

The Mission

The low hum of the engine reverberated through the hold of the military transport plane, a steady rhythm that matched the pounding in Captain James Holloway's chest. The flickering red lights cast eerie shadows on the faces of the ten men seated beside him. At 3.00am, the time was only visible on the luminous military timepieces they all wore. The air was thick with anticipation and the metallic scent of sweat. Holloway ran a gloved hand over the rough canvas of his kit bag, feeling the hard edge of the package inside.

He glanced to his right, meeting the eyes of Sergeant Paul Donovan, his second-in-command. Donovan gave him a slight nod, a silent confirmation that they were ready. Holloway nodded back, reassured by the sergeant's calm demeanour. They had planned this operation down to the last detail, but there was no denying the weight of what they were about to do.

"One minute!" The voice of the crew chief broke through the drone of the engine.

Holloway stood, bracing himself against the sway of the aircraft, and signalled for his men to prepare. Cold wind whipped through the hold, but the men barely flinched, their focus on the task ahead.

"Go!" Holloway barked.

One by one, the men leapt into the void, their black parachutes opening silently against the night sky. Holloway was the last to jump, the package secured to his chest with heavy-duty straps. As he descended, the vast expanse of desert lay below in the moonlight, the border hills a distant shadow on the horizon.

The descent was swift, the team landing with practiced precision on a narrow strip of sandy scrubland just outside the ruined village which was their destination. Holloway quickly unclipped his parachute, and it was swept away by the wind, disappearing into the night. Donovan landed beside him; his movements efficient as he gathered the men.

They moved quickly, the sand and scrub giving way to grassy dunes and then to a dense thicket of stunted trees. Holloway led the way, his senses heightened by the silence that enveloped them. The only sound was the crunch of their boots on the earth. They reached a clearing, where the ruins of an old farmhouse stood, half-buried in ivy and moss. The men took up defensive positions around the perimeter, their eyes scanning the darkness for any sign of movement.

Holloway knelt, pulling out a small handheld device from his bag. He activated it, watching as the screen came to life with a series of green dots, each representing one of his men. They were all in position.

"Package secure?" Donovan whispered, his eyes flicking to the object on Holloway's chest. Holloway nodded, placing his hand over the package. It was small, no larger than a briefcase, but its contents were invaluable. The enemy, a rogue faction with ties to the Taliban, had no idea the British were aware of their plans. This package was a pre-emptive strike, a way to dismantle their operation before it could cause irreversible damage.

Holloway took a deep breath. "Execute."

In an instant, the quiet night exploded into chaos. A series of muffled thuds echoed through the trees as Alpha and Bravo teams neutralized the guards stationed around the perimeter of the enemy's camp. Holloway could hear the crackle of suppressed gunfire, the distant shouts of men caught off-guard. The package was their only priority; it had to be delivered without fail.

They moved quickly, shadows in the night, their weapons at the ready. The camp was a crude setup - tents and vehicles haphazardly arranged around a central firepit. Holloway's team spread out, taking up positions around the camp, their eyes trained on the few remaining sentries who were frantically trying to respond to the attack.

Holloway's target was a large tent at the centre of the camp, the command post. That was where the package needed to go. He signalled to Donovan, who nodded and led two men toward the tent while the rest provided cover.

As they approached, Holloway could hear the panicked voices of enemy officers inside. He pulled a Thunder flash from his belt, primed it, and tossed it through the tent flap. There was a blinding flash, followed by the shouts of disoriented men. Donovan was through the entrance before the sound faded, his silenced weapon spitting out rounds that dropped the enemy officers in quick succession. Holloway followed; the package cradled in his arms.

He moved to the centre of the tent, where a makeshift table was strewn with maps and documents. Placing the package on the table, Holloway quickly entered the activation code into the device attached to it. The package beeped once, then twice, as the timer began to count down.

"Thirty seconds," Holloway announced. "Time to leave."

The team withdrew from the tent, retreating into the darkness of the forest. Behind them, the camp was in disarray, the few surviving enemy soldiers too disoriented to mount any real pursuit. Holloway's men regrouped at the edge of the clearing; their eyes fixed on the tent in the distance.

A sudden, sharp explosion ripped through the air as the package detonated, a plume of fire and smoke erupting from the centre of the camp. The shockwave flattened the remaining

tents, sending debris flying in all directions. The ground trembled beneath their feet, but Holloway felt a grim satisfaction as he watched the enemy's command post burn.

"Mission accomplished," Donovan said, a note of relief in his voice.

Holloway nodded; his face set in a hard line. The package had been delivered, the enemy's plans disrupted, but there was no time for celebration. They still had to make it back to the extraction point, and into the safety of the British zone.

"Let's go," Holloway ordered, leading his men back through the trees. The mission was far from over, but for now, they had struck a decisive blow. The package had done its job.