

MC 074: Alliance of Convenience

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G.I. JOE #74

Alliance of Convenience

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Script: Larry Hama

Pencils: Ron Wagner

Inks: Randy Emberlin

Colors: Bobbie Chase

Lettering: Rick Parker

Editor: Bob Harras

Editor-in-chief: Tom DeFalco

Summary: On Cobra Island, the G.I. Joe recon team watches the Baroness lead an attack on the land-locked freighter, which is serving as Serpentor's headquarters during the newly-begun Cobra civil war. The Joes look on and discuss the Baroness' battle tactics, and that Cobra Commander won't let her take out the freighter due to the expensive hardware inside. In the battle, the Maggot tank driver tells the Baroness that the freighter's defenses are well-entrenched and they'll never get through. At the headquarters of Cobra Commander -- still Fred VII in disguise -- a transmission from the Baroness informs Fred that they can't make a dent in Serpentor's defenses. Fred scolds Zartan for not forcing the Dreadnoks to fortify his headquarters, but Zartan is more interested in why the Baroness is disagreeing with Fred. "She received your orders; Why doesn't she carry them out?" Fred refuses to let the Baroness pull back, afraid that Serpentor will break through their lines. Inside the land-locked freighter, Tomax and Xamot urge Serpentor to break through and attack the Commander's headquarters. A BAT arrives with a call from the mainland, from Dr. Mindbender. He's succeeded!

Out in the forest, Falcon radios the U.S.S. Flagg and informs Hawk of what the recon team has seen. Hawk gives him new orders to head for the airfield and give a full report on its defenses. As the team packs up to go, Spirit tells Falcon that someone has been following them since they landed, and he's going to lay back and see who it is. Falcon says, "Don't take him out unless you have to, and then do it quietly."

The next morning on the Flagg, two Tomahawk 'copters arrive carrying General Hollingsworth and a Joe security team and weapons team. Hawk wasn't expecting them, and nearly pulls his weapon when Dr. Mindbender steps out of one Tomahawk. Hollingsworth calms him and explains that Mindbender made a deal with the United States. In return for the electronic "black box" Cobra stole from them, the Joe team will support Serpentor in the civil war. "It all boils down to whether we support a constitutional monarchy or a fascist dictatorship." In addition to the two Tomahawks, two C-130 transport planes carrying Battle Force 2000 and other vehicles are present, as well as the WHALE hovercraft carrying a combat engineer team. That's why the recon team's orders changed. The Joes are going in. Back on Cobra Island, Falcon calls Hawk to inform him of the airfield's defenses. Hawk interrupts him and tells the lieutenant that his team now has a new mission to take the airfield's control tower at all costs. Hawk explains that the tower can't be in Cobra Commander's hands when the Joes attempt to land at the airfield. As they speak, Hawk sits in one of the Tomahawks as the Joe aircraft all head toward the island. The recon team begins to crawl through the tall grass surrounding the airfield, hoping to reach the tower unnoticed. Spirit informs Falcon that he will "take out" whoever is following them. Spirit grabs the man, who is Captain Minh, the fishing boat captain seeking for revenge against Fred VII. He shouts that he can get them to the tower without being seen. Hawk radios his orders to the Joes as the aircraft and the WHALE approach the island. Cutter and the engineer team will land and blow up the ASP gun emplacements at the end of the runway, clearing the way for the C-130s to land.

Meanwhile, Captain Minh brings the recon team to a storm drain that will lead them into the tower. They head inside, taking Minh with them. They pop up from a grate on the ground floor and fire on the unsuspecting Cobras inside. The Tomahawks land and Cobra Commander's Maggots open fire on them. A Mamba helicopter swoops down to attack, hitting one of the Tomahawks. The burning chopper is quickly unloaded, while Wild Bill's Tomahawk lifts off and takes out the Mamba. At the other end of the runway, the WHALE fires on the ASPs, but is hit after knocking out half of them. The WHALE is totalled, but the Joes on board are all right. Falcon's team makes its way up the stairs to the tower, firing all the way.

At the land-locked freighter, Serpentor takes advantage of the Joes' landing and leads a squad of HISS tanks through the Baroness' forces. The Baroness angrily informs Fred. "You had better do something, you worthless imposter! He's heading for the airfield!!"

Back at the airfield, the Joes are pinned down in one of the hangars, desperately trying to clear the Maggots off the runway so the C-130s can land. Cutter's team uses statchel charges to knock out the remaining ASPs just in time for the

C-130s to land. Wild Bill and Maverick in his Vector shoot down the Mambas overhead, just as Fred and the Dreadnoks arrive at the airfield in the Thunder Machine. Fred's shocked to see the Joes, and has Thrasher open fire on the nearest transport plane. As the Joes start to offload another burning plane, the Thunder Machine heads right for the Joes, and Buzzer snatches Hawk up as they drive past. As Hawk struggles with the Dreadnoks, Fred isn't happy to see Serpentor's HISS tanks arrive. Serpentor has the Baroness tied up, hanging across the front of his HISS. The Thunder Machine turns around as Serpentor opens fire. The Joes have to meet up with Serpentor's forces before they can save Hawk, but Zartan has arrived with more Maggots and troops. The Thunder Machine swerves to avoid the enemy, but runs into a tank, commanded by Destro! Inside the tower, Gung-Ho spots the new arrivals: an entire army of Destro's Iron Grenadier troops and vehicles. "Take a gander to seaward, Lt. Falcon. Seems like Destro decided to cut himself in on the action... and he brought all of his boys with him!"

