

*Half a league, half a league,  
Half a league onward,  
All in the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.  
"Forward, the Light Brigade!  
Charge for the guns!" he said:  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.*

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## **reckoning**

/rɛk(ə)nɪŋ/

noun

The avenging or punishing of past mistakes or misdeeds.

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***Wednesday, October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016***

***Cowes, Isle of Wight***

## **CALEDONIA**

The place was pleasant.

It was a sheltered anchorage, too. But everybody was rested, and they just wanted out of there - and soon. At about 7 A.M., a fast boat roared toward CALEDONIA from the direction of Portsmouth. Sarah had received prior notification of the approaching Pacific RIB from the WESTMINISTER and she was there to meet the craft at the stern. A sailor handed over a weighted canvas bag which Sarah had to sign for before the RIB accelerated away in the direction of Portsmouth. Sarah recognised the bag - they were used to carry sensitive documents at sea. If required, the bag could be dumped over the side and it would flood, dragging the secrets below the murky waters forever. Sarah took the bag inside and she placed it down on the table in the office. She broke the seal and inside, she found several paper-filled files, some folded maps and charts, and two computer storage devices.

Sarah read the top sheet:

## **OPERATION COUNTERSTRIKE**

**TOP SECRET - UK EYES ONLY**

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## ***That morning***

After breakfast, the briefing began.

It was over - the wait was over, and everybody was relieved to be getting on with the final part of the whole sordid affair. They had a location. They had a target. They had a mission. They were also very eager. Twenty-eight eager people were crammed into the main deck. Anti-eavesdropping measures had been employed and every hatch and window aboard was sealed. Jasper and Lynn had setup a pair of large whiteboards to port as aids for the briefing.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, *Predators* and *Princess*," Jasper announced. "I am very pleased to announce Operation Counterstrike. This operation is intended to take

down the Radford Group and Radford himself. This *not* a Vengeance operation, however, it has received the highest authorisation for COBRA."

"Cobra?" Olivia asked innocently.

"It stands for Cabinet Office Briefing Room A - it's the room where emergency situations are discussed in Downing Street," Lynn explained.

"Oh," Olivia replied, suitably enlightened.

"Radford's base of operations is, as we have mentioned before, in Wales. He bought up a disused RAF base about twenty years ago and he built up his company. He repaired aircraft for the airlines, then he went on to support the military. He picked up some lucrative contracts during the run up to the first Gulf War. He made even more money bringing back and repairing damaged helicopters and fighting vehicles. By the time the second Gulf War erupted, Radford was on the MoD's list of preferred suppliers. He made millions and then he made even more once he wormed his way into Afghanistan and supported the British military there. The man has his own mercenary force - men who guard his facilities abroad - who we believe to be in the UK in force. He is expected to have upwards of a one thousand people working at his HQ. Of that number, maybe four hundred are believed to be ex-military and therefore capable of bearing arms."

"Will they fight against us and the British military?" Craig asked.

"The mercs vary in nationality and not all are Brits. We're hoping that the Brits may turn on Radford - but we cannot rely on that. However, the PM has directed that all are fair game. She would rather they meet unfortunate deaths than end up costing the country money while they spend the rest of their rotten lives in prison. A lot of resources are going into this - we have the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, the Army, and the RAF involved. They are looking at *Vengeance* to serve on point. We will go in along with elements of 42 Commando Reconnaissance Troop. Our job will be to keep sight of Radford and take him out if we can. We need to identify anything which might inhibit the main assault and ensure that the bastards do not escape. The RAF have been authorised to shootdown any aircraft which launch from that facility, as have the RN."

Jasper paused to put maps and diagrams up on the whiteboard with magnets to hold the documents in place.

"I know that tensions run high in you all and we have all suffered a loss. This will be our opportunity to get even. However, do not lose sight of the endgame and why we are going on this operation. We are there to assist in taking down a clear and present threat to the United Kingdom. I trust you all to do your duty and not to waver should temptation strike. You are all professionals - some more than others - but you all know the score and you will be fighting alongside the best the United Kingdom has to offer. I want you all to go through these maps and diagrams until you have them memorised. You must know every bump in the landscape and every part of that facility. Later on, I will have your teams. We depart for Wales at fourteen hundred. That is all."

There was feverish activity as everybody grabbed briefing packs and scoured the documents inside.

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After a short while, they went through the people who they might be facing.

Photos were stuck up on the board. Sebastian Radford headed the list. Also added were the known members of his staff. Keira stood up and she stuck another photo up on the board. Her face bore a very dangerous expression.

"This bitch is Scarlett Radford and she is thirteen-years-old. She is the reason why Harper is dead. She took my sister away from me. . ."

