

# THE QUARRY

## Do You Copy, Over?

**Richard Duong**

Stationed in an Iraqi city, our PMC, Grey Ghost Company, had just received an emergency call from our client, Fadhil, a weapons and rations supplier for the militia. His warehouse was being attacked by the insurgents when contact from him was suddenly cut off. Mike and I were first out in our armoured SUV. REBEL Team, our CAT, needed time to finish up maintenance on the hate truck.

I don't particularly like the guy. He reminds me of those damn politicians, like the mayor who criticised my SWAT team back in the States. Had to leave because of him. The Captain was kind enough to let me resign to keep my record clean though. But I know Fadhil cares about his family, even his guards. I don't want to see him dead.

We are now almost at his warehouse. Our mission: find and protect him. If possible, secure the area. If not, extract him. We've been paid good money, and he's helping out the militia, which takes the heat off of us and the military. If he dies, our reputation will go down, and clients will look for another PMC. Everyone in Grey Ghost has taken care of me since I arrived half a year ago. I won't let them down.

Hands firm on the steering wheel, I take a hard right onto the road leading to the warehouse two-hundred yards ahead. I scan around for any signs of the insurgents—

situational awareness is key. The area around the warehouse is empty—a bad sign. They might still be there, and they may be setting up an ambush.

Without our CAT, Mike and I are just two guys with small arms. We won't be able to do much if there are too many of them, or if they've brought armoured vehicles, but we can still scout and take out several of the insurgents before REBEL team arrives.

'You ready Mike?'

'Yeah man, I'm ready.'

I look over at him. He pulls back the charging handle on his rifle, selector on burst-fire.

Eyes back on the road, 'Keep your eyes out for IEDs,' I say and slow down before the T-intersection.

'Got it.'

One set of eyes is never enough. If I end up missing a potential IED, the next guy might be able to pick up on it.

Eyes peeled, I take the left turn.

'REBEL, this is CARRIER-THREE. We've arrived at the warehouse, over,' Mike says.

I stop the car just before the entrance. The gate's open. I look around, eyes on the houses in the area. The entire place is deserted, and no cameraman means one thing.

Good, no ambush.

I shut down the engine and take the keys. We step out of the car and dart to the stone pillars on either side of the gate.

'REBEL, this is CARRIER-THREE. We're here, over,' he says again.

—I look at him and ask, 'It ain't going through?'

'I dunno man.'

'Have you charged it?'

'I don't always forget to man,' he replies, and unhooks it, 'Look, it's still on.'

The screen looks fine. It might be malfunctioning.

'Okay, get it checked later,' I say and clutch mine, 'REBEL, this is CARRIER-TWO. We're at the warehouse. Do you copy, over?'

—There are five members in REBEL team, so they shouldn't be taking this long to respond.

Might be a jammer.

'Was there anything on the INTSUM this morning?' I ask, 'I don't remember there being anything about the military in the area.'

'Yeah, there was nothing about military, man.'

The insurgents are probably responsible. I try the monitor switch—static. I take out my cell phone and check the bars—no signal.

'Fuck, it's a jammer.' I say, 'REBEL team'll be here soon. We'll just scout for now.'

'Got it.'

Up ahead, several feet away, is the security booth—small, white, able to fit two people at most. Beyond it is an alleyway leading to the back. To the left of that is the warehouse, L-shaped, five-thousand square feet, walls made of corrugated iron sheets. We have the floor plan, even visited a few times, so unless someone used explosives to level some areas, we know our way around.

There are two rows of shelves, running along the side and back of it, usually filled to the brim with supply crates. The cafeteria is at the back, next to a fenced-off area, chain-link, where Fadhil keeps his two German shepherds. His office is right in front of us. A part of the warehouse, its windows face parallel to our position, but its blinds are down. To the left of the office and jutting out is the loading dock. He'd said that he was in the office, so that's where we're heading.

'Jack, dock's open.'

I lean right. The metal shutters are up and inside are two white pickup trucks, facing away from one another.

Assuming that the two trucks belong to the insurgents, that's somewhere between four to six guys, maybe more if they were riding on the back.

Fucking insane religious radicals leading a bunch of kids and stupid adults to war, putting civilians at risk and killing anyone who goes against them. They're poor, and they're pissed, so you've gotta feel sorry for some of them, but that doesn't excuse their actions. They've violated and denied the rights of others to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,

and they'll pay for doing so. We as contractors will do what we have to, not only to protect ourselves but also the civilians of this country.

