





THE DECLASSIFIED REPORT

INTRODUCTION

by Chris "Werecat" Chung

Welcome back, friends! We've been away a little longer than we would have liked, but we've been hard at work putting together our second newsletter with information you will not find anywhere else. At least not publically. I think you'll agree the wait was well worth it.

We're jammed packed with so much great information and photos, that I'm going to keep this intro quick to save time and space. But I would like to mention two things:

As you can see, this issue is in full color. All subsequent issues will also be. Issue #0 was intended to be in color, but due to last minute complications, we were only able to print a handful in color before we had to resort to black and white---or not have an issue to be handed out at the convention. While it was disappointing, we simply pushed past the problem and continued forward. For those who did not receive an issue in color, I apologize.

I would also like to thank Mike O'Sullivan for his contribution to this issue. For those who don't know, Mike was a writer and editor for Devil's Due Publishing, and was one of the leading architects behind the G.I. Joe comic's prior incarnation. He put forth a tremendous amount of time, effort, and emotional energy into his behind the scenes article into the development of the epic World War III storyline, and we at The Declassified Report appreciate the effort, and hope it was both rewarding and cathartic.

So without further ado. . .

Devil's Due

World War III: Behind the Scenes

By Mike O'Sullivan

Hey Joes --

I've been asked a few times to do a retrospective of the World War III saga we told in G.I. Joe comics a while back, and the time just never felt right. (I guess I was never ready to revisit it. I still miss working on the Joes!) But when Sam Damon asked me to do this for this newsletter, I felt ready. (It didn't hurt that he would have beaten me up if I said no!) I guess enough time had passed for me to be able to look back on the issues and not see the frustrating bits and memories, but to re-experience it with the excitement and love of a Joe fan again.

What follows are my memories the behind-the-scenes workings of the 13 issues that went into WWIII. None of this is sponsored by anyone at Devil's Due Publishing or Hasbro. This is just me, and only me, as a fan and the former editor of the book, sharing my thoughts of what happened and what could have been with other fans. Sort of like a DVD commentary.

There's SO much that could go into this. . . This story is my magnum opus for G.I. Joe (and the highlight of my career so far). I could go on and on and on about all the Easter eggs we threw in these pages, and all that went into each word and pencil line. But, I'll stick with the major beats (or the things I think are the most interesting) for now. Maybe someday you can stop me at a convention, we'll find a copy of the story and I'll tell you the rest.

Until then, here you go: a little inside view of how WWIII all came together.

Yo, Joe!

SPECIAL MISSIONS: THE ENEMY (The prologue to the war)

- Mark and Patti. Actually my parents, whose first date involved coffee and a piece of pie. (Hi Mom! Hi Dad!)

- The babies. In the original script, the event Rip It and Sky Creeper were protesting was the elimination of the babies in the nursery. The last panel of that page was the Cobras opening fire at the off-camera nursery. Of course, we were rightly told not to have that scene, and I agree with that decision. The end result is the same: Rip and Sky were executed for questioning orders. I was just trying to have the future Plague members be irredeemable in what they did from the very start. I agree that killing babies was too far. (It was kind of funny to see this very event happen later in the X-Men: Messiah Complex story over at Marvel.)

- The Plague. What a thrill to be involved in creating them! We wanted an anti-G.I. Joe team for Cobra, and Sam Damon suggested we look into the few already existing Plague characters. I liked the concept, but hated the designs of the figures that had been made. Body Bags and Bayonet had codenames and rough sketches from Hasbro, but they looked too similar to the first three. What we ultimately came up with for the comic looked nothing like what Hasbro had envisioned. I don't know anything else they had thought of beyond the names and visuals we opted not to go with. Everything else in their comics profiles was created by us. Munitia was another character Hasbro was considering for the Plague, so we ran with it. We just changed her look and fleshed out her profile. Vanguard was the only Plague member who was not initially affiliated with Cobra or any specific Cobra unit, and he was mainly a way to have an everyman view into the Plague, and Cobra in general. We also wanted to provide an example of how Cobra Commander recruited members. Vanguard was a perfect slate to do all of that. . .



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So, after getting over a few internal road bumps at DDP, we ultimately came up with the designs and characters that saw print. Someone at Hasbro even hinted at them being made into figures someday, so we opted to go with existing costume and weapon designs, but change them to black. That way, the toys would be fairly inexpensive to produce as the molds already exist (who knows if that will ever happen, but it was still a lot of fun to come up with them). Ultimately, I think the Plague didn't shine as much as I wanted them to, but that's sort of going to happen to villains in a book about heroes. With an underlying edict that the Joes have to win, there wasn't a way to really make the Plague triumphant. They were created to lose, basically. I still think the concept, designs, and the characters are bad ass, and wish we could tell more stories with them. (Comic writer Fabian Nicieza has said that his method of writing villains is to have them lose big the first time out, and then watch them come back meaner and angrier the second time around. That's where we would have gone with the Plague if we had more time/stories to tell.)



#25

- Cover Girl's fighting ability. We've never seen it happen on panel. It was time to show what she could do out of a tank, med center, or a kitchen.

- The team. At this point, we were able to bring some characters back to the team that fans (and I) had been clamoring for -- FINALLY! With only the noticeable absence of Lady Jaye, this grouping of Joes is my favorite. This is the team that I have always wanted to see in the book. Add Colton, Hawk, and Sparks, and to me, it's the pitch perfect roster.