"I recognise her; she was the one who threw Harper into the mud, naked," Kaitlin interrupted. "That bitch is mine!"

"Ours!" Naomi growled dangerously.

"Let's not get distracted," Jasper warned. "Yes, Scarlett Radford is fair game and I can see why you all want to kill her, but Sebastian Radford is the number one target. Scarlett is a ways down the list, however . . . however, I understand why she needs to die and I will say it again: do not lose focus of the operation as a whole."

Kaitlin and Naomi nodded, their faces furious and dangerous.

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**Thursday, October 27<sup>th</sup>**

**Castlemartin, Pembrokeshire  
Wales, United Kingdom**

It was late afternoon by the time they turned into the entrance to the Castlemartin Training Area.

They were directed to drive straight into the open door of an aircraft hangar. The moment they were inside, the door was closed behind them. They were a mere twenty miles from their target. As they exited the vehicles, they were met by a large man in combat fatigues. His T-shirt proclaimed him to be Royal Marines Commando.

"Sergeant Billy Martin. Welcome to Operation Counterstrike."

The man was cheery and welcoming as *Vengeance* gathered around. Behind him, there were eleven similarly clad men - all smiling.

"This gentleman," Sergeant Martin proclaimed, pointing at a man in a dark business suit who looked like anything but a soldier, "is from the Ministry of Defence and he is your liaison. Please meet Phillip Ransom."

"Hello," the man offered somewhat timidly. "I work for the MoD in Whitehall and I will be the liaison between *Vengeance* and the MoD. Some in power have raised concerns about those beneath the age of combat consent. That is, those under eighteen years of age should not deploy into what is expected to become a combat zone."

"What!?" Kaitlin exclaimed and the faces of the other *Predators* reflected her outrage.

Naomi stepped forwards, pushing her rambunctious cousin towards Cassie who grabbed Kaitlin.

"So," Naomi began as she moved towards the man from the MoD. "I am deemed too young for a combat zone. Nobody deemed me too young when I was taken at seven-years-old and trained to become an assassin. I murdered my own parents. I was deemed old enough to wield a gun. I was deemed old enough to wield a knife. I was deemed old enough to be taught to kill with my bare hands. I have killed - many times. I have the blood of men on my hands. Where were you then, Mr Ransom? Where were you to prevent my government deeming me of age to be trained to become a fucking assassin?"

Naomi seized the unfortunate man and she slammed him against an Army Coyote armoured vehicle. She wrenched his right arm up behind his back.

"Now, Phil, what are you going to do about it?" Naomi growled dangerously.

The man was fighting obvious pain as his arm was bent backwards.

"Are you going to allow me and my friends to fight for our fallen comrade, or are you going to go back to London with a badly broken arm and your tail between your legs?"

"It was merely a concern, young lady - I have the greatest respect for *Vengeance* and you *Predators* and I apologise but I had to pass on the message."

"Any more of you wankers got any ageist or maybe some sexist bullshit?" Naomi went on as she glared at the assembled Royal Marines Commandoes. "I'll take every damn one of you down!"

"Enough!"

The nine-year-old girl with blazing anger in her eyes turned to find herself receiving a much more powerful glare from a Royal Marines officer who had come into view. Naomi released the man as directed and she stepped back, allowing him to regain his composure as he cradled his right arm. Sergeant Martin laughed out loud and there were chuckles from the other Royal Marines present.

"I am Captain McFadden. I am in charge of tonight's escapades."

"You're a girl!" Olivia blurted out as she took in the green beret with the globe and laurel badge over her left eye and the three pips of her rank.

"Very observant . . . Olivia, is it?"

Olivia nodded.

"Yes, I am a girl, does that surprise you?"

"I didn't know there were any female Royal Marines," Olivia replied.

"Oh, yes; there are not all that many of us, but we can all keep up with these Neanderthals," Captain McFadden explained as she waved a hand in the direction of the grinning male bootnecks. "However, don't let me intercede, Sergeant."

"Thank you, ma'am. Welcome aboard, *Vengeance*," Sergeant Martin said before his tone darkened and his face showed genuine sorrow. "We have all heard what a *Predator* is, and we are horrified to believe that something so inhuman even exists. However, before us, we see the proof. You have our respect, and we would be honoured to have you fighting alongside us."

"Hope you've got strong stomachs, boys because there's going to be a lot of blood!" Kaitlin chipped in.

"I like this girl!" one of the marines exclaimed with a chuckle.

"Right - I would suggest you all go and get changed," Sergeant Martin directed, bringing things back on track. "Scran will be in forty minutes and the final briefing at eight before we deploy at midnight."

*Vengeance* was pointed towards a double-stack of portacabins over to one side of the hanger.

