

MC 058: Desperate Moves

Saturday, 22 November 2008

G.I. JOE #58

Desperate Moves

Cover Date: April, 1987

Writer: Larry Hama

Penciler: Rod Whigham

Inker: Andy Mushynsky

Coloring: George Roussos

Lettering: Joe Rosen

Editor: Bob Harras

Editor-in-chief: Jim Shooter

Summary: Somewhere in the Middle East, rebels led by Professor Gamal ambush a convoy of Colonel Sharif's forces. The rebels are being advised by two Joes -- Mainframe and Dusty. Mainframe is upset at the young age of one of the rebels. Dusty tells him that "in these parts" you are considered a man when you turn thirteen. He adds, "There were drummer boys younger than him at Gettysburg, Mainframe!" The ambush is a success and another victory towards a return to power of the Emir. Professor Gamal thanks the Joes for their help and offers them a motorcyle with a sidecar to help them reach their objective. He also gives them a guide -- Rashid, the young rebel Mianframe noticed earlier. Rashid refuses to ride in the sidecar with Mainframe and gets on the bike with Dusty. "Now that I am a man, I will ride with a real soldier...not a fixer of computers." Dusty smiles, but warns Rashid to not sell Mainframe short. They ride off into the into the desert.

In Denver, Colorado, an old ambulance pulls up to Fred's Garage. As the ambulance drives inside, the mechanic tells the driver he's closed for the day. A man in a beret, sunglasses and a long mustache steps out of the ambulance and closes the garage door. Fred is angry at the man until he tells him, "I have every right to do so...for I am none other than Cobra Commander and I have arrived to activate your Crimson Guard status, Fred. Or should I say Fred VII?" Fred isn't convinced, but changes his mind when the Commander gives him the secret handshake and passwords-- "greed, ambition and ruthlessness!" Fred salutes his commander. The Commander opens up the back of the van to reveal his still comatose son, Billy. "I believe you are the only one who can help my son Billy be whole again once he's out of his coma!"

Back in the Middle East, the Joes and Rashid are asleep by their campfire. Dusty smells something, and asks if any loyalist troops operate there. Rashid tells him no, but there are bandits in the region. Dusty runs off toward a sand dune and tells Rahtsid to stay at the camp. Rashid picks up his rifle and gets ready to help, but Mainframe pulls his rifle out of his hand. "Gimme that thing. You're not going anywhere...you just hush up and stay put." Rashid insists that they must help Dusty. It would be shameful to let him fight alone. Mainframe says it would be stupid for all three of them to stumble around in the dark, and Dusty is one of the best desert fighters there is as long as he doesn't have amateurs cramping his style. From Dusty's direction, Rashid sees a small explosion followed by gunfire. A figure comes over the hill carrying four rifles. He can't tell who it is, but when he switches on his flashlight, he sees it's Dusty. "Just picking up a few souvenirs," he says dropping the rifles. As he gets into his sleeping bag, he explains that four bandits were waiting for them to go to sleep to sneak up and kill them, but he could smell the tobacco one of them was smoking. "Nasty habit, smoking... can be downright lethal." Dusty goes to sleep while Rashid just stands there, wide-eyed.

Back in Denver, Fred VII shows the Commander his secret lab hidden in the back of the garage. His laboratory is dedicated to "movement enhancement duplication" -- robotics. There are also hawks perched inside. Fred explains that they belong to his accountant, a man that Destro found poaching on Cobra property with specially bred and mutated hawks that Destro thinks may come in handy someday. He then reveals his special side project the Commander should be interested in. "A new suit of battle armor fit for a Cobra Commander!"

In the middle east, the team has reached it's objective -- an oil storage facility. They keep quiet until they reach the fence, which Dusty snips open. They slip past the guards and reach one of the storage tanks. Dusty knocks on the tank and learns that it's hollow.

Back at Fred's Garage, Cobra Commander is testing out the new body armor. Fred VII explains how the suit enhances the wearer's movement, its strength amplifiers, bullet-proof frame and infra red sensors. The display is interrupted by a sound out the garage. Someone's out there!

At the oil storage tank, Dusty finds a button that opens a hidden doorway in the tank's wall. They all slip inside and find a Terror-Drome hidden within the hollow tank. Dusty notes that it was cleverly hidden, but Mainframe thinks it would have been smarter if they had included fake pipes to fool satellite photos and at least modify the infrared signature of the tank.

They go inside and Mainframe unpacks his equipment near one of the Terror-Drome's computers as Dusty and Rashid guard the door. "You boys just make sure I don't get interrupted while I plug myself into the central data bank..." Outside, two of Colonel Sharif's men notice the cut open fence, and realize they have intruders.

In Denver, the sound out in the garage turns out to be Billy inside the ambulance. He's come out of his coma. But he barely remembers his own name. "I...don't remember anything. Who am I? Who are you?" The Commander hugs his son. "Your name is Billy and I'm your father..." He turns to Fred. "And this is the man who is going to make you all better again." Fred has no idea what he means.

In the Terror-Drome, Rashid asks Dusty to tell him stories of the battles he's been in. Dusty thinks there isn't much to tell. "I'm too new to this stuff and besides, the real nitty gritty is never too interesting in the retelling..." He points to where Mainframe is working. "To tell you the truth, the guy you can really learn something from is Mainframe!" Rashid isn't impressed. Outside, the guards find that someone has entered "the secret tank". Rashid reluctantly watches Mainframe, who calls up the Terror-Drome schematics on the computer. He then hooks up his own computer to the Cobra system. After showing all his work to Rashid he finally reaches his goal: he picks up a phone receiver and, "Hello? I'd like to place a person to person call to the Chaplains' Assistants's gymnasium in Fort Wadsworth, Staten Island..."