#26

- Despite it being emblazoned on the cover to #25, and being approved for months before we started the story, it was decided by Hasbro that "World War III" couldn't be the title of the story, as it was too real and close to home for Americans watching the Afghanistan/Iraq conflicts. Luckily, the great folks at Hasbro compromised and allowed us to still use it as the title inside the books (and ultimately, the trade paperback compilation) as long as we removed it from the covers. While we would have liked to have it remain there, at least we didn't have to stop using it altogether.

- Agent Delta. He was going to be our everyman voice in the war and after; the character that you just didn't know who he played for, but that would give insight to readers to both the Joes and Cobra. Our version of the X-Men's Gambit, if you will. We wanted to have him be around for years, always in the shadows, always mysterious, always interesting.

- Scarlett's family. We wanted to have this moment with Scarlett's dad because at the end of #36, we intended on having a scene where a defeated Cobra Commander got his last strike in as he went down. Scarlett's family -- all martial artists -- were going to refuse protective custody, thinking they could take care of themselves. Cobra Commander's last act: he was going to have her whole family killed on screen so she could see it. We'd add some depth to her character as well as having Snake Eyes lose his father figure again. This would have then opened us up to all sorts of Scarlett stories -- her recovery, revenge, her being able to relate even more to Snake Eyes, who had no family left, etc. But with the title ending at #36, we had to scrap that idea. Anyway, that's why this scene was here -- to tie SE emotionally to Scarlett's dad, and to remind everyone of how close Scarlett and her father were.



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- Shipwreck and Cover Girl. We wanted to have an individual mission with these two, not only to bring in another romantic relationship to the pages (as Scarlett/Snake Eyes' relationship is pretty untouchable), but also to help remind people that Ship isn't just a sailor. He's a competent soldier, too. He's more than just a boat Joe, and this mission helps show that.

- Mr. Hauser's shirt. In the individual issue, you can see that it says "Greatful Dead" on it. That was supposed to be removed, but somehow the wrong file got printed, but was corrected in the trade paperback compilation.

- Skull Buster. He was going to end up being an archenemy of Cover Girl and Shipwreck due to their defeat of him this issue. We wanted to bring some specific rivalry back to the pages, and this was going to be one we would foster for a while.

- Cobra Commander. To me, this is CC at his finest: When we only get glimpses of him being Machiavellian and mysterious and evil. He's the ultimate bastard, plain and simple. He's only in this issue for one panel, and it's a pretty cool bet that's going to affect thousands of lives. In my opinion, that's how CC should be. (Not like he was in the cartoon!)

- The end. It was right around this issue that we learned that the book might not stay at DDP due to big changes at Hasbro with the live action movie being greenlit. When we also learned that we would only be able to finish the WWII story and that the entire continuity might be rebooted with the new direction, we realized we needed to change some of our plans (which are detailed here in this article). But I also took it upon myself as a personal mission to try to tie up any and every loose end in the continuity and bring it to a nice, solid closure by the end of the title. I scoured message boards, talked to Joe fans, re-read the entire Joe comic library (again!) to find any and every mystery/unresolved feud/unfinished business, etc., etc., etc., and worked my tail off to get them all into the book before the continuity ended. While I was pretty bummed to think about losing my work with the Joes, I also was extremely proud and excited. G.I. Joe #1 was my first comic book in 1982. I'd get to be the one to shepherd the end of the book 26 years later in 2008. Selfishly, I was glad it was me that got to be the one to do it. I hope I did it justice. . .

#28

- Oktober Guard. Another group we wanted to return to the title, and build up to some more stories after the War. We wanted to flesh out the new characters and make them sing. Unfortunately there was nothing more set in concrete beyond what you saw in the books. Things ended before we had a chance to daydream anything more for them, including Ruslan's back story. At least we got to have them here for a little bit.



Devil's Due

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- The map. G.I. Joe, as it should be. Out in the world, acting as democracy's defenders and protecting those that can't protect themselves. Being proactive. This map is something I'd envisioned since I was a kid playing with my Joe toys. Getting to actually make it, then print it in the book? A really cool moment for me.

#29

- Boston. While I think it would have been powerful to show the actual attack on the city, it's almost even stronger that we weren't allowed to. Leaving the devastation up to the reader's imagination provides opportunity for even more vivid imagery. Behind the scenes we never made a decision if it was a nuclear or conventional bombing. That was sort of moot, as we knew everything would be done off-panel anyway, so we didn't waste time or energy on that scenario. All the readers needed to know, was that it was devastation on a massive scale.

#30

- Xamot. The one dangling thread that we were never able to resolve. I liked that we put him in the coma in the Red Shadows storyline, as it brought Tomax forward in a real way. I just wish we could have found a way to end the coma, but we never were able to. We just ran out of time and were not able to extend his story out any more than what we wanted to accomplish with Tomax. At least we were able to have him play an important part as a bargaining chip in a few beats of the war. Even unconscious, he still impacted the story.

- The President. In the original outline that was approved, we were given permission to have Cobra Commander assassinate the President. What a moment that would have been! The most unbelievable, villainous accomplishment CC had ever achieved. But, without being able to play it out after the war, we knew we needed to shift thinking. Having CC drop the President in the Middle East and leave him there to fend for himself was poetic irony. I think it was a pretty cool moment, even without the impact of assassination.

#31

- Priest Lake, Idaho. This is actually a cabin where I spent a lot of time growing up. Probably one of my favorite places on the planet. When I knew we wanted an ultra-secret hideout for the Joes, this was perfect. Besides, seeing my family's cabin in print was an extra thrill.

