

MC 054: Launch Base

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G.I. JOE #54

Launch Base

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Writer: Larry Hama

Penciler: Rod Whigham

Inker: Sam DeLerosa

Coloring: George Roussos

Lettering: Joe Rosen

Editor: Bob Harras

Editor-in-chief: Jim Shooter

Summary: "In Fort Wadsworth, At the collapsed rim of the Pit..." Snake-Eyes and Scarlett throw a bouquet of lillies into the crater left behind when the Pit was destroyed. Nearby, Flint (wearing bandages and a sling) asks Lady Jaye why the two Joes are honoring Destro's memory. Lady Jaye tells him that its tough to explain, but when you fight someone long enough, you sometimes start to respect them. As they talk, they are startled by an approaching Cobra Rattler that glided in silently. It swoops down over them, dropping a wreath of roses that says "R.I.P. DESTRO". We see that the pilot is the Baroness, tears rolling down her face.

On Cobra Island, representatives of Sierra Gordo's provisional military government are met by Serpentor, now in control of Cobra with the Commander and Destro gone. The visitors have come to Cobra, wanting to update their air defenses. He shows them a model of a Terrordrome, but Dr. Mindbender notes they're expensive. Luckily, the men are carrying briefcases filled with 250 million dollars in cash. Serpentor promises the Terrordrome will be delivered and online in a week.

Back at Fort Wadsworth, Ace, Airborne and Wild Bill watch as an officer plays the "Mig-Waxer" arcade game in the fort's PX. He proceeds to get such a high score that he overloads the machine. The officer introduces himself to the other Joes as Slip-Stream, the team's newest fighter pilot. Outside, at the collapsed Pit, a voice can be heard from far underground calling for help. Amidst the rubble of the lowest level of the Pit sit Cobra Commander and Destro. They're surviving on rations and seeing by candle-light. The Commander tells Destro to help him with moving some of the rubble that has them trapped. Destro tells him its useless to try and move the rubble. They need to come up with a plan to escape.

A week later, in Sierra Gordo, Cobra transport helicopters arrive, bringing in the final pre-fab components of the Terrordrome. Mindbender tells the officials that this Terrodrome will be their demonstration model. One of the Sierra Gordans is waiting to judge the launch base's capabilities against enemy aircraft.

Back at Fort Wadsworth, the Joes have set up a temporary operations center in the chaplains' assistants gymnasium. Hawk scolds Airtight for using the gym's basketball hoop with rolled-up scrap paper. Airtight brings Hawk new satellite photos from Sierra Gordo, showing the Terrordrome like the one they spotted on Cobra Island. Airtight suggest they should send a team into Sierra Gordo, since they're not allowed on Cobra Island. Hawk disagrees, but Airtight hypothetically suggests they'd have to send in someone who'd already been inside like Snake-Eyes, but that he's a ninja and Cobra would make security around him too tight. "That's brilliant, Airtight," Hawk says. "We'll put your plan into operational status immediately!" Airtight looks a little scared: "Plan? I was just free-associating..."

On Cobra Island, Serpentor discusses the future with Zartan, Zarana and Zandar. Now that Cobra Commander and Destro are out of the way, he wants to make Cobra as successful and profitable as it should be. He plans to sell launch bases to anyone who can afford it, and wants Zartan and family to head up Cobra's Terrordrome sales division.

The next day in Sierra Gordo, the new G.I. Joe Conquest X-30 fighter jet is being flown by Slip-Stream, who is explaining the advanced technology that the jet uses to his passenger, Flint, who has nothing to say at the moment. At the Terrordrome, the Baroness and the Crimson Guard twins arrive by helicopter, when alarms go off, the Conquest fighter having been spotted by Cobra's sensors. They launch the Firebat jet from the Terrordrome. Slip-Stream outflies the pilot for a while, but the Conquest is hit and starts to go down, trailing smoke all the way. The Cobras detect an explosion in the mountains, and see only one parachute. Tomax and Xamot drive out in the Ferret ATV to find the Joe who ejected. As the jumper lands, the twins recognize him as Flint and get the jump on him, knocking him out. Back at Fort Wadsworth, Hawk is trying to reach Slip-Stream on the radio. He's worried for a while until Slip-Stream finally answers. The Conquest was never shot down. Slip-Stream went into stealth mode and dropped a bomb to make it seem like he'd crashed. He says that the "passenger" has been delivered. "No way to tell whether he landed safely?" a concerned Scarlett asks. "No way at all..." answers Flint, still at Fort Wadsworth and wearing his bandages.