'I think I see the jammer. Back of the pickup on the left, black, several antennas,' he says, 'Use your optics.'

'Roger.'

I look down my sight and there it is. A large black box, with several antennas sticking up from it. Maybe two or three times larger than the ones I operated back in SWAT, which were a little bigger than a backpack. It probably doesn't do jack to the military's comms, but it's bad for ours.

'Okay, no insurgents outside,' I say, 'We'll close the perimeter around the warehouse so our CAT can safely come in and support us. I'll keep eyes on the loading dock while we're moving. You need to clear the security booth and keep eyes on the alleyway. Once we're there, hold that corner on the right. I'll keep eyes on the front entrance and check if he's still in his office. Sound good?'

'Sounds good, man.'

'Okay, let's go. On three. One, two—'

We move quickly toward the warehouse, rifles to the ready. I watch for any movement from the loading dock, leaving my six to Mike. My life is in hands, and his in mine.

'Clear!' he shouts, 'There's a dead guard. Anyone in the loading dock?'

'No movement.'

That's one of Fadhil's guards down. He has more, but there are only five here at any given time. He calls us whenever he needs to go somewhere. Since there's no-one here to greet us, and no gunfire, they're either holed up somewhere, or dead.

'Securing the alleyway,' Mike says.

'Roger.'

Keeping my reticle on the front entrance, I move forward, the office windows in my peripheral vision. Propping my rifle up, I knock twice on the nearest window.

‘Fadhil! You there?’ I shout.

——I bash on the window. If he’s in there, he should be able to hear us.

‘Fadhil! It’s Grey Ghost Company! If you’re there, tell us! We’re here to get you out!’

‘——He might be in the cafeteria, but I don’t hear his dogs.’ I say.

‘Who knows man. He might be dead.’

I sigh.

Chances of him being alive are slim. The insurgents aren’t all that well-trained, but give them enough chances and they’ll hit their target.

‘——Mike, we’re getting comms back up. Leave the alleyway.’

‘Got it.’

We need to secure the front, but, without comms, we can’t give REBEL team a SITREP. In war, information is vital. Situational updates may determine whether we live or die, succeed or fail.

He places his hand on my shoulder—ready to go. Keeping my eyes on the doorway, I move straight toward the left pickup truck.

‘Keep your eyes on my three,’ I say.

‘I’ve got eyes on it.’

We’re one man down. If Simon were still alive, and if we had a ballistics shield, I’d head right in and clear the entire compound. I’ve applied for one, but it hasn’t arrived yet. This was just really bad timing.

Inside the warehouse, apart from the areas lit up by the sunlight coming in through the loading dock, it’s dim, especially at the back. The only other source of sunlight comes from the opaque panels on the roof. The lights are all off, and you need a key to turn them on. Fadhil’s stingy when it comes to his electricity bill.

‘Lights on,’ I say.

‘Lights on.’

We both switch our rifle lights on. The insurgents have the advantage if they're watching us from the dark, but we can use strobes to blind them if they come out.

I look into the truck—clear—and then at the aisle beyond it. On the ground is an insurgent, clothed in black, rifle on his right arm, a white insignia on the keffiyeh around his lower head—'For His Glory' in Arabic.

'Dead guard near reception,' Mike says.

That's another one.

'Roger. I've got one EKIA down the aisle. There are probably five, maybe more in the area. Stay frosty.'

'I'm watching the back aisles.'

'Roger.'

I go around the front of the truck and look down the next two aisles. They're all clear. Taking the chance, I switch my laser on, lean left and look down the left-most aisle at the back. The cafeteria door is ajar, and on the ground are two more insurgents.

'I have eyes on two more EKIA just outside the cafeteria.'

'Got it.'

They can still be hiding nearby.

'I'll clear the aisles on this side. Then we can shut the jammer down.'

'I've got you covered.'

I continue down the length of the aisles, glancing right for movement near the cafeteria.

'Grey Ghost Company! Fadhil! You there!?'

—I reach the final aisle—all clear—turn my muzzle toward the aisles along the back and back away.

'Mike, cover me! I'm gonna shut down the jammer!'

'Got it, man!'

I look at the trunk. Once I get on, I'll be visible from the back. Who knows how many of them are in here.

Letting my rifle hang, I vault onto it.

Okay, where's the damn off switch.

I squat down and inspect the jammer. Large, cube-sized, black, a low buzz coming from the generator. Not as good as what the military uses, but still mil-spec as far as durability is concerned. There are several sliders on the front for picking frequency, and switches beside each of them, all on.

This looks heavy as fuck.

I flip each of them off.

'Okay, try—'

'I'VE GOT MOVEMENT! LA TTHRK!'

Mike orders them to stop moving in Arabic. I dive off the right side of the truck and roll, quickly get up and aim down the aisle, at the corner of the shelf nearest to the cafeteria door, cutting off their only exit.

'Where're they at!?'

'HE RAN RIGHT! HE RAN RIGHT! HE'S GOT A HANDGUN! I'VE GOT EYES ON THE AISLES! WATCH THE CORNER!'

'Roger!'

I rush forward to cut off the corner near reception, using the second pickup truck as cover. Resting my foregrip on the hood of the truck, I look down my optics.

'I'm in position! Mike! Find some cover! I'll contact REBEL!'

'GOT IT!'

I move the butt of my rifle over to my left shoulder so I can quickly engage the target, and clutch my radio.

'REBEL, be advised, we are inside the warehouse, loading dock, engaging a hostile! There may be more! When you get here, watch the alleyway! They may try to ambush you from there! Over!'

I bring my hand back on the grip of my rifle, finger off the trigger and ready to fire. Trigger discipline. It'll be a shitshow if Fadhil suddenly comes out.

*'CARRIER, this is REBEL-ONE! We are Oscar-Mike to your pos! Give us one-mike! We'll be coming in hot with the Brownie, over!'*

‘REBEL-ONE, roger, solid copy! CARRIER-TWO, out!’

Okay, they’re almost here. We just need to wait a little longer.

I glance at the cafeteria door, now hidden by the shelf. If I don’t keep an eye on it, insurgent reinforcements may come in, and we’ll be in trouble. The same goes for the alleyway on Mike’s side.

‘YAZHR! IN NAWDHIK!’ Mike shouts, urging the insurgent to surrender.

Quick footsteps echo toward us. He’s just beyond that corner.

‘YAZHR! IN NAWDHIK!’

We’ve given him the chance to surrender peacefully, so I’m not taking any chances. He doesn’t even need a second to get off several shots.

‘Mike, —’

‘—Wh—’

‘—if he’s still holding his gun, drop ‘im!’

‘Got it, got it!’

If you dare come out with a gun, I’ll pump you full of .308.

—Jammer’s off.

‘REBEL, call Fadhil and see if he’s okay! And get his location, over!’ I say.

*‘This is REBEL-THREE. I’ll give you a heads up when he’s on the line. REBEL-THREE, out.’*

We’ve almost got all the info we need. Once we know where he is, and if he’s alive, we can decide what to do next.

—The rumbling of an engine penetrates the warehouse’s thin walls.

‘CARRIER, we’re just outside! Fadhil’s on the line. —He says he’s hiding inside the kitchen. —He has three guards with him watching both exits. —There should be only one hostile left. —Young male, black shirt and tracksuit pants, black keffiyeh around his lower face. —He wants us to clear the compound, over.’

There are no more insurgents and he’s watching our blind spot. I can focus my attention on the remaining insurgent.



‘This is CARRIER-TWO! Watch the office’s windows! Tell Fadhil to stay put, over!’

——‘*This is REBEL-ONE! We’ve got movement in the office windows! —*’

‘——CUT ‘IM OFF! CUT ‘IM OFF!’ I shout.

We run toward the reception area. I lean left and keep my laser on the office’s open doorway, trapping the insurgent inside.

‘This is CARRIER-TWO! We’ve cut ‘im off! He’s inside the office! If he fires at you, light ‘im up! Over!’

*‘This is REBEL-ONE! Wilco, over!’*

The insurgent comes running out and brings his right arm up, gun in hand. Lasers on his upper torso, we pull our triggers. A red mist fills the air, red patches cover his face and chest—he drops. My heart races, a continuous rush of air comes in through my nose, my hands firm on my rifle, reticle on his body. If we’d missed, we could’ve died. But we didn’t.

‘——This is CARRIER-TWO. Tango down. Secure the perimeter, over.’