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Forty minutes later, a very different crowd of people re-joined the marines in the line for food.

Each wore MTP (Multi-Terrain Pattern) trousers with green stable belt, a T-shirt with thermal smock over, and a lightweight jacket. On their feet, they

wore dark-coloured lightweight boots. Those with long hair had their hair tied up in braids, a bun, or a ponytail. The fifteen members of *Vengeance* appeared extremely professional, even the younger members. They were all very hungry as they intermingled with the elite troops. Royal Navy cooks and stewards manned the makeshift galley and by the smell, something damn nice was cooking.

"Okay," one of the cooks announced. "We have some freshly made steak and kidney pie with endless chips - plenty of ketchup, too. And for those who finish their scran, we have some nutty."

Everybody grabbed a tray and they each received a plate of steaming steak and kidney pie with a scoop of thickly cut chips. Craig and Olivia were both grinning as they took in the food before them. They both stopped at the drinks offerings. There was a pair of coolers - one was a violent green, the other orange.

"What is that green stuff?" Olivia demanded.

"Limers, love," a marine offered. "Lime juice - tastes great, but stains anything it touches."

Olivia and Craig both helped themselves to a large plastic mug and filled them with 'limers'. *Vengeance* intermingled with the bootnecks while they ate, and they got to know one another. Naturally, the girls appeared to gravitate to the female officer who they saw as an example of ultimate girl-power. Electra, Naomi, and Kaitlin had most of the marines laughing - pissing themselves actually - with some jokes and generally being idiots. The marines returned the favour with their own jokes which began politely but then they just turned downright crude and eventually even Craig was wide-eyed and blushing. The steak and kidney pie was the best that any of them had ever eaten. Olivia liked the lime juice, as did Craig. Towards the end of the meal, as they cleared their plates, the talk turned more serious and steered towards the looming operation. Once they were finished, everybody helped themselves to some 'nutty' - several boxes of confectionery were arranged on a table: Mars, Twix, Fruit and Nut, Snickers, and Aero.

Very quickly, the contents - over two hundred bars - vanished, leaving just empty cardboard behind.

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An array of comfortable seats was arranged in a semi-circle and twenty-five of the twenty-eight people present took their seats.

Captain McFadden, Sergeant Martin, and Mr Ransom stood upfront. Mr Ransom did not appear very happy with his location standing before *Vengeance* and the marines - he looked like a man about to be fed to the lions.

"Okay," Captain McFadden explained as she pointed to some enlarged, high-definition colour photos of the area to the west of Milford Haven. "Over the past few days, there have been plenty of helicopter flights around the area. As a result, our infiltration should go unnoticed. The police will be controlling all access to the peninsula in a discrete fashion - a messy car crash, I believe, on the two main roads in and out. Okay, we have a troop of twenty-eight and I am in overall command. My second-in-command is Sergeant Martin, here. We will break down into six sections: five per section for *Vengeance* and four per section for us Royals. *Vengeance* has callsigns with the prefix 'Cavalier One'. The Royals will be using callsigns with the prefix 'Cavalier Two'. Helicopter support will use the callsigns 'Cavalier Three' and that includes your TWILIGHT: *Cavalier Three-One* and SCOURGE: *Cavalier Three-Two*. We have air support from *Devil Flight* which I believe to be RAF Typhoon FGR4 jets

- they will take out anything which gets in the way and they will be with us from around oh-four-hundred. They will be armed for air-to-air and air-to-ground. The RAF will also have a pair of Reaper MQ9A drones airborne, callsign: *Rapier* from midnight armed with laser-guided bombs and AGM-114 Hellfire missiles."

"Woah!" Craig breathed.

"No punches are being pulled here, Craig," the captain continued. "We need support, we're going to get it - no half measures. We are up against some serious people and we only want the bad guys getting killed. *Cavalier One-One* and *One-Two* will be dropped off at Point Alpha, out to the west . . . here. *Cavalier One-Three* and *Two-Three* will be dropped off here, at Point Bravo . . . to the south. Finally, *Cavalier Two-One* and *Two-Two* will be dumped at Point Charlie, to the north. There are three primary targets: the maintenance hangers to the north of the airfield, the Radford Group HQ over here . . . to the northwest of the airfield. The final primary target is down here, Target One, the Radford home. I know that you want to target that first with everybody, but we have an operation to follow through, okay?"

There were reluctant nods from the *Predators*.

"There are three secondary targets which will be attacked by the main force an hour before dawn with assistance from us once the primary targets are destroyed. We have the aircraft and weapons storage facility to the east of the airfield, the executive jet terminal, and the main airfield where we have scattered aircraft and defensive features. We are just twenty-seven, but there will be over a hundred men of 42 Commando coming ashore from the main assault plus armoured fighting vehicles and naval gunfire support. Now, when you arrive, there will be a pre-positioned vehicle awaiting each section - five Jackal 2s and a Cougar. They will be fully fuelled and ready. Each is fitted with a GMPG in the bow and an L111A1 M2 Browning in the turret ring. Right, people - go get yourselves a look at a Jackal 2 and a Coyote, then get yourselves rested for an hour before we deploy at midnight."

After a brief tour of a Jackal 2 and the all but identical Coyote, *Vengeance* headed off to rest and gear up.

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## ***Friday, October 28<sup>th</sup>***

### ***Midnight***

*Vengeance* and the Royals left the hanger and moved a short distance away to a concrete hard-standing.

Masks had been pulled on by the *Vengeance* members with approving looks from the Royals. Every person carried an automatic assault rifle, a pistol, ammunition, and various blades and other sharp objects. Ahead of them, they found their transport waiting. The three Royal Navy Merlin HC4 helicopters of the Commando Helicopter Force and 845 Naval Air Squadron were ready for take-off, nine turbine engines screaming and three sets of main rotor blades spinning at high speed. Each giant helicopter had the rear ramp lowered. On each ramp stood the loadmaster, a Royal Navy Petty Officer. Mounted centrally at the base of the ramp, a 7.62-millimetre General Purpose Machine Gun (GPMG) pointed out behind the helicopter. The teams climbed aboard their designated transport and were pointed to canvas seats mounted on either side of the fuselage. Forward, M134 miniguns could be seen poking out the port and starboard side of the helicopters. Two pilots were seated in the hi-tech cockpit fitted with large colour displays. Each pilot wore night-vision equipment on their helmets and

all three helicopters were dark, with no external lighting and internally, only red lighting was in use.

In the left-hand Merlin, callsign: *Bayonet*, the Point Alpha teams, *Cavalier One-One*, consisting of *Crimson*, *Nemesis*, *Glide*, *Prowl*, and *Ajax* strapped in alongside *Cavalier One-Two* consisting of *Drift*, *Stripe*, *Harrier*, *La Coccinelle*, and *La Terreur*. Along with the two pilots, the loadmaster, and three crewmen, the helicopter was very lightly loaded with only sixteen people aboard. The *Vengeance* members were all nervous, even the older members. Next door, in the centre Merlin, callsign: *Twister*, the Point Bravo teams, *Cavalier One-Three*, consisting of *Sleuth*, *Jack Foster*, *Debbie Grey*, *Q*, and *Rigour* strapped in alongside *Cavalier Two-Three* consisting of *Sergeant Martin*, *Lance Corporal Nicol*, *Marine Scott*, and *Marine Howe*. The right-hand Merlin, callsign: *Vortex*, carried the Point Charlie teams, *Cavalier Two-One*, consisting of *Captain McFadden*, *Corporal Morgan*, *Marine Lawson*, and *Marine Thornton* along with *Cavalier Two-Two*, consisting of *Corporal Franklin*, *Marine Freeman*, *Marine Angus*, and *Marine Coleman*.

As soon as the three helicopters were loaded, the rear ramps rose just a foot before the helicopters lifted off the ground and each machine headed west at seventy feet altitude and over one-hundred knots indicated airspeed.

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### ***Point Alpha***

***Cavalier One-One: Crimson, Nemesis, Glide, Prowl, Ajax***

***Cavalier One-Two: Drift, Stripe, Harrier, La Coccinelle, La Terreur***

The Merlin HC4, callsign: *Bayonet*, came in low over the sea across Jack Sound before pulling up sharply to clear the cliffs at The Anvil.

The 14-tonne flying machine touched down four-hundred yards to the west of their initial objective. The flat terrain suitable for the helicopter and far enough away from civilisation was on the headland which gave a commanding view of the area, including their pre-positioned vehicles. As the two teams ran down the rear ramp, they were each patted on the shoulder by the loadmaster as he counted them off his helicopter. The ten individuals ran twenty feet before diving to the ground, SIG Sauer assault rifles raised and NVG goggles scanning for any sign of movement beyond the rapidly departing helicopter whose downdraft threatened to blow the smaller members over the cliff edge.

Once the noisy machine was gone, heading out to sea, the two teams headed down a steep path towards the east in two parallel but staggered columns, each person searching their sector for any sign of the movement, or danger. There was a stiff wind blowing from the north and it was cold, there was the hint of rain too, just to add to the night's impending entertainment. Moral was high, and they were all pleased to be finally going into action. Boots touched down in the grass silently as the teams moved down the path towards a stone wall with an opening which led onto a road. It did not take them long to reach the opening and they passed through the opening tactically, a pair at a time who quickly took up positions to cover the two roads which came together at the corner where the opening in the stone wall was located. One road led downwards, toward the north and the sea - the other upwards and towards their initial objective. They moved up the road speedily but stealthily. They came across nobody and saw no activity - which was kind of expected for approaching one in the morning. At the top of the small hill, they found a deserted car park - at least it was deserted of cars. Off to one side were a pair of green 40-foot cargo containers labelled up as belonging to the local authority. *Crimson* and *Drift* each walked up to a container and after confirming that the discrete

anti-tamper seals were still in place, they each unlocked a large steel padlock with a code before unlatching both main doors. Inside the two containers resided their transport for the evening - a pair of Jackal 2 armoured assault vehicles in deep green camouflage paint.

It was a tight squeeze, but Crimson and Drift wormed themselves behind the wheels and they started the 6.7-litre diesel engine before edging the 7-tonne vehicle out of the container. They stopped outside, and the weapons were mounted: an L111A1 M2 Browning in the turret ring with a box of ammunition and in the bow, in front of the navigator in the left-hand seat, the ubiquitous L37A2 General Purpose Machine Gun IN 7.62-millimetre calibre. In the first vehicle, Crimson took the wheel with Prowl beside her on the GPMG. Behind, Nemesis took control of the M2 Browning in the turret ring leaving Ajax and Glide to strap into the passenger seating behind the turret ring. In the second vehicle, Drift drive with Stripe beside him on the GPMG while La Coccinelle took the M2 Browning in the turret ring. That just left Harrier and La Terreur to strap into the pair of passenger seats.

With a dull roar, the two armoured vehicles departed the car park and they headed east without lights, relying on their NVG systems to see through the darkness.

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### **Point Bravo**

**Cavalier One-Three: Sleuth, Jack Foster, Debbie Grey, Q, Rigour**

**Cavalier Two-Three: Sergeant Martin, Lance Corporal Nicol, Marine Scott, Marine Howe**

The Merlin HC4, callsign: *Twister*, came in low a bare dozen-feet over the white-tipped waves of Frenchman's Bay before passing to the south of Little Castle Point and sweeping up and over the steep cliffs.

The large triple-engine flying machine touched down a little under six-hundred yards to the southwest of their initial objective to avoid nearby homes. The two teams were countered off by the loadmaster as they ran down the rear ramp and then dropping after twenty feet, their SIG Sauer and L119 Colt Canada C8 assault rifles raised while NVG goggles scanned for any sign of movement beyond the rapidly departing helicopter whose downdraft buffeted the kneeling troops.

As the Royal Navy Merlin HC.4 pivoted and headed back out to sea, the four Royal Marines and the five *Vengeance* members moved off on a heading of 43-degrees keen to leave the barren cliffs and the high winds behind them. They kept to the northwest to avoid the main road and several houses which sat on that road. It was only a short jog to their initial objective where another pair of containers awaited them. However, there was but a single Jackal 2 available. Instead of a second Jackal 2, a Coyote Tactical Support Vehicle occupied the second container. The Coyote was identical to the Jackal 2 in every way except for the third axle to the rear of the vehicle and the extended load bay. The load bay was occupied by a small container filled with electronic equipment to which Q immediately set to work connecting his laptop. Sleuth took the wheel of the Coyote with Jack Foster in the navigator's seat beside him and Debbie Grey took the M2 Browning in the turret ring. Rigour joined Q, strapping into the two passenger seats in the rear.

The four Royals mounted up on the Jackal 2 and both vehicles exited the car park, turning left and heading north towards Target One.

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## **Point Charlie**

**Cavalier Two-One: Captain McFadden, Corporal Morgan, Marine Lawson, Marine Thornton**

**Cavalier Two-Two: Corporal Franklin, Marine Freeman, Marine Angus, Marine Coleman**

The Merlin, callsign: Vortex, settled into the moist grass in the field a dozen yards from a pair of steel cargo containers.

Once the helicopter had departed, the area was cleared, and the containers checked before the pair of Jackal 2 armoured assault vehicles were removed and prepared for the impending attack. The two Jackal 2s headed southwest across the fields, avoiding the roads. That was no problem for the off-road vehicle which could maintain almost fifty-miles-per-hour over rough terrain.

Considering that the vehicles had been designed for the harsh mountains and unforgiving terrain of Afghanistan, Wales was child's play.

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**02:20**

**120 Miles to the southeast**

**RNAS Yeovilton**

**Yeovil, England**

"Lieutenant?"

Lieutenant Keira Sharp turned from the chart table to find a naval rating standing at attention.

"Yes."

"All ground forces are safely on the ground and moving to their attack positions, ma'am."

"Thank you, sailor."

Keira breathed a sigh of relief. The wait for information had been intolerable but Keira had been busy preparing for the forthcoming action and that had kept her attention away from her friends who were stepping into danger. She too would be following once the Cavalier Flight was loaded and ready. She had not seen the flight line at Yeovilton so busy in a long time. Upwards of twenty helicopters were arrayed on the tarmac in various stages of armament. It was an interesting mix too. *Cavalier Three-One: TWILIGHT*, was receiving the last of her armament, a second AGM-114 Hellfire missile on the starboard weapons pylon to join the first. On the port weapons pylon, the Agusta-Westland AW109LUH attack helicopter carried her usual 12.7-millimetre machine-gun pod with three 70-millimetre armour-piercing rockets. A few yards away, *Cavalier Three-Two: SCOURGE*, was being loaded with a pair of Hellfire missiles to starboard with an M134D minigun and M260 seven-round rocket launcher to port. Behind *SCOURGE* and *TWILIGHT*, four Army Air Corps No.661 Squadron Agusta-Westland Wildcat AH1 helicopters were being fitted with their own four AGM-114 Hellfire missiles and pintle-mounted M3M Browning .50-calibre machine-guns. Six Army Air Corps No.653 Squadron Agusta-Westland Apache AH1 attack helicopters were ready for action, each armed with eight Hellfire missiles and a pair of rocket pods, plus their standard M230 30-millimetre chain gun.

Beyond the armed helicopters, six Royal Navy 846 Naval Air Squadron Merlin HC3 helicopters were being configured for casualty evacuation and battlefield support. They were soon joined by the trio of Merlin HC4 helicopters returning

from their successful insertion mission. They were rapidly refuelled and prepared for the next phase of the operation. Chief was busy checking the two helicopters under his command but also liaising with the various squadrons - some of whom he used to work with when in the service, so he knew how things worked. The Naval Air Station was filled with a purpose and every part of the facility had thrown open its doors to assist in the preparation - nobody was sleeping, and every helicopter was being checked and rechecked prior to launch in around three hours' time.

Keira went back to her attack planning with Trevor and Adrien.

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*"Forward, the Light Brigade!"  
Was there a man dismayed?  
Not though the soldier knew  
Someone had blundered.  
Theirs not to make reply,  
Theirs not to reason why,  
Theirs but to do and die.  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.*

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**03:00**

***The Radford Group HQ  
Radford Air Facility***

***South Wales***

Sebastian Radford was in a decidedly moderate mood.

Surprising, considering he was only hours away from being overrun by the armed forces of the United Kingdom. Yes, he knew what was going on. His informants had kept him fully informed about what was going on in London. There was still a slim chance that everything would come to a grinding halt and the Government would fall. Thanks to a minister still on his payroll, the attack on his facility may never happen - or at least, it would go so badly wrong that the operation would be stopped. Right at that moment, he knew that there were half a dozen reconnaissance units arrayed around the airfield and he knew that they would be targeting his own home, a mile to the south.

"Sir, they're about to cross the threshold."

"Okay," Radford directed. "Take them out - let's put an end to this."

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**03:34**

***Cavalier One-One: Crimson, Nemesis, Glide, Prowl, Ajax***

***Northwest corner of the Radford Air Facility***

It was Ajax's keen eyes which first saw the flash as the FGM-148 javelin anti-tank-missile as the weapon tore through the air at well over 500 miles-per-hour.

There were just seconds to react as Crimson floored the accelerator and Glide threw a flare out the rear of the vehicle while Prowl triggered off four of the vehicles sixteen smoke grenade launchers. The vehicle accelerated forwards leaving the infra-red-guided missile to home in on the red-hot flare. The 8.4-

kilogramme shaped charge detonated as the missile struck the ground and exploded into a large fireball a dozen yards behind the fleeing Jackal 2.

"I think somebody knows we're here," Nemesis commented unnecessarily.

"No fucking shit, Sherlock!" Ajax exclaimed.

The thirteen-year-old had been feeling a little frightened by where she was and what she was doing but being attacked by a missile had scared her badly. She grasped her bucking seat as the vehicle bounced over the varied terrain, racing southeast to attack their primary target at the northern end of the airfield from the south. Considering that they had just been attacked, stealth was no longer a factor as they drove across the runways and taxiways, ignoring rights of way, and smashing through fences and gates. Prowl depressed the triggers of the GPMG mounted before her as a pair of Wolf Land Rovers crossed their path, spitting fire from their own mounted weaponry. Bullets pinged off the armoured sides of the Jackal 2 as one of the Wolves crashed off to one side as Prowl found her target and she killed the driver. The other Wolf crashed into a concrete structure and exploded as Nemesis drilled the vehicle with .50-calibre rounds from her L111A1 Browning.

Disconcertingly, gunfire could be heard coming from the northeast and the southeast of the airfield, indicating that the other *Cavalier* groups were also under attack.

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### ***Cavalier One-Two: Drift, Stripe, Harrier, La Coccinelle, La Terreur***

Drift drove after the other Jackal 2 in support with Stripe and La Coccinelle pouring lethal gunfire in any direction there was trouble.

That bastard Radford, he appeared to have lots of men and lots of armed vehicles. Many were Army vehicles which were in for repairs. They were well-armoured and resistant to their lighter weapons. However, they could not stand up to the heavier rounds of the M2 Browning, nor the grenades which Harrier lobbed in the general direction of the inbound vehicles. The eleven-year-old whooped with joy when he managed a hit on a Wolf Land Rover, destroying the engine and allowing La Coccinelle to riddle the vehicle with .50-calibre rounds. After a brief dash, they found themselves at the maintenance hangers and that was when things *really* started to go very wrong.

"Is that a fucking Scimitar!" Drift exclaimed as a tracked vehicle hove into view from around one of the hangers.

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**03:53**

### ***RNAS Yeovilton***

The news that the ground forces had come under attack had not been welcome.

There was fury amongst the pilots and the desire to get airborne and provide air support to those in danger on the ground. But then had come a 'hold' from COBRA.

"What the fuck!?" Scorpion had exploded on hearing the news.

Her sentiments were not alone. The other pilots were very angry at the news and the bad-mouthing only got worse when it was understood that the amphibious force was, even then, circling in the St George's Channel to kill time until

they were given the go-ahead to steam into the Dale Roads and assault the beach at Dale.

Twenty-seven lives were at risk, twenty-seven lives rode on the decision making of the politicians on COBRA, hundreds of miles away in London.

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**03:56**

#### ***Radford Group HQ***

***Cavalier Two-One: Captain McFadden, Corporal Morgan, Marine Lawson, Marine Thornton***

***Cavalier Two-Two: Corporal Franklin, Marine Freeman, Marine Angus, Marine Coleman***

Captain McFadden was furious.

The enemy had been seriously underestimated and COBRA was delaying the main assault. Her people were being put at risk – worse, the lives of children forced into a life of killing were also being put at risk. Her Royals knew what they had signed up for and they were a 100% volunteer force, unlike many of those who formed *Vengeance*. She and her men were fighting for their lives as they smashed through the main gates, coming under immediate fire from the men guarding the facility – who were not supposed to be armed in the first place – to whom the Royals responded with their own weapons, Marine Lawson put a grenade from his under-barrel grenade launcher into the gatehouse as they passed and the wooden shack exploded into splinters, putting down several armed men.

The pair of Jackal 2s sped onwards directly towards the headquarters buildings, spouting fire from their combined weapons. The incoming gunfire was furious, but every Royal was a combat veteran and while they did not enjoy being fired upon, they were able to tolerate the plinking and the pounding on the armour which protected them. They approached the largest building which bore the Radford name above the door. The gunfire grew fierce from several directions as they sought cover amongst the buildings.

"This is a fine pickle and no mistake," the captain commented as she threw a grenade off to the left side.

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#### ***Approaching Target One***

***Cavalier One-Three: Sleuth, Jack Foster, Debbie Grey, Q, Rigour***

***Cavalier Two-Three: Sergeant Martin, Lance Corporal Nicol, Marine Scott, Marine Howe***

As *Cavalier Two-Three* approached Dale Castle, they received the news that things were not going well at the airfield.

As a result, they abandoned their primary target as their colleagues needed assistance. The operation was coming apart and they desperately needed support but as far as Q could tell, nothing was coming. They had been hung out to dry by Whitehall and they were very much alone. However, the Reaper MQ9A drones had arrived as promised, albeit an hour late and there had been communication issues between their base at RAF Waddington and the teams in the ground. As such, valuable reconnaissance data had been unavailable to the ground teams – information which might have prevented their ambush.

However, the images being relayed were not good as they saw their comrades being encircled less than a mile away.

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**04:34**

***Aircraft & Weapons Storage  
Radford Air Facility***

The fifteen *Vengeance vigilantes* and the twelve Royal Marines of 42 Commando Reconnaissance Troop were in defensive positions between two of the giant aircraft hangers. Royal Marines had taken up positions on the roofs and the Jackal 2s were blocking the area in between the aircraft hangers with the Coyote behind the Jackal 2s. They faced off against close on sixty enemy, not to mention the eight armoured vehicles: Four FV107 Scimitar Mk II light tanks, a pair of Husky's, a Foxhound, and a Ridgeback 4x4.

There were numerous injuries - nothing fatal, or even serious - but morale was still high; they just prayed that COBRA came to a decision and fast. The various burning vehicles scattered around the airfield attested to the ferocity of their defence. Several Wolf Land Rovers and a pair of Husky's were burning furiously. The Husky's had been dispatched by a pair of well-aimed 84-millimetre AT4 anti-tank weapons. For the moment, there was a stalemate as the Royals were giving as good as they got, and Radford was losing men and equipment which he could not easily replace. Therefore, Radford had ordered his men to cease fire and corral the attackers - they were going nowhere, he figured, and he hoped that within the hour, a total stand-down would be ordered from Whitehall and the whole sordid affair would all end with him a winner.

Drift, as the commander of *Vengeance*, had discussed the situation with the Royal Marines Captain and they had both come to the very same decision. Nobody was surrendering; the stakes were too high.

Radford was going down - no matter what.

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**05:30**

The man himself appeared from his bunker.

He came out in a Panther armoured command vehicle but stopped within his own lines where his own people could protect him. He grabbed up a megaphone and he began to speak, his voice echoing across the facility with its bright arc lights mired by the thick black smoke from the burning vehicles.

"*Vengeance*, you have fought gallantly. Worthy of recognition. Now, it is finished. Surrender, and your lives will be spared."

Drift looked toward Captain McFadden who nodded for him to respond.

"We will not be hostages to be bartered, Radford!" Drift yelled back in his electronically enhanced voice.

"Come now, I'm sure we can be reasonable," Radford responded.

"I don't damn well think so!" Crimson yelled back.

"Play for time," Q called out from the Coyote.

Crimson tipped her head quizzically, then Q grinned and she knew what was coming.

"I'll make you a deal, Radford," Drift called out. "You hand yourself over to rot in a cell for the rest of your miserable life and we'll come quietly."

Laughter was heard coming from Radford.

"I will never see the inside of a prison cell - however, you might. You have no way out of here . . . alive. The Royal Marines in there are professionals and they must see the hopelessness of their situation. I have no desire to spill blood unnecessarily, especially not the blood of our brave warriors."

Crimson had had enough the bastard's pontificating and so had the Royals. Q nodded, and Crimson climbed up onto the eastern-most warehouse. She gazed to the east where dawn was breaking, and the first rays of the new day were illuminating the sea and the surrounding hills. Crimson grinned at the sight before her. She turned in the direction of Radford.

"Hey, you dumb bastard!" she yelled before she raised her right hand and she pointed out to sea.

Radford was very pleased with himself, however, the bastard appeared momentarily confused by Crimson's antics until he followed her signal and he directed his vision out to sea.

The man blanched as he recognised the immense naval and military firepower which was about to be brought to bear on him and his position.

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Squatting down at anchor, a mile out to sea, the Royal Navy assault ship, HMS Bulwark, became visible as the stiff wind blew away the early morning mists.

The 20,000-tonne vessel was flooded down at the stern, her massive internal dock flooded down to allow her to deploy her landing craft. Beyond the assault ship, a deadly Type 23 frigate provided escort, her Wildcat helicopter lifting off from the flight deck at the stern of the warship. Further out to sea, the unmistakable shape of a nine-thousand-tonne Type 45 destroyer was visible as it scanned the area for air-threats with its long-range air-surveillance radar and providing air-traffic control for the entire area and directing civilian traffic away from the combat zone. Between the assault ship and the shore, eight landing craft belonging to 4 Assault Squadron Royal Marines and a myriad of smaller shapes moved towards the shore. Two of the 240-tonne Landing Craft Utility (LCU) Mk10 vessels were heavily laden and just reaching the beach. As they beached, the ramps came down and two fearsome beasts roared off the vessels and onto the beach before turning in the direction of the main battlefield, their turret-mounted guns eagerly searching for targets. The other pair of large LCUs dropped their ramps onto the beach to divulge two angry-looking, tracked armoured vehicles each. The four Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel (LCVP) Mk5 vessels all hit the beach and dropped their own ramps, each divulging an articulated tracked vehicle.

Of the smaller craft, ten were the Royal Marine Offshore Raiding Craft, each carrying eight Royal Marine Commandos. The remaining pair were 3 Commando Brigade, Viking tracked assault vehicles of the Royal Marines Armoured Support Group which were 'swimming' ashore from the assault ship while their four colleagues landed 'feet-dry' from the LCVPs.

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*Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,  
Cannon in front of them  
Volleyed and thundered;*

Stormed at with shot and shell,  
Boldly they rode and well,  
Into the jaws of Death,  
Into the mouth of hell  
Rode the six hundred.