Back at the Terrordrome, the Sierra Gordo officials are ecstatic over the Firebat's performance, while the twins arrive with Flint. Mindbender begins interrogating "Flint", noting that he has a singularly unexpressive face. "Flint" won't talk, so

Mindbender takes him to the new-and-improved Brain-wave Scanner. The twins notice that when "Flint" sees the scanner it's as if he's seen a ghost.

Near the rim of the collapsed Pit, rain has begun to fall. Flint and Lady Jaye walk outside behind Scarlett and Hawk. Lady Jaye says, "Scarlett must be worried sick." Flint thinks she looks calm and is probably used to this by now. "You never get used to it," Lady Jaye replies, "You just get better at hiding the fear. You know what it's like to be afraid, don't you?" Flint answers, "Uh, sure! I've been afraid a lot!" Lady Jaye seems satisfied. "I was beginning to think you were really stupid..." Meanwhile, the rain has started to run down into the ruins of the Pit, finally reaching Destro and Cobra Commander. "This whole place is going to fill up with water," Destro says. The Commander is scared: "We're going to drown!"

TO BE CONTINUED

Review: "Launch Base" is a good story mostly because it's interesting to see the aftermath of last issue's great story. All that's left of the Pit is a crater in the ground, and everyone presumes Cobra Commander and Destro are dead. Reaction is mixed. Scarlett and Snake-Eyes honor Destro's memory, while the Baroness "bombs" the crater with a wreath for him. Back on Cobra Island, Serpentor seems uninterested in his rivals' death, aside from being happy to get them out of the way. Some people may hate Serpentor, but it's fun to see him making changes right away and beginning to make Cobra successful in his own way by selling Terrordrones. This seems to be the first time in the series where we see Cobra acting as actual weapons dealers. It also marks another return to Sierra Gordo, the most visited nation in the series, aside from the United States, of course. Sierra Gordo is now becoming a running gag, satirizing the types of nations that are in seemingly endless conflict and revolution. We find out of course, that Destro and the Commander are not dead, although I doubt too many readers were convinced of that, anyway. Still, no one else knows they're alive.

The funniest scene is when Airtight, basically just fooling around, gives Hawk an idea about how to get information about the Terrordrones. Airtight seems a little frightened that his "plan" is being used. Though what Airtight says gives it away, the "plan" in action still would trick some readers until they see Flint is in two places at once. Although, the writer certainly gives us enough hints between Flint's not saying a word and Scarlett's concern over the mission. Still, I won't tell you in this summary what's going on. You'll have to see the summary for the next issue!

On the characterization end of things, Destro's calm planning and the Commander's nearly panicking fits the characters exactly, while we see Flint slowly opening up to Lady Jaye. Most fun is Serpentor's slimy charm, that seems to fool everyone but the readers. We see signs that Larry Hama and the artist are trying to make Serpentor seem less silly when in one scene he doesn't wear the snake cowl, carrying it like it's a helmet. And it might sound ridiculous now, but I remember when I was younger that some kids used to think Serpentor's appearance wasn't a costume, but his true appearance.

Issue #54's story is solid, and serves as both an epilogue to the previous issue, and a prologue for things to come.

First Appearances:

- Cobra: A.V.A.C. (Firebat pilot)
- G.I. Joe vehicles: Conquest X-30 fighter jet

Reprinted in:

- The Transformers (UK) #178-181 (August 13th - September 3rd, 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.