On Staten Island, the Joes are in their temporary headquarters in the gymnasium when Mainframe's call comes through. Hawk, Flint, Lady Jaye and Dialtone are at a computer console and link up their computer with the Terror-Drome's over the line. Lady Jaye gives the computer the access code she got from Destro ("greed, ambition and ruthlessness") and the data starts feeding through.

Back at the Terror-Drome, Rashid is angry to see they crossed the desert just to make a phone call to a computer. Mainframe tells him to learn to think before fighting. "If you think hard enough, you can get out of most jams!" Rashid thinks Mainframe's advice is shameful and mocks fighting men. Dusty starts berating Rashid, but at the same time, Sharif's soldiers surprise him from behind, knocking him out cold with a rifle. They demand that the intruders drop their weapons. To Rashid's surprise, Mainframe agrees. He gives up and drops his gun. Rashid refuses, but Mainframe knocks his rifle out of his hands. He then drops to his knees and begs for his life, even saying that he didn't come on his own and "these two terrorists forced me!" Rashid is enraged and calls Mainframe a traitor and a coward. Even the guards are disgusted and when Mainframe bows down to lick the lead guard's boots, the guard yanks his foot away and tries to kick Mainframe. With the guard off balance, Mainframe grabs his foot and knocks him to the ground. He jumps up and punches out the other guard. As Dusty gets up, Mainframe says they have to leave before reinforcements come, but it's too late! A large group of guards with tanks are outside the door into the oil tank. They fire on the Joes and Dusty tries to return fire, but can't hold them off by himself. Mainframe runs back to the computer and sets the launch base's Firebat jet on computer control. The Firebat smashes through the tank's roof and then circles back to strafe the guards outside. As the jet starts blowing away the guards and tanks, the confusion gives the Joes enough time to escape, with Mainframe leading the charge.

Sometime later, Dusty and Rashid ride their motorcycle across the desert as the sun rises. Mainframe is asleep in the sidecar, and Rashid asks Dusty, "Why didn't you tell me that he was a fighting man before he learned about computers? I insulted him--"

Dusty interrupts, explaining that Mainframe's an "old campaigner" and doesn't need to prove himself. "He gets the job done and to blazes with what anyone else thinks, because a soldier only wins by surviving."

Review: A pretty solid story, the best part of "Desperate Moves" is the standalone Dusty and Mainframe story, while the introduction of Fred VII is more interesting in light of what happens later. The desert nation that appears in this story is only described as "somewhere in the Middle East", but the freedom fighters here are fighting to liberate their country from Colonel Sharif. Sharif and his fanatical followers actually first appeared in the back-up story in issue #1. The country is never named but appears again in Special Missions.

It's a shame that Dusty and Mainframe appear so little in the series, considering their first major appearances here are well-written, and they're both interesting characters. Dusty is shown to be an easy-going guy until the fighting starts, and then he turns nasty. His good nature is actually fairly close to his personality in the cartoon series, but that show would never have shown (or at least implied) that Dusty killed the bandits. Mainframe is probably the most interesting character in this whole issue, but unfortunately he doesn't play a significant role in any story after this one. He seems to follow along well with his character as mentioned in his action figure file card: an old veteran who later learned about computers and left the infantry. He lets Dusty do his job and doesn't interfere. What's funny is how he doesn't care at all what Rashid thinks and doesn't defend himself. Dusty finds Rashid's insults mostly funny, since he knows how wrong he is and that Mainframe couldn't care less about Rashid's opinions. Rashid, by the way, will return dozens of issues later working for Destro as a computer programmer, of all things!

Cobra Commander's arrival at Fred VII's garage is the beginning of a storyline that will lead to CC's long absence from the series, and Fred's prominence as a major character, posing as CC for a time. But that's for another summary. What's strange here is that the Commander's new found love for his son hasn't changed his mind about leading Cobra. Not yet,

anyway. This part of the issue is less important because the important parts of the Fred/CC story come later on. Also, this will mark Billy's return to prominence.

One error occurs in the issue when the Joes back at Fort Wadsworth receive Mainframe's transmission. Flint and Lady Jaye got the Terror-Drome plans from Destro, yet he and Scarlett appear here. In a later issue's letter column, a reader gets a "no-prize" by explaining away this mistake, saying that it was merely Lady Jaye trying out one of her undercover disguise. In fact, she is not referred to by name. Another probable error in this scene is the person sitting at the computer console in the scene seems to be Stalker, but this is actually one of a few places where a colorist confuses Stalker with Dial-Tone. Both characters wear berets and have mustaches, but Stalker is a black man and Dial-Tone is white. An understandable coloring error, but it makes less sense to have Stalker in this scene than Dial-Tone.

One interesting note in this issue is that it's a perfect example of how difficult it must be to write in the dozen or so new characters who are introduced by Hasbro each year. Dusty was introduced in 1985, Mainframe in 1986 and the new CC in 1987. Yet, they all appear in this issue for the first time.

So, in short, the desert storyline makes this a entertaining issue, and the Cobra Commander story makes it important to the overall story.

First Appearances:

- G.I. Joe team: Dusty
- Recurring Characters: Fred VII, Rashid

Reprinted in:

- The Transformers (UK) #208-212 (March 11th - April 8th, 1989). A Marvel UK series that began reprinting Action Force stories after the end of that series. These issues reprint this story in five 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.