

# MC 065: Shuttle Complex

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G.I. JOE #65

Shuttle Complex

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Writer: Larry Hama

Penciler: Ron Wagner

Inker: Randy Emberlin

Coloring: Neil Yomtov

Lettering: Joe Rosen

Editor: Bob Harras

Editor-in-chief: Jim Shooter

Summary (by Foster H. Coker, III): In orbit above the Earth, a U.S. Air Force space shuttle mission installs upgrade modules to USAF surveillance satellites. Once the first module is brought online, the sudden influx of improved intelligence data alerts the crew to the distinct possibility that someone has been running some type of worldwide operation that was heretofore undetected. As the shuttle crew scrambles a coded message to Mission Control, a second satellite looms into view. The second satellite is marked with the all-too-familiar Cobra sigil.

On Cobra Island, in what appear to be Cobra Commander's private quarters, Fred VII and the Baroness debate the wisdom of Fred passing himself off as the real Cobra Commander. Fred is worried that his lack of knowledge of the inner workings of Cobra will lead to serious trouble. The Baroness reassures Fred, taking his face in her hands and telling him "Together we can both get what we want. . ." They are interrupted by Dr. Mindbender with news that Cobra's "secret plan" is in danger of being exposed by the Air Force spy satellite upgrades. The secret plan involves the true purpose of the Cobra Terrordromes. Totally confused when Mindbender suggests he knows what must be done, Fred blusteringly agrees to a prearranged course of action without having the slightest inkling what it is. Mindbender is happy to have a decisive leader in command again, but the Baroness seems concerned . . .

In Utah, Lift Ticket delivers Hawk and Ripcord to Pit III where they are greeted by Duke and Roadblock. Once below, Hawk is briefed by Main-Frame on the Air Force shuttle mission findings, specifically a widespread pattern of ultra low frequency beam transmissions from an as yet undetermined source.

Back on Cobra Island, Fred and the Baroness are whisked into a high-tech chamber under the land-locked freighter. Serpentor facetiously comments that Cobra Commander's willingness to place himself in mortal danger will boost the troops' morale. Fred is startled by the remark, and his alarm only increases when the chamber is revealed to be the cockpit of Cobra's very own space shuttle. The craft blasts off on a mission to intercept the Air Force shuttle. Of course, the launch is detected by the Joes, and Payload correctly deduces the purpose of the Cobra flight. Hawk authorizes a mission for Payload, instructing him to "Take whoever you need, including me!"

In orbit, the Cobra spacecraft shows up as the Air Force astronauts are working on another satellite. With Cobra jamming their radar, the astronauts are defenseless.

Back in Utah, a huge hidden door opens in the desert floor, and the Crawler rolls out of the Pit, driven by Payload's "crazy friend" Hard Top. The Joe space shuttle Defiant lifts off with Payload at the helm. In orbit, the Cobra shuttle uses a robotic arm to seize the Air Force satellite, along with the astronaut who had been working on it. Whispering, the Baroness tells Fred that they need the satellite so they can determine how much the Air Force knows about the Terrordrome plans. Fred admits that whatever they know will be more than he does. The Cobra crew asks for instructions regarding the unarmed Air Force shuttle, and the Baroness replies with a terse "Blow it away!"

Before they can fire on the Air Force craft, though, the Cobras detect the approach of the Defiant. Hawk hails the Air Force shuttle and orders them to release their trapped astronaut's umbilical and withdraw. The Air Force shuttle complies, leaving the Defiant to face off against the Cobra spacecraft. Payload has Sci-Fi arm the Defiant's laser and the Baroness, ignoring Fred's desire to retreat, orders Scrap-Iron to lock on the Defiant with missile batteries. Scrap-Iron, lets fly with three missiles which Payload coolly avoids. Payload then manages to reach the Cobra shuttle's blind spot, allowing Sci-Fi to squeeze off two laser blasts. The first shot severs the robotic arm, freeing the satellite and the astronaut, and the second is a direct hit on the cockpit resulting in the Baroness being knocked unconscious.

As the Defiant moves in to recover the satellite and astronaut, Fred is inundated with damage reports and requests for orders. He freezes, unable to respond, his eyes wide with fright. The Defiant reels in her prizes and gives the Cobras one

last parting shot with the laser. In the cargo bay, Roadblock and Dial Tone ask the astronaut why Cobra was trying to capture him, and he reveals that the Cobras were after the satellite all along. The Joes realize that they have to defend the other spy satellites, and turn to re-engage the Cobras.

Aboard the Cobra shuttle, Fred has regained his composure. His technical skills come to the fore as he barks orders on how to redistribute available power, and he confidently tells his men "Let's show them how Cobras can fight!" In the ensuing exchange of missiles and laser fire, both ships sustain serious damage. The Defiant loses her navigation computer and targeting system, and suffers hull damage to her bridge. Realizing that he has no hope of capturing another satellite with the Defiant in the way, Fred has Scrap-Iron fire missiles at the remaining satellites, destroying them all and thus preventing the Joes from learning the truth about the Terrordromes. Fred orders his crew to disengage and head for home. With the Defiant badly damaged, Hawk orders Payload to break off pursuit rather than risk the lives of their crew unnecessarily.

The scene shifts to a small circus "somewhere in Europe", where Snake Eyes, Scarlett, and the Blind Master are in the midst of a very successful tryout involving a knife throwing, chainsaw juggling balancing act. The leader of the troupe, identifying himself as the White Clown, announces that they will play two more towns in Austria then they will cross the border . . . into Borovia.

Review: A lot of readers will find a story involving two spaceships shooting it out from orbit to be out of place in G.I. Joe, but the events in this issue remain within the previously established technology parameters of the series. The "space action" here is far more believable at least than in the "Star Brigade" storyline near the end of the series' run.

Roadblock certainly seems out of place among the rest of the Joe shuttle crew, which includes Payload (pilot), Hawk (C.O.), Sci-Fi (gunner), Dial Tone (communications), Main-Frame (computer specialist), and Slipstream (co-pilot). What was his function aboard the Defiant anyway? Payload is depicted in this issue as Caucasian, despite his first appearance in issue #64, which shows him to be African-American. Hard Top delivers his first and (as far as I know) only line of dialogue in the entire series on Page 11 when he says "Sure". Of all the Joes ever to get speaking parts in the series, I'm sure that makes him the least verbose. Even Snake Eyes had more to say. The tender moment shared by Fred and the Baroness on Page 3 foreshadows an even more intimate moment in Yearbook #2.

Interestingly, all three spacecraft in this story appear to enjoy the benefits of artificial gravity, except on Page 16 where the unconscious Baroness appears to be floating just off the floor.

The introductory caption on Page 21, identifying the location as "somewhere in Europe", seems unnecessarily coy considering the White Clown's comment one page later, "We have two more towns to play here in Austria . . .";

For the first time, Fred VII, previously depicted as a scheming, backshooting opportunist, shows signs of true leadership ability. After the first exchange of fire, his ship had suffered three hits while the Defiant was untouched. Yet he still managed to turn the tide of battle 180° and pull out a victory for the Cobras. Not too shabby for a "mechanic".

#### First Appearances:

- G.I. Joe Team: Payload and Hardtop named after unnamed appearance in #64
- Supporting Cast: White Clown; Orlovsky (unnamed)
- G.I. Joe vehicles: Defiant space shuttle and launch complex
- Cobra vehicles: Cobra space shuttle

#### Reprinted in:

- The Transformers (UK) #266-269 (April 21st - May 12th, 1990). 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 7 (February 2010). A trade paperback collection from IDW Publishing. Includes issues #61-70.