- The Red Shadows. Call us stubborn. We really wanted a chance to make them viable and a third party in the struggle between Cobra and the Joes. The first story with them didn't sit so well with us, and we were really hoping for a chance to redeem them. This was a start. Bringing Eden back was the first step of what ended up not happening. No doubt many fans would be happy we didn't, but I still think there was potential there that wasn't able to be fulfilled in any of their stories. Ah, well. . . Best laid plans, and all that. We ended up just letting them fade out after Eden served her purpose as a foil for Storm Shadow and Destro. After that, we just let them return to the sidelines, plotting and scheming away. . .



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- The kill list. This was where we tied up loose ends. So many villains had been left in limbo over the years, that this was the most efficient way to either bring them back to the ranks of Cobra, or take them off the board permanently. Top of my list for elimination was Sei Tin. After a story I was personally against happening, I wanted to get the bad taste of this character out of my mouth so badly, and this seemed to be a good way of doing it. The others were also characters I either found irredeemable as characters or just pure lame. (Except for Monkeywrench. His inclusion was just a good way of getting Zartan and the Dreadnoks involved in the war.) Now readers could see why we had the Paine brothers, Biggles-Jones and others revealed as alive and in the Cobra medical facility back in SPECIAL MISSIONS: ANTARCTICA. I wanted there to be a more full list of cannon fodder when we finally were able to make it happen. That was a long-range goal!

- Wild Bill. We wanted him on the team for many reasons, not the least of which were for transportation and the sheer color he brings to the title. While planning out WWIII, and in one of my many talks with Sam Damon, he said that if he were a Cobra, he'd go for the weakest link of the Joes first. In his mind, that'd be Wild Bill. Even if they knew he was an L.R.R.P., they'd assume that he'd be rusty after spending so much time in a chopper. The Plague underestimated him by making him their focus. We thought it'd be cool to show a side to him we hadn't seen a whole lot before (his combat skills), as well as use him as a way to prove a point: the Joes are the best in the world, not just because of one aspect of their abilities. They're good all around. Wild Bill was a great tool to accomplish that.

- General Rey. We established that Rey was the long lost last clone of Serpentor, but had willingly rejected his programming, coming to cherish freedom and democracy, not the conquering he had performed in all of his various lives. However, this was to be the start of where we'd show that even the best intentions weren't enough. Without meaning to, he'd found his way back into a place of great power. He was going to help liberate the Middle East, rescue the President and become a figure of great admiration. He'd have many people decide to follow him (both good and bad) and before he knew it, he was an "emperor" again, but this time with different goals in mind. More stories that we'd have been able to tell had we gotten more time.

#32

- Major Bludd and Zartan. We knew we wanted to start introducing elements that would help bring Cobra down. What better way than starting with their weakest link: a mercenary that can be bought. To defeat Bludd, all you have to do is wave cash. Zartan knew that and exploited it. To me, this felt like classic Joe. The villains manipulating each other to accomplish their own goals.



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- Billy. A HUGE loose end that needed to be tied up. Ideas bounced back and forth on what to do with him. The top two were to have Cobra Commander kill him (which we ultimately decided to do) or to have him somehow take up the mantle of Cobra Commander at the end of the war. I didn't like the second idea as it would really undo a great amount of development he saw during the entire continuity. He's always been the incorruptible faction, and to have him give in would be too big of a step. While I was sad to see him go, it was necessary to have CC kill the absolute, last thread he had connecting him to humanity, and that was Billy. I especially love the way it was done. We didn't show it, but there was no doubt. The boy was dead at his own father's hand. Creepy good stuff.

#33

- Stalker's family. We really wanted to start diving into the characters' backgrounds and families more once the war was over. By this point however, we knew that we wouldn't get to, but we figured this was a scene best left in -- both to establish the families were all being watched out for, but also to establish that there are enough people in the world that would rise up against something like what Cobra was doing. We also liked the idea of the Joes having to work with people that they may not agree with. Stalker's gang history provided all of those beats for us.

- Spirit. My favorite page in the entire WWII story. Spirit being bad ass in a way only he could be. Such a great character, such a cool moment.

#34

- Another moment I've been dying to get into the title. "Hello Scarlett. How's the head?" Truly a Baroness moment if ever there was one! Not just shooting a foe in the head, but taunting them after the fact.

#35

- Colton and Jane. Having them in the field was something important, too. He's not the original for symbolism. He's earned it. We wanted to show that he's still a viable soldier as well as an excellent leader. Jane, too. We were eventually going to get them into the field more often, but at least we got to do it once before the end. Seeing the two of them firing away together is a pretty cool moment.

- The missions. Overall, I think this issue is pretty indicative of what we'd like to have done more of in the future: high stakes, even higher odds, the team having to battle their way through grave danger. I have a fond place for this particular issue because it's reminiscent of the old cartoon -- four missions, four goals to accomplish, the team having to work in concert across the globe. Sort of a nostalgic indulgence in this issue, but one I'm glad we got to do before we ended.



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- Cobra Commander's plan to destroy the Amazon and Antarctic was a losing thrust, pure and simple. He was a sore loser, and just wanted to devastate the world in order to vent his anger. Chaos/war/murder just to spite his enemies. I truly feel by that point, Cobra Commander knew it was over. He knew the Joes would stop him. They always do. His gambits never pay off. I think he was just posturing, and he knew that. By the point we got to #35, we knew we just needed to have a "Joes accomplish impossible missions" sort of story to set up the big ending. This was a perfect homage to the past as well as raising the stakes of the war at the climax.

- Athena. We wanted to set Baroness up as the new Destro. She had her own resources, nearly as far-reaching as her husband's. We wanted Athena to become the new M.A.R.S. eventually, with the two of them playing an outside factor in all future stories, as weapons manufacturers should be. This would have been really cool to see develop. Again, at least we got to have a moment of it before signing off.

#36

- For a brief moment -- I mean, a very brief moment -- it actually looked like we were going to be able to kill Cobra Commander once and for all. There was no way you could do what he did and walk away unscathed. With the continuity ending, why not? Well, cooler heads prevailed, and we ended up locking him away (very X-Men movie, right?), which leaves the main foil available for when/if someone decides to pick the continuity back up again. No sense destroying it completely for anyone that may want to do that.

As for not showing his face, that was a decision made by Mark Powers and I. Sure, we could have shown it, but it would have been an "meh" moment. Anticlimactic. Visually, he's just a schmuck, you know? Just a typical white dude that's done some pretty astonishing/troubling things behind a mask. Having that one little bit still be a mystery keeps him larger than life and mythological. Showing his face, and having him look just like the guy that serves you a sandwich at the deli down the street would have taken that little bit of iconic magic away from the character. At least that's how we felt about it. . .

- Sparks. My favorite Joe, bar none. I know, I know. . . I'm biased, because short of his cartoon visuals and code name, I created him. I guess because of that, he's the one nearest and dearest to my heart. He's also the one that is most like me as the editor all that time: monitoring all the ins and outs, keeping things running behind the scenes. I was looking forward to more moments here and there with him in the future. I think I'm going to miss him most of all.

- Grunt. The shot of Grunt with his hand in the air. After being on the majority of covers during the Marvel run of G.I. Joe comics, I couldn't let the series end without him striking the pose one last time.



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- Recondo. We initially had him go deep undercover in SPECIAL MISSIONS: TOKYO with no real idea how we wanted to resolve the story. Mainly just keeping that as a trump card that we'd be able to pull out when the time was right. It ended up working out that we could turn him into the mole within Cobra for WWIII, but that's one I wish we could have saved a while longer and made into a full tale on it's own. It still worked out, but it could have been cool to really develop further.

- Zarana. She'd turned on her family again in a previous tale, and would be on the outs for a while. It would have been a point for us to develop the Dreadnoks some more, and to watch them become whatever they were to become now that Zartan had stepped away from them. And now that they mistrusted the second-in-command, would Zandar have stepped up? Zanya? We'll never know now. . .

- A happy note. I think the series ended the only way it could have. The Joes with their arms in the air, and Cobra Commander making a cryptic threat. This was the best way to end the entire continuity, really. Of course, if the series had continued, it would have been much more of a dark ending, with the next issue being a slower paced issue dealing with the fall out of the war and the human side of the characters. But with this being the last issue, we needed to return things to a status quo that was going to be pleasing to the fans (and to us!). No other way for us to have let it go. Truly.

So, that's it! My recollections and inner workings of how the entire tale came together. I hope that you enjoyed this. God knows I loved working on this book. Who knows? Maybe someday I will again. I sure have enough material rolling around inside my head to do so!

Thanks for reading,

-- Mike O'Sullivan
March 2009



2004 Unproduced "Night Force" Tracker

by Mike "Mike T." Taber

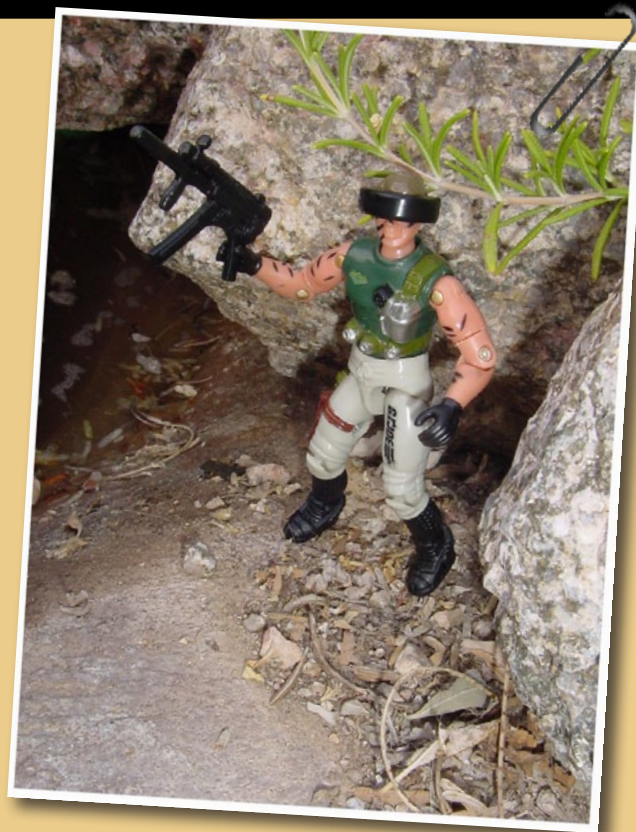
There are certain figures who have found decent popularity despite poor colorings on their actual releases. Many of these are molds that are well done and unique. Oftentimes they are also characters that have potential. One such character is Tracker.

