spirit, Quick Kick and Cross Country are crouched outside the window, listening in on the Cobras inside. Lady Jaye arrives, telling them about the Cobra Eels. She and Quick Kick run off to warn the other Joes. Quick Kick reminds her that all their weapons are locked up in The Pit.

Destro and Cobra Commander find that The Pit's elevators won't go lower then the first level, and they rappel the rest of the way down the elevator shaft. They discover The Pit is being defended by only a small group who are now holding the stairwell against the BATs. Destro sends some troops and BATs into the ventilation shaft. Below in the stairwell, Cobra

Commanders spots their opposition: "One of the defenders is Hawk! I want him! He's mine!"

Back on the shore of Fort Wadsworth, most of the Eels head toward the motor pool, while one remains to do away with an unconscious and beaten Flint. At least he appears unconscious. Flint grabs the Eels' knife and punches him out. He takes the Cobra's gun and knife and head to join the fight, but wonders if he's about to lose control: "This is bad... a pro shouldn't let the fight get personal... I should calm down and -- Naaaah! I'll worry about it after I stomp a few more Cobras!"

Back in The Pit, Cobra Commander sends a BAT covered in plastic explosives down the stairwell. Destro is upset. He just sent a group of Cobra troops down into the ventilation ducts, and they'll be caught in the blast. The Commander isn't concerned: "That was your mistake then, wasn't it, Destro?" As the BAT reaches the stairway just above Hawk and the others, Hawk tells them to hold their fire. A stray bullet could set off the explosives. They seem ready to give up -- all except Admiral Dyson. Dyson drops his weapon and charges at the BAT. "I always say, 'Don't give up the ship.'... and this time I mean it!" They try to stop him. "Come back here, you old fool," General Ryan shouts. Dyson tells them to run for it and get as much distance between them and the BAT, as he tackles the android. Hawk shoves the other Generals into the hallway. Ryan yells, "We can't leave that sniveling yes-man Dyson behind! He has no right to be a hero!" Hawk isn't interested in what Ryan has to say: "He made his own decision! He bought us our lives! Let's not let his gesture turn into a waste!" Hawk punches the button to seal the doors, shouting to Dyson that he's sealing the blast shields. Dyson struggles with the BAT, which lifts him over its head, trying to throw the Admiral down the stairwell. "I know how to deal with this thing," Dyson says to himself. "If you hit the detonator hard enough it'll either break or go off!" He punches the detonator, setting off the explosives. As Destro and Cobra Commander witness the explosion, the Commander gloats, "That must have been it! The end of Hawk!" Down below Hawk wonders what's going through the Commander's head.

Above ground, the Joes are trying to get some weapons out of the Chaplain's Assistants School armory. The armorer, Percy, refuses, not even believing they're part of the Joe team, won't open the door without proper authorization. A bruised and bleeding Flint storms in. "I'll give you proper authorization... in blood!" Roadblock has other ideas: "No need to get heavy with my boy Percy, Flint! I'll just rip the door down and absolve him of any blame!" And he does.

Hawk and the others reach the utility level. Hawk explains that there's only one level beneath them, which lead to the escape tunnel to the Fort Wadsworth water tower. Ryan asks Hawk about the structural support pillar in the middle of the utility room. Hawk tells him that if you take out the central pillar, the Pit will collapse. Ryan seems to have an idea. "Would you be willing to sacrifice The Pit to take out all of Cobra's high command?"

Minutes later, they've retreated to the lowest level. Destro, Cobra Commander and some troops run down the stairs and attack the cornered Generals. None of them notice the blasting cable running down the stairs.

Back above ground, the Joes have armed themselves and have ambushed the Cobra Eels. They begin their attack on the motor pool as Serpentor and the other Cobras try to defend themselves.