TO BE CONTINUED

Review: Issue #74 really brings us to the meat of the Cobra civil war storyline. It's one of the biggest battles and stories of the series, and is even more into the fighting of the battle than issue #50 was, when the Joes invaded Springfield. Once the decision is made for the Joes to land on the island, the action starts and doesn't let up. The Joes are mostly arriving in this issue, but the chaos of the landing makes it an instant battle scene. The tactics on display here are fairly in depth for a toy/cartoon book, with logical planning by the Joes. They need to secure the airfield and knock out the defenses there in order to safely land. Of course, as often happens in real warfare, things don't go according to plan, and the Joes have to contend with wounded and burning transports while avoiding enemy fire. The story manages to jump from one scene to the next and keep everything understandable. There's a great sense of confusion and chaos to the issue, and so many groups and characters collide in one place, thanks to the Joes' intervention. Destro's sudden arrival is unexpected, though we saw him on the way in the last issue. His army's landing is also a very dramatic way of introducing some Iron Grenadier hardware. There is definitely a higher level of violence than in previous issues. Granted, all the casualties are generic Cobra troops, but it's not that often that we see Vipers mowed down in large numbers. The defeat Baroness' forces is illustrated by a battlefield littered with bodies. And though the death isn't really dwelled on, it's never played as some thing "cool" done by the Joes. It's straight forward war.

Characters aren't ignored, despite all the fighting. It's obvious there are some characters suspicious of Fred's identity. Though Zartan hasn't specifically seen Cobra Commander is a fake, his amusement at the Baroness' unwillingness to follow orders makes it obvious he thinks so. In the midst of battle, Fred commands little respect from any of Cobra's high command. The Baroness and Zartan constantly question him, and even the Dreadnoks give him advice. Fred and the Dreadnoks' ride on the Thunder Machine is a funny scene, with Thrasher trying to go after Serpentor in the midst of a armored column, and Fred constantly yelling at the other Dreadnoks. While their capture of Hawk is almost ridiculously easy, it's also a lot of fun.

It's easy to question the U.S. government's willingness to enter the war on Serpentor's side. Would they really let Mindbender walk into Washington with the black box and not simply take it from him. But that all stems from Cobra Island's sovereignty, which the story hinges on. And it could be argued that Serpentor is a chosen monarch, since the Cobra rank and file accepted him after the Commander's presumed death. But arguing all this is probably taking things too seriously, anyway. An obviously forgotten plot point is Flint's complaint that he's missing the "big one" while serving on the operations team that stays behind on the Flagg. Keel-Haul tells him, "You'll get your chance before this is over, mark my words!" But the storyline will end without Flint seeing any action at all!

Some other errors include Falcon referring to himself as Flint -- probably due to the characters' similarity -- and General Hollingsworth again appearing as a white Air Force officer, instead of a black Army officer.

A nice feature of this issue is the map of Cobra Island in the back, and a chart of Cobra's and Joe's forces. The map also marks where the various aircraft made their landing. The map was probably partly created to keep the geography of the island straight for Larry Hama, but it helps the reader, too. It just adds to the feeling that we're in the midst of real battles. The map includes a character called "SEAL", which is not a character name. It's presumably Wet-Suit, since Torpedo won't arrive until issue #76. Actually, one scene shows a generic "big hat" wearing soldier in the background, which seems to match the series' land uniform for the Navy SEALs.

"Alliance of Convenience" is an exciting, smart issue, that combines the fun of the series with some hints of realistic fighting and battle tactics. Destro's arrival just adds to the suspense, and most fans of the series would just be happy to see all the comic's factions clashing together in one huge battle. Next issue, the war continues...

First Appearances:

- Iron Grenadier vehicles: A.G.P.s (Anti-Gravity Pods)

Reprinted in:

- The Transformers (UK) #302-305 (December 29th, 1990 - January 9th, 1991). 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". This is the final issue of The Transformers (UK) to print an Action Force story. The Cobra civil war story was continued in an Action Force Holiday Special, but never completed in the UK.
- A version of the issue was released by Hasbro in 2005, packaged with action figures of Zartan, Zarana, and Fred VII as Cobra Commander, as seen in this issue. All references to Marvel Comics were removed.
- G.I. JOE: Best of Hawk (June 2009). Part of a series of reprints from IDW. Also includes issues #4, 16, 45, 47 and 70.
- Classic G.I. JOE: Volume 8 (May 2010). A trade paperback collection from IDW Publishing. Includes issues #71-80.