Since the early days of online collecting, repainted Tracker figures have been a staple of the collecting community. The great-mold-but-bad-colors made it a customizers dream piece. In the modern line, Hasbro has taken a few occasions to give up properly colored versions of underappreciated vintage molds. In the case of Tracker, collectors were oh-so-close to finally seeing a properly colored version of the figure in 2004. But, a last minute change left Tracker in the cold as his character was changed to Britain's Action Man and he was given a bright orange shirt in the Night Force set. But, a little Easter egg was left. A few of the Night Force Tracker figures were actually produced and they found their way into the hands of Asian Joe sellers. The result is the best version of Tracker never made, and the subject of this profile.

In the essence of authenticity and figure credibility, there are a few collecting phrases that truly annoy me. The first is "Argen 7". There is no Argen 7. There are six rare figures released in the scarce second series of Plastirama figures. The Cobra Invasor was not in that wave and is not part of them. It is a cutesy term that novice collectors use to make themselves seem more knowledgeable than they are. The other is "Midnight Chinese". I'll concede the term is clever and catchy, but it is also potentially derogatory and misleading. It's true that some Asian factories likely churned out after-hours products using whatever material was in the machines at the end of the day. But these are usually limited to the unpainted, oddly colored "prototypes" that have become all too common. The fully painted production level figures are unlikely to be "bootlegs" and are more likely truly unproduced items. This is an important distinction as it lends the proper amount of credibility to figures such as Night Force Tracker.

This figure has a nice paper trail that cements its status as a true unproduced figure. At the 2003 Convention, a hand painted Tracker in colors eerily similar to this figure was shown. At that time, it was Hasbro's intention to release Tracker as part of the Night Force set. As the existence of this figure indicates, that remained Hasbro's intention until fairly late in the process. While this Tracker figure does feature the same paint masks as the Action Man figure, there is one important difference: the Night Force insignia on his chest. This stamp is unique to Tracker and shows that Hasbro produced a entirely new paint mask for the Tracker figure. It also proves that the change from Tracker to Action Man occurred at nearly the last minute, and it's likely that had there not been other issues with the Night Force set, we would have seen Tracker at retail instead of the oddly out-of-place Action Man.

As a figure, this Tracker is beautiful. All of the Night Force figures proper (obviously excluding Action Man) were well done with intricate paint applications. Tracker is the exception. Instead of the complex Night Force camo pattern, his base color is just simple green. But, it is this simplicity that makes the figure special. Instead of being part of a specialized team



2004 Unproduced "Night Force" Tracker

by Mike "Mike T." Taber

that is difficult to integrate with figures of a different paint design, Tracker fits perfectly with figures from all generations of Joes. As stated, the figure uses the same paint masks as Action Man. So, he has silver and green grenades, a silver knife and a green pistol on his legs. There are two points that differentiate this figure from Action Man, and prove that he is a truly an unreleased figure. First, Tracker has black boots. For whatever reason, the first incarnation of the Night Force figures wore white pants. Tracker is no exception. However, his boots are painted black. This was an unnecessary detail on Action Man, as Action Man featured black pants. But on Tracker, the contrast between the green upper torso, white pants and black boots creates a visually remarkable figure. The second detail is the Night Force logo on Tracker's chest. Action Man features a unique Action Man logo on his chest. Tracker features a distinctive yellow Night Force logo that is unique to the Tracker figure. This is an entirely new paint mask and that helps prove the intention of Night Force Tracker as a genuine unproduced item.



As you might be able to tell, I'm quite pleased with the Night Force Tracker figure. He fills a huge gap in my collection and is a figure who I would use endlessly were he not an unproduced rarity. Tracker as a character is highly underused. The reason is because the figure features such a high quality mold ruined by bad colors. He is one of the few Navy SEALs collectors have that wasn't released in underwater diving gear. Prior to 2003's Chief Torpedo, Joe collectors have wanted a SEAL who could be used out of the water. The 1991 Tracker initially offered hope of that, but fell short in the most important area: his colors. That Tracker was a horrid mishmash of yellows, oranges and browns. As such, he isn't all useful in standard combat situations. In the early years of online Joe collecting, a repainted Tracker was a common rite of passage for many customizers. The mold featured strong details, solid design, and a look that when properly colored; would stand among figures and characters from any year. Alas, to this day we have yet to see a decently colored Tracker offered in any official release.

This brings me to the crux of this profile. As a figure, I think Action Man is quite nice. However, as a replacement for this Tracker, he is inferior. Night Force Tracker shows us the great opportunity lost when figure slots are either wasted or underutilized. Had Action Man replaced the Night Force Roadblock, I don't think anyone would have had any issues with him since the Roadblock mold used was the least appealing version of the character, and in my opinion, sucked across the board when compared to his 1992 counterpart. But, as a replacement for this Tracker figure, Action Man simply has too high of standards to live up to. This was the Tracker figure that collectors were waiting for, and the unreleased figure offered a tease of what might have been available to all collectors had things gone a bit differently. It's this missed window of opportunity that's most frustrating to deal with. Many collectors have the notion that anything Hasbro puts out is fine, and as such, they think Hasbro will eventually release some really great figures that stands above the mediocre ones. However, as we've seen with Tracker, that is simply not the case. We missed our window for the definitive Tracker figure. And now, over five years later, we have yet to see the figure revisited and there is little hope on the horizon for a decent Tracker to ever make an appearance in O-ring form. As such, due to Action Man, we lost out on one of the better figures of the modern take on ARAH. This is why each and every figure released carries such importance. Every slot wasted on Avalanche, another V1 Duke, Firefly, Alley Viper or several other characters is one Night Force Tracker, Walmart Low-Light or other high quality or otherwise unreleased figure that never gets to see the light of day.



2004 Unproduced "Night Force" Tracker

by Mike "Mike T." Taber

I can get quite cynical about this hobby at times, and I can be animated in my criticism of Hasbro and others. Unfortunately that's a direct result of this notion above. It's a painful waste to see a single figure slot used on something that collectors and consumers have no use for, or one that doesn't make sense in a thematic sense, since it can cost us the chance of getting something really cool. When Joe is an infinite line and everything we want is released, things will change. But, while ARAH-style releases are finite and infrequent, each and every slot counts, and should be treated as the opportunity it is.

This Tracker is truly a striking figure. His deep green matte shirt offset by the white pants and heavily painted details really makes for a figure that could be considered convention quality. That's hardly unexpected, since most of the figures from the Night force set featured up to eight different paint applications. With that said, there is a potential drawback. While impressive in paint applications, it can also be argued some of the detail is lost due to the overabundance of striping and patterning on the figures. Granted it's a great look, but it can clutter the figures and prevent you from fully appreciating the quality of the underlying colors or sculpting. Not so with Tracker. He is devoid of the patterns that adorn the rest of the Night Force figures, and he stands apart in his simplicity.

While Tracker makes a perfect display piece, these figures tend to feature soft paint that chips and rubs easily. As such, if you hope to use a figure like this as your everyday Tracker, you need to be especially cautious. The silver paint rubs easily and the Night Force logo is incredibly fragile. These figures do not seem to have the durability or quality control of full production run figures, and careful handling is mandatory for such an item.

Another drawback to this figure is the lack of his unique accessories. This was the beginning of Hasbro cheapening out the accessory complements in their exclusive sets, and as such, none of Tracker's hallmark accessories are available with Night Force. Fortunately the enterprising collector can find ways around this. While eBay is the first start for any replacements, Tracker's gear has some color variations you can choose from. The one accessory on the original Tracker that was done in tactical black was the visor, but the Funskool version is blue. Tracker's orange gun was later molded in black (as well as several other colors) and was then available with many figures in 1993 and 1994 on the weapon trees. Finally, one can replace his raft with the original orange, or choose the Funskool one which was blue. It's not a perfect match, but it is darker than the American version. As such, collectors are really only left with Tracker's oars not being available in a good color. For me, a spare visor and gun is all this figure needs to make it a vital part of my collection.

Moving on, the Tracker mold has a decent history: even though the offerings available out there all have



2004 Unproduced "Night Force" Tracker

by Mike "Mike T." Taber

issues. After Hasbro used the mold in 1991, it was supposed to be used in Brazil. Tracker even appeared on Brazilian cardbacks and in the catalog, though ironically he was never actually released in Brazil. From there he showed up in India in the early 00's. The Funskool figure was actually brighter than the American one, and really didn't offer collectors the perfect version they were looking for. In 2003, Hasbro recalled many molds from Funskool and Tracker was among them. Some of the first figures to utilize the newly reacquired Funskool molds were the Night Force set. While this Night Force Tracker is a great figure, the Action Man who was released at retail suffers from the same issues as earlier Tracker figures since his base chest color is bright orange. Since then, we have not seen the Tracker mold used at all. Quite frankly, this is baffling! Tracker is a high quality figure that has never been released en masse in a good color scheme. He is a logical candidate for a future release in a Convention set or other exclusive that utilizes ARAH style molds. But, for now, if you want the best colored version of Tracker ever released outside of customizing, this unproduced figure is your only option.



When the unreleased alternately colored figures first started appearing out of Asia, this Tracker was among the rarest of all the releases. Initially, only a handful of samples made their way to the U.S. and it was believed by many high-end collectors that this figure might pull a "Pimp Daddy Destro" and become one of the true rarities of the line. In time however, more of these figures were found in Asia and they were imported to the U.S. in decent enough numbers to appease most of the hard core collectors who were really after them. Truth be told, despite more figures being found, this figure is still probably one of the more rare figures to be sought after, as there are probably only a few hundred of them in the hands of collectors at maximum. And here's the irony: despite its rarity, collectors have yet to properly value most of the alternate or unproduced figures. Consequently, you can get this figure for next to nothing in terms of his scarcity. Price wise, you might pay upwards of \$80.00 for this figure, but people pay that for mass produced figures from the 80's. My point, is, most of these unproduced figures have yet to fully realize their value potential and deals can still be made on these. In five years, I don't know if that will be the case. But, as many of the other alternate figures have dried up and almost never reappear for sale these days, I certainly wouldn't let an opportunity to add this figure to my collection pass me by.



G.I. Joe Official Backyard Patrol

By: Roger "Goofateer" Taft

Have you ever noticed play patterns seem to go in cycles? For instance, you may have observed the explosion of role-playing toys that have been clogging the action figure aisle in the last few years. With the Transformers Optimus Prime Voice Changer, kids can command the Autobots to "Roll Out!" with true authority. Turning to the Dark Side is so much more appealing with Star Wars Darth Vader Helmet and Light Saber, or one can deploy mass legions with the Clone Trooper Helmet with Voice Effects. Not to mention there are plenty of accessory options to help little Power Rangers do . . . well, what ever it is Power Rangers do these days.

So what about G.I. Joe?

Growing up in the late 1970s, I don't particularly remember the play pattern being very prevalent in the G.I. Joe line. Sure, I had a cowboy hat and some six shooters, but that was about the extent of it, and it certainly wasn't connected to G.I. Joe. That stuff was certainly available in the 1980s, but how often did you see kids playing with it? In the 1990s and 2000s, with the rise of video games, computers, and other electronic entertainment, role-play toys seemed to disappear entirely unless they were consigned to a special release from a larger parent line, or found in limited quantities in discount marts.

But in the 1960s, role-play had to be popular. Granted, I can't speak from first-hand experience, but there were a lot of G.I. Joe role-playing toys on the market, so there must have been some demand for them. In fact, just about everything a kid could need to become a real G.I. Joe was available. Hasbro covered most of the basics themselves under the name "G.I. Joe Official Backyard Patrol," but they also licensed out the brand to other companies. Of course, there were also plenty of knock-offs from competing brands all trying to capture the "live-action" imagination of children - all of which makes perfect sense in the historical context. America was still caught up in the patriotic fervor following the Korean War and the remnants of World War II, so what better heroes for little tykes to emulate than soldiers?

The G.I. Joe Backyard Patrol will be the focus of this article. I'll cover the others in due time. The Backyard Patrol Role-Playing sets should not be confused with the 12"-scale Backyard Patrol; the latter was used to liquidate overstocked outfits for G.I. Joe figures.



Sadly, there is very little documentation on the kid-sized Backyard Patrol. The series started in 1965, and ran its course by 1968. The toys are mentioned in some of the G.I. Joe collector books, but almost all the images are taken directly from Hasbro catalogs. As such, it's difficult to know what exactly came out. Just like today's toy world, some items may have been solicited, but never released. It's hard to be certain when so many of these sets are extremely difficult to track down in good shape with relevant paperwork, packaging, and authentication.

However, with that said, some sets in the line are fairly easy to find, such as the "Mess Kit and Canteen." I'd imagine that every kid wanted a set since almost every G.I. Joe figure had a mess kit and canteen. However, it must have proven to be



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a disappointment when they realized they couldn't blow anything up with a knife and fork. That could explain why so many of these delicate sets still survive today.

Another relatively easy to find item is the helmet with jungle camouflage. It came in a set simply called ".45 Pistol and Helmet," although the pistol is considerably harder to find, for whatever reason. The helmet is one of my personal favorites in the line. (Well, it's my favorite among the items I've been able to track down, anyway.) There is just something whimsically absurd yet appealing about a fake military helmet covered in plastic camouflage shrubbery, and clearly marked with a large dog tag embossed with the name "G.I. Joe."



Speaking of the dog tag, many of the Backyard Patrol items can be easily identified by the dog tag design embossed on them. It's nearly identical to the oversized dog tags kids received when they joined the G.I. Joe Club. While it isn't found on every item, it's on everything mentioned so far. It also appears on another reasonably common item, the boots.

While it's not that hard to find the boots, it is difficult to find them in good condition. The boots are near exact kid sized replicas of G.I. Joe's own distinctive footwear, complete with molded on plastic shoe-laces.

Unfortunately, while they physically looked like boots, construction and functionality-wise they were little more than a prop. They were made from fairly thin, blow molded plastic that stood little chance of surviving a single day of rambunctious outdoor play, and they offered no protection from the elements. The boots were in no way intended to replace real shoes, and in fact were most often worn over real shoes. If you find a pair, odds are pretty good that at least a portion of the sole is worn through.

On the other end of the spectrum lie the sets that are next to impossible to find. The "Military Police" set certainly falls into this category. Aside from catalog photos, I have yet to see a photo of a complete set in private hands. It came with a white MP helmet and belt, a black holster, .45 pistol, and a Billy club. The helmet and Billy club from this set are extremely hard to find.

The very pinnacle of the collection was a complete oxymoron; a squirt gun shaped like a flamethrower. This forerunner to the modern day Super-Soakers packed quite a punch. Mimicking the fuel tanks of the 12" scale version that inspired it, it appears to be able to hold at least a gallon of water on the child's back. Unlike the rest of the line that stuck to fairly realistic colors, the flame thrower seemed a little out of place. The large tanks were silver, the hose orange, the straps green, and the gun itself was blue. Despite its overall accuracy to its smaller inspiration, it did lack the menace of the real thing. Furthermore, rather than bulbous and realistic fuel tanks, this version looked more like three Thermos containers strapped together. While it lacked the realism of other G.I. Joe



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Role-Play toys, it's still a very nice item and would make a great centerpiece to any collection. Now if only I could find one that I could afford!

There are two major reasons the Backyard Patrol role-playing toys are hard to find. The first and most obvious one is their scale. They simply take up too much room. So if any toys the kids had grown out of or stopped playing with had to go during spring cleaning or moving day, what do you think was first on the trash heap?

Second, because they were so much closer to the real thing, they were that much more likely to be put to actual use--- which unavoidably leads to more wear and tear, or even complete destruction, and inevitably the toy lands on the trash heap again. Take, for example, the "Entrenching Tool." The one that came with the 12" G.I. Joe really couldn't be used for anything more than shoveling loose sand. But the Backyard Patrol Entrenching Tool is big enough that a kid might think he could actually dig himself a foxhole with one. And believe me, many kids probably did try, as is evidenced by the fact that it is nearly impossible to find one today that doesn't have scratches covering the spade.

I hope you've enjoyed this small glimpse into the world of the Backyard Patrol. There are plenty of great pieces out there, maybe even still a few yet to be discovered. Kids in the 1960s must have had quite a bit of fun with them. I know I still do!

Good hunting,

Roger Taft
Owner/Operator, Captain Cosmos Collectibles
Winchester, Kentucky



Collector Spotlight: Kevin "KrymsynGard666" Watts

Who are you?

My name is Kevin Watts

Please tell us a little about yourself:

I'm 33, I live just outside of Philadelphia, in Norristown. Outside of G.I. Joe, my interests are art and illustration, woodworking, old and middle-school punk, and paintball; though it has been years since I've had the time to play.

How long have you been collecting?

I like to say I've been collecting since 1982, because even through high school there wasn't a time when I wasn't buying Joes. When the line ended in 1994, I was going around the discount places and flea markets and buying up lots in bulk, or items I didn't have from my childhood. The mentality of a collector; as in condition sensitive, rare item searching, army building, MOC collecting, etc., didn't really kick in until about 1992, when I was 16.

What's your favorite piece in your collection?

Man, that is a tough one to pin down. Generally, the most recent piece I picked up, regardless of what area of collecting it falls into, is my favorite. There are several series of pre-production items I have been able to assemble that I am very happy to own, like my series for the 1991 Snow Serpent that includes two different pieces of Presentation Art, a 2up, the original package painting, and the original wax head sculpt. Another series would be for the A.G.P., the Iron Grenadier vehicle from 1988. About 5 years ago I had the opportunity to speak with the designer for the A.G.P. and several other vehicles. I obtained the presentation art for that piece from him, and he told me there was a styrene model made by a former colleague of his that should still exist. Sure enough, a couple years later I lucked into a meeting with the other designer that built the styrene model, and now I have both pieces to display together. I got the story on the vehicle from each designer's perspective, and having such intimate knowledge behind the thought processes and design details of the A.G.P. has elevated it from a basic collectible toy to one of my favorite pieces from the vintage line.



What was your first Joe figure?

I got straight arm Grunt, Snake Eyes, and Short Fuze at a Kiddie City in 1982, after a neighborhood kid was showing off his Flash figure. I specifically remember passing on Stalker because he didn't come with enough accessories.

What kind of Joe items do you collect?

I collect just about every range of G.I. Joe items to some degree. I collect vintage toy and non-toy items, odd items outside the Hasbro line like the die cast toys or the Tonka vehicles, international items, the comics from Marvel and Devil's Due, paperwork and promotional items, store displays both vintage and modern, prototype and pre-production items from the modern and vintage line, including resin prototypes, test shots, wax sculpts, printing proof material, original art for presentation, packaging, design or comics. As well as MOC

Collector Spotlight: Kevin "KrymsynGard666" Watts

and MIB items, army building, and customs both of my own creation and customs by some of my favorite fellow artists. It helps keep my interest because if I become frustrated or bored with one range, I can switch gears and look for something else and still be adding to my collection without straying into something else.

What's the primary focus of your collection?

For several years, I have been building most heavily on my pre-production and art collections, but I have also been doing more and more custom work in the last couple years.

What piece was the most difficult to acquire?

Well, I would probably say trying to find items that stick to a specific pre-production run can be very difficult, because so many are one-of-a-kind items, like art or resin prototypes. But generally I find most items on a production level art out there, you just have to be willing to pay the price to get it. I don't enjoy the "thrill of the hunt" when it comes to toys. I don't want to hunt and gather them, I want to buy and own them. I'll pay a little more for an item if it is something I want or need, and that makes "finding" an item a bit easier. I constantly hear more recent collectors complaining about how they can't find a certain "rare" item, like an S.M.S. or a Dreadnok Assault Set. Well, those pieces are out there, but you might have to pay up to get them, and many collectors would rather complain that they can't find something rather than just bite the bullet, buy it, and move on. The tyranny of the cheapskate collector can bring nations to their knees with the sheer power of their whining alone.

What's your favorite Joe related memory?

I have tons of great childhood memories, but I would say the ones that are most on my mind these days are the great times I've had at the G.I. Joe Conventions that I've attended since 1997. I won first place in two customizing contests, in 1997 and again in 2007, and in 2008 I had the opportunity to give a seminar on the design and production of the D.E.F.,



Collector Spotlight: Kevin "KrymsynGard666" Watts

a G.I. Joe sub-team from 1992. I was nervous and worried I would flop, but the few people that attended seemed to enjoy it, even if it was a little monotonous and image heavy. Beyond that, buying, selling and trading Joes with other collectors, talking to people from Hasbro, going out and partying with my long time online Joe buds, are what make me attend the convention each year, as well as the memories that help to stabilize me and keep me in the hobby through the more frustrating times.





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Thanks!

First off, I'd like to thank everyone reading these words right now. Your support and enthusiasm at last year's G.I. Joe Convention has made the effort worth it. I look forward to seeing many of you again this year, as well as hopefully some new, unknown faces. Hopefully we can share even more of the hobby with one another.

If you'd like to help us out, we'd love to have it. The Joe Declassified project is completely volunteer driven and non-for-profit. We will be working on methods for donations in the near future. Article submissions can be sent directly to samuel@joedeclassified.com. If you'd like to be featured in an upcoming Collector Profile, merely answer the question format established so far, and e-mail us some good, comprehensive photos.

On that note, I'd especially like to thank:

Kevin "Soap Dish" Watts - For hilarity, inebriation, and inspiring jealousy.
Jason "Alibi Shooter" Wells - For deep pockets, and missing the target.
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Mike "Ice T" Taber - For hot climate, and hot attitude.

And lastly, to Chris "Mommy" Chung, for putting all this together while I run around and pretend to be a grown-up, and making me wonder about genetics. Chris is a one-in-a-million Joe fan, and you should buy him a drink right now.

Sam "Nomad" Damon
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