Deep inside The Pit, the Cobras are closing in on the Generals. A Cobra trooper throws a grenade, which explodes, causing a heavy piece of machinery falls on top of Ryan. Hawk tries to help him, but Ryan realizes his legs are crushed. He orders Hawk and Hollingsworth into the escape tunnel without him. Meanwhile, Destro notices the blasting cable running past him from the Generals' position. But it's too late. "Ha! Admiral Dyson thought he had me outdone," Ryan says out loud. "I'll show him!!" He hits the detonator switch.

The earth shakes under Fort Wadsworth as the Pit begins to collapse. The Joes standing up above run for the edges as the explosion turns the ground above The Pit into a smoldering crater. Serpentor and the Cobras use the confusion to escape, smashing the tractor-trailer through Fort Wadsworth's main gate.

Hawk and Hollingsworth climb down from the water tower where the escape tunnel brought them. They and the Joes approach the edge of the crater that was once The Pit. "Look at that... all that destruction," Hollingsworth says. "There's no way that Cobra Commander and Destro could've survived that. But we lost Dyson and Ryan... I think the price was too high on this one."

"Sir, the price is always too high," Hawk says.

"You're right, Hawk. In fact, the Joes are off suspension as of this minute and you're back in command of them. You'll be a nomad unit. Always on the move with no home base to be a vulnerable target. When can you get mobilized?"

"Right now, sir."

Review: As is often the case, bad times for the Joes lead to some of their best stories. That is true for "Pit-fall", as well. After 53 issues, the destruction of The Pit was a surprise. Hoping to stop Cobra Commander and Destro, Hawk has The Pit destroyed. Ultimately, it will be apparent the plan did not work. For now, it seems Destro and Cobra Commander are dead, but I doubt anyone would expect such prominent characters to die so suddenly.

When the good guys die in G.I. Joe, they are usually new characters created for one appearance. This happens here, but Admiral Dyson and General Ryan make for interesting characters in their short appearance. We get little more than hints that Dyson is a cautious, decision-making officer while Ryan is a stubborn fighting man who doesn't belong behind his desk. Also, they seem to have an adversarial relationship. It would've been interesting to see them appear more than once. Their death is profound because they give their life to save others, and it's quite interesting to see that the heroes of this story are more than twice the age of the Joes we usually see in action.

To a lesser extent, this issue is also notable as the first place Flint makes his move on Lady Jaye, nearly two years after fans of the cartoon saw them as a couple on TV. We learn that under Flint's arrogance is still a brave man who can usually back up his boasts.

The story is also notable for the first appearance of General Hollingsworth, who will appear in many issues to come, filling the role that Generals Flagg and Austin filled as an advisor to the team. Here, Hollingsworth is an Army general and is a black man. This is significant because later -- in issue #73 -- he appears as an Air Force general, and a white man! What makes it all more interesting is that if you look closely at the General's uniform in this issue, it look to be in the design of an Air Force uniform except for the color. The symbol on his hat is quite different than the symbol on Hawk's. Also, it would make sense if he were in the Air Force, since the other three officers represent the remaining armed forces: Hawk is in the Army, Dyson the Navy and Ryan the Marines. Still despite all this evidence, I've heard from Larry Hama himself who says Hollingsworth was always meant to be black and in the Army. Still, it doesn't make much sense, unless there were some miscommunications between Hama and the artist and color artist.

Despite the exciting story and events of "Pit-fall", they have less impact when one knows the upcoming storyline of the series. The Joes will only remain a "nomad unit" for less than ten issues, and we will learn that Cobra Commander and Destro aren't willing to die. Not just yet, anyway.

First Appearances:

- Recurring characters: General Hollingsworth

Reprinted in:

- The Transformers (UK) #174-177 (July 16th - August 6th, 1988). A Marvel UK series that began reprinting Action Force stories after the end of that series. These issues reprint this story in four parts, alongside original stories. All references to "G.I. Joe" were changed to "Action Force".
- Classic G.I. JOE: Volume 6 (December 2009). A trade paperback collection from IDW Publishing. Includes issues #51-60.