

OUR MAN IN WEST AFRICA

An assignment for *Millennium's End*

A top television news reporter and her film crew have disappeared in Sierra Leone. The operatives need to find her, and quickly

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The Assignment

It's 2300 hours and the operatives are settling into their seats on a charter flight out of Las Palmas in the Canary Islands to Freetown, Sierra Leone, via Dakar. A dull (but incredibly comfortable and lucrative) assignment advising corporate security delegates for an offshore bank on personal security techniques the operative was terminated abruptly by a call from Septimus Grant (New York SCL).

Grant, as usual, didn't mince his words. "We have a situation developing in Sierra Leone. Our client, Global News Corporation, has lost contact with a senior correspondent and her news crew. Needless to say, they're pretty concerned, and want her extracted post-haste. Other operatives will conclude your current assignment in the Canary Islands. Right now, I need you on a flight to Freetown. Full details on the assignment have been e-mailed for you to prepare en route."

The details in the e-mail message come from Martin Carroll, GNC Vice-President for Cable News. Stephanie Ritchie was GNC's correspondent in Sierra Leone. She had been there for around three months, reporting on the crisis situation and the British intervention with the UN peacekeeping force. To date, her assignment had been pretty much uneventful, with the excitement confined to reporting on the mob violence and civil disorder in Freetown.

Ritchie made a daily report to the office, purely for security reasons. This was made daily at 1000 hours local time, and was a simple phone call to advise of the current situation. She hadn't missed one until yesterday. Once the call was over twelve hours overdue, GNC called BlackEagle. Although GNC were at pains to emphasize that this may indeed be a false alarm, they aren't in the business of taking chances with their top correspondents.

Her last report indicated that she had a possible lead on a story in the vicinity of Bo. In apparently typical Ritchie fashion she was more than a little vague in her report: "I picked up a rumour that something may be going on over in Bo. We're driving out today to check it out." Although she had her two-man news crew plus a corporate bodyguard, Carroll's concern is that kidnapping is one of the accepted ways of earning a living

Global News Corporation:

Anyone with a TV in the western hemisphere knows GNC. A relatively new rival to CNN, they grab all the best features of top cable news channels and combine it with the slick presentation and media darlings of the mainstream networks.

Stephanie Ritchie is one of GNC's prized assets. The belle of televised news, an action-girl with a reputation for bringing the hardest hitting headlines from the roughest corners of the globe. It also helps to catch your attention that she has looks a supermodel would kill for and a voice that purrs like a kitten.

in Africa. What concerns him even more is that GNC haven't had a ransom demand yet.

Clutching the e-mailed message, the operatives have a mere few hours to get themselves straight before they land in Freetown just before dawn.

The Real Scoop

Ritchie picked up on one hell of a story, and has managed to get herself tied right into the middle of it. GNC aren't exactly playing it straight on this one; despite all their apparent concern for their correspondent they were still overly keen that she follow up this story when she reported it. If Ritchie's agent finds out about this, then GNC will be batting on a decidedly sticky wicket when he takes them through the courts for putting his client in unreasonable danger. And GNC's insurance people won't be too happy about that either. The only thing that can save them is Ritchie getting out, **with** the story.

Ritchie had been accompanying British Army patrols to try to pick up on local stories, with members of the 16 Air Assault Brigade (this unit incorporates a significant element of 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment - 2 Para). As a result, her crew has been unofficially attached to one of the companies conducting reconnaissance patrols beyond the city limits of Freetown, and has got to know them pretty well on an informal level.

A few days ago, a British patrol made hostile contact with Revolutionary United Front (RUF) forces around twelve miles south east of Freetown. The British captured 23 RUF soldiers, whilst another 14 were killed in the fighting. Lieutenant Andrew Gollings, an officer known to Ritchie, led the patrol.

Although most definitely not official British policy, rough treatment of captured RUF prisoners to 'extract field intelligence' is not an uncommon practice in Sierra Leone, particularly where British casualties result. Gollings had lost two men as a result of the encounter, and a few of his men wanted to settle a few scores. However, whilst being subjected to a beating, one of the RUF soldiers proffered a map to assuage the beating. He claimed that the map would "lead them to untold riches". Nevertheless, the soldiers finished beating him and took the map, unbeknownst to any of their fellow troops.

The RUF finance their struggle against the Sierra Leone Government and UN forces largely by controlling the diamond mines in the east of the country. The ability of the RUF to sell these diamonds on the international market translates directly into their ability to procure arms, even though there is an arms embargo in force with Sierra Leone. Such diamond sales have been accomplished so far through contacts in Liberia (where the regime plays an interesting dualistic role with the British and Americans). However, the RUF has started to also negotiate with contacts in organised crime groups in Russia. Since such groups have good contacts within the Russian arms industry and a need to convert goods into hard cash, this makes for a convenient partnership.

Occasionally the RUF cannot find a black market buyer for their diamonds immediately, and are forced to store them. The map showed the location of one such RUF cache of diamonds near the town of Bo. How the soldier came to be in possession of such a map is a mystery that will

Whilst the British aren't over the moon about media presence, they tolerate it to foster better relations. Britain's involvement in West Africa is touch-and-go politically, and the Foreign Office has instructed the Ministry of Defence that 'positive media coverage is to be gained whenever possible on all operations'. Consequently, TV and radio reporters are a routine presence on army patrols in Sierra Leone.

Russian links to Africa are not as bizarre as they might seem at first thought. During the sixties, many African nations built strong ties with the Soviet Union during their struggles for independence and the willingness of the Soviets to support their revolutionary comrades. Such ties were at all levels - military, political, academic and economic. With the reforms to the Russian economy in the wake of *Perestroika* and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the burgeoning black market economy began to be dominated by organised crime. Many of these criminal organisations have since further developed their economic ties, in order to find new and cheap sources of primary material. Such primary material can literally be animal, vegetable or mineral.

probably never be solved.

Realising that there were only the three of them who knew about the map, and that this was a genuine opportunity of a lifetime to make a fortune, the three soldiers cut Gollings in on the deal. The four of them plan to desert and head for South Africa, where they can sell the diamonds and make a fortune. Gollings spun a story about a long-range patrol and set off for Bo at dawn.

The problem was that Ritchie knows Gollings, and saw him preparing for the 'patrol'. Following her journalistic instincts, she tailed him at a discreet distance. Unfortunately, Ritchie herself was ambushed by RUF troops yesterday morning. Her driver and bodyguard were killed in the ambush and Ritchie and her two crewmembers were captured.

Gollings had an idea that he was being followed, and when he heard the gunfire from the RUF ambush he moved to investigate. Unfortunately, outnumbered and outgunned, as they closed in he and his men were captured as well. Although the soldiers have been stripped of their weapons and equipment, the RUF have not subjected them to a detailed search, and Gollings still has the map folded neatly in the shoulder pocket of his jacket. However, until he has had chance to have a look in close detail, even Gollings isn't 100% sure of the precise spot that 'x' marks on the map.

The RUF have now taken their prisoners back to their base, at an old colonial farmhouse, just outside Bo. There they await a decision from the local RUF commander as to what they are going to do with them.

Preparations

The operatives have recently completed an assignment in the Canary Islands, but have gone straight from this into another. The assignment they have just completed consisted principally of conducting refresher training, and they will not necessarily be equipped for a full tactical exercise in the African bush.

The extent to which the operatives get assistance with equipment is at the GM's discretion. The argument and counter-argument are:

- (i) They have just come from what is essentially an office assignment, where even personal sidearms are not a necessity.
- (ii) BlackEagle expects them to respond to a situation as the nearest assets in place, and BlackEagle cells need to be ready to roll at the drop of a hat.

Regardless, L&P will have some difficulties getting equipment into Sierra Leone. For one thing, there is an arms embargo, and there are a lot of UN inspectors who get very twitchy about people bringing more weapons into an already inflamed situation. For another, it's not exactly Silicon Valley, and hi-tech gear doesn't grow on trees in Africa.

L&P have obtained firearms permits for the operatives, for personal security reasons (it is common for Western travellers in West Africa to have armed bodyguards). However, anything larger than a submachinegun (i.e. firing rifle calibre rounds) is not covered by this. Should the operatives specifically request it, a hunting permit can be made available, but this will be for rifles and shotguns not capable of full automatic fire. Alternatively, they can attempt to procure rifles through

the black market.

The Action

The action in this scenario takes place over five phases:

- (i) Locating and examining the ambush site
- (ii) Locating and reconnoitring the RUF base
- (iii) Rescuing Ritchie
- (iv) Recovering the diamonds
- (v) Getting out

The Ambush Site

The location of the ambush of Ritchie's vehicle is around 10 km west of Bo on the main road. Examining the ambush site will lead the operatives towards some fairly logical conclusions, and confirm their next course of action for them.

The Land Rover lies off the road in the bush and scrub, with the right front wing and wheel housing missing. There are burn marks where the wheel housing was. The car appears to have been heading away from Bo when it was hit. The wing and wheel housing was removed by an explosion, caused by either an explosive projectile or a tamped explosive. An anti-tank mine is unlikely since there is no evidence of a crater on the road.

There is the body of what was once a Caucasian male decaying next to the front passenger door. He has been shot with multiple rifle rounds. He is wearing western style clothing and was apparently carrying both a submachinegun and a pistol in a shoulder holster.

There are a number of bullet holes in the vehicle, mostly around the driver's door and window. The fire appears not to have been controlled single shots or short bursts, but probably fully automatic. There is a large pool of what looks like dried blood on and around the driver's seat, with marks that indicate that the driver was either dragged or dragged himself out of the seat. There is a small amount of dried blood in the back, consistent with a minor flesh wound.

The drag marks lead into the bush about fifteen metres or so, where the decaying remains of the driver can be found. Given that they have been there a few days, with the heat and the voracity of African carrion-eaters, there is precious little that is recognisable left already.

There are a number of spent 5.45mm Short casings scattered on both sides of the road where the ambush point is likely to have been. The ambushers therefore probably used Russian-made AKSU-74 submachineguns or AK-74 assault rifles. This probably means that the RUF were responsible.

There are tracks indicating that the ambushers probably headed off in the direction of Bo after the ambush.

The Ambush:

Ritchie's Land Rