

PACIFIC WARRIOR

by

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The gentle whirring of jet turbines fades in to a black screen. In the blind belly of this C-17, all anyone hears for conversation is a whisper.

Click. A set of quad-tube night vision goggles turns on, turning blackness into a green panoramic glow. LIAM and his colleagues emerge, packaged in their HALO gear and sling chairs along the sides of the aircraft. The cargo section is occupied; a loadmaster triple-checks the ATV's and motorcycles in their stealth enclosures, and a bunch of netted equipment pallets carrying angry-looking black cases rest further up the deck.

Liam, our window into this black mission, turns next to him. ARMIE's IR-activated American flag patch flashes patriotic. The Australian doesn't care; he salutes his own flag first, just like everyone else on this aircraft. The Americans are just observers here, even if they get to shoot to kill.

"Two minutes." The crystal-clear call over the headsets is a shock after eight hours of silence in the air. The team gets up and gets ready.

The cargo door at the rear of this airborne machine opens into the void of night. The sounds of silence fill the air; a wordless repeat of the thousands of jumps that came before for these men.

"Go." The cargo slides off the ramp and out of the aircraft. The operators take turns taking running dives into the black hole. The bigger egos look like swans; everyone who has to put up with them just takes care of business as usual.

The strangely comfortable turbine roar gives way to a quietude of rushing air. Armie flashes a thumbs-up, and under his mask he's definitely smiling. Smiles and wry laughs don't make it into the comms, but if they did then Armie's partner would return the salute.

Liam takes a look down. Cloud cover at five thousand means no room for error on this mission into Hoeryong, North Korea; China and Russia don't normally let Australian warplanes in, and the paperwork on a deniable multilateral mission would take longer than actually escaping from a Chinese prison. Hell, they look the same as the gulag from the air.

Solemn guitar power chords amp up the team for this mission. They fall through the clouds, and clouds fill the screen.

OPENING CREDITS ROLL

The men break through the cloud cover and pull their chutes. This may be a HALO drop, but the planners said that drifting a mile or two in from China wasn't out of the question. Of course, they weren't the ones jumping; typical Army rear-bringers. They also said G.I. Jane couldn't go on this mission, but there were good enough reasons for that decision.

Rushing air gives way to the dead of night as the men drift toward their target: the Hoeryong gulag. Even in high definition night vision, it looks more like a boy scout camp than an example of a dictator's whims.

Soft landings and a check-in three clicks North of the facility confirm that everyone made it. With the equipment waiting a mile away near the Chinese border and only a stealth drone watching the sky, this is a walk-in mission and a walk-out march. Two VIP's worth the lives and freedom of a dozen operators must be Very Important after all. And so the quiet laughs and wry smiles are gone.

WHIT takes point and the team hoofs it to the hills overlooking the prison. Drone intel shows no thermal signatures in the area, so the North Koreans aren't expecting anything tonight. Just another day of hard labor for the inmates, and easy watching for the guards. That's about to change.

Cut to a thermal imaging view from the drone overhead. It's on someone's monitor back at the base. Where the base is, no one really needs to know. But everyone knows what to do. For now, the support group stands around, tenser than ever. They're a mix of Australians and Americans, each with his or her own take on pride. For the Australians, it's the winged sword and "Who Dares Wins." For the Americans, it's a triangular lightning bolt.

Back on the ground, the men flash occasional hand signals to each other, which are somewhat redundant given that they're so highly trained they can read each other's minds.

Liam's heads-up-display shows a forest of EMF and visual dead zones that the team will be walking through to avoid detection. To anyone watching, they'll look like a roving patrol of North Koreans, at least from a distance. Up close and personal, all anyone will see is a suppressed muzzle flash followed by permanent darkness.

The team reaches the exterior fence. Armie takes out what looks like a spray bottle of 409. He applies it to the fence in a door-sized rectangle. The men wait a few moments for the acid to eat through the metal, and one of them takes out a pair of snips to finish the job.

At the base, the drone's thermal view shows a dozen operators casually walking through what looks like a minefield. With electromagnetic fields and pressure zones of the mines tagged and visualized on everyone's HUDs, it isn't too hard. The main danger is actually coming across a random K-9 unit; scent suppression only works so well, after all.

"Patrol at your 10 o'clock, 600 meters, bearing 180." says an analyst. One of the drone's cameras zooms in and shows two North Koreans with AK-47s. They're walking down a road bordering the minefield and pose only a moderate danger. With patrol patterns calculated in a multivariate regression analysis over a weeks-long period, the planners caught practically all enemy activity. But not all.

Cut back to the team. They're approaching a long building that looks more like a chicken hatchery than a prison. Its corrugated metal siding glints in night vision despite the moonless, cloud-covered night.

Silence as the men approach the building. The North Koreans don't bother with guards in every cell block; after all, once the prisoners are locked in and the cameras turned on, there's nothing else to do.

Whit pulls out a lock picking kit and expertly opens the giant padlock securing the door to the cell block. He carefully slides it out, and the men are in.

As the team enters the cell block, the only sounds are the breathing (and snoring) of dead-tired laborers catching what little sleep they can before another day in Hell.

The men move carefully from cell to cell in a methodical search for the VIPs. With no way to reach them before the mission, it would be just as dangerous to wake the VIPs up as any other prisoners.

Whit signals-- VIP one located. Liam signals-- VIP two located. Next comes the dangerous process of waking them up without waking anyone else up.

Armie pulls out his spray bottle again and goes to work on the bars. Another operator pulls out a wire saw and follows up the acid with a slow, arduous rasping of the bars. At least it sounds like snoring instead of sawing.

Suddenly, the prisoner in the next cell over wakes up. Everyone freezes.

He turns around and is shocked to see an Australian pointing a suppressed 1911 at him.

PFFFT! Lights out.

Silence.

The men finish opening the VIPs' cells and wake them. They're haggard and run down, but alive. Time to go.

The team is quietly leaving the building when suddenly...A BLARING HORN! FLASHING LIGHTS! Searchlights! Barking dogs! The gulag goes from sleepy scout camp to Tier One nightmare in a heartbeat.

The operators take off the way they came in and do their best to hustle the VIPs to safety. Cut to the North Koreans, pouring out of their barracks with bleary eyes and reckless trigger fingers. They jump on troop carriers and take off toward the building the team was in. A series of shots shows the North Korean control room and surveillance camera operators excitedly calling the action.

Cut back to the operators, now nearing the minefield. The North Koreans open fire from their trucks, just hoping for lucky shots.

And some of them get lucky. Whit takes a round to the helmet and gets knocked out, lucky to be alive. Another operator is hit in the legs and falls down, immobile. The unit grinds to a halt and returns fire. Someone sets up a machine gun and another takes out a truck with an anti-tank missile. The comms come alive.

"Alpha One, you've got to keep moving."

"Negative, two men down. We're not leaving them."

"Someone's gonna have to stay behind."

"Roger."

A series of shots showing chaotic small unit battle scenes and smash cuts to/from the drone view overhead. Liam, the senior officer after Whit, crawls over to Armie.

"All right mate, you wanna do this?"

"Now or never, man. DO IT!"

Liam signals the others to clear out. They set up a couple of stretchers and carry out Whit and the other wounded man. Armie and Liam, a pair of friends, remain. After a few seconds, they do what no one expects-- they ATTACK the North Koreans. It's suicide, but the consensus is that death by AK-47 is better than death by torture and hard labor.

Armie dual-wields a GPMG and someone else's SAW. Liam takes out another troop carrier with a LAW and snipes the remnants. The two men advance on the North Korean positions and draw fire away from the rest of the team.

But Liam and Armie can't hold out forever. More troop carriers and more North Koreans keep coming. Liam looks over his shoulder; the rest of the team is gone. Armie's GPMG barrel glows red from all the rounds, and the night vision goggles flash dazzling fields of tracers over his and Liam's position. They stay in place and keep fighting prone. Soon they're back to back, brother to brother. A grenade lands nearby.

BOOM! Blackness envelops the men.

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Armie hangs upside down in a North Korean torture chamber, unconscious. A hand and bucket appear and pour water over his face. He wakes up.

"Gwihau i leumgwa dan-wineun mueos-inga?" (What is your name and unit?)

"Fuck you."

Armie gets pistol-whipped. His neck and face bear fresh wounds from shrapnel.

"Chinguga jug-eoss-eoyo." (Your friend is dead.)

His face turns ashen at the news. Armie knows Korean, and somehow they know this or have guessed. In any event, a North Korean officer enters and speaks accented English to him.

"What is the last thing you remember before waking up here?" Seems harmless enough.

"Fuck you."

The officer just laughs. "Typical American bravado. You are nothing here, and will soon learn that we have ways of making you talk."

The officer strolls around the room at his own pace, talking to Armie. "We were able to take out most of the fragments from your body. You were in a coma for three days after your raid, and you woke up briefly yesterday. You told us your name, rank, unit, where you are from, how long you have been in Delta, who your training cadre was, what your partner's name was, and basically everything else we needed

to know. We should put more people in comas. I regret to inform you that Liam, your partner, was not as lucky as you. He's dead."

"Fuck you."

"I'm embarrassed for you that you feel that way. As you know, no one is coming back to rescue you, so it would be in your best interest if you simply cooperated with us. It may take time, I realize."

"Fuck you."

Sigh. "As I said, it may take time. And here in North Korea, you will find, we have all the time in the world."

The officer leaves the room and Armie gets pistol-whipped again, this time getting knocked unconscious.

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Fade in on a waterboarding session. Liam, very much alive, lies on an operating table with a wet towel wrapped around his head and several guards around him. They waterboard him repeatedly.

The same North Korean officer walks in and signals the guards that he's ready to talk to the prisoner.

"G'day, mate! Ha ha ha." The guards laugh. The officer does a repeat of the earlier session with Armie. "Your friend is dead. You were in a coma for three days from the shrapnel, most of which we were able to remove. You woke up briefly yesterday and told us a lot. So I'm here today to follow up on a few things."

"Hemsworth, Liam. Australian. Captain."

"Yes, we know who you are. You are an Australian SAS officer who was part of a rescue mission to retrieve two downed U-2 pilots from our...facility. Your mission failed and two of you were left behind. The rest were captured trying to cross into China. What I don't understand is how you and your team expected to get away, but that is for another day. For now I have some questions for you."

"Hemsworth, Liam. Australian. Captain." The words echo from being repeated so many times.

Fade out as the interrogation continues.

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A montage of a "day in the life" of a re-education camp

prisoner follows, seen through Armie's eyes. Wake before dawn. Walk to tool shed and get tools. Walk to mine. Start mining. Spend all day mining. Break for crackers and soup. Return tools. Return to cell block. Pass out at midnight. Some prisoners don't wake up.

One day, Liam and Armie see each other at a distance. They each flash a thumbs up at the other. The guards see this and inform their superiors that the prisoners have seen each other.

That evening, the two men are brought into the same torture chamber. Instead of torture, the guards make them play Russian roulette against each other. Although the round is a dummy round, this isn't known to the prisoners, so the tension is real.

At that point Liam is offered a choice: either waterboard Armie or be executed. Armie tells him to do it. Liam does it. This continues day after day for a long time.

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Eventually, the men are released in a prisoner exchange. They each return to their respective countries and are debriefed at length.

Armie goes on with his life. Liam, on the other hand, is haunted by his actions. This is amplified when he is court-martialed for violating Australian law-- torturing another P.O.W. is illegal.

A trial takes place. Liam is convicted of torture and sentenced to ten years in prison. The film concludes with scenes of Liam in an Australian prison, which ends up being not much different from his confinement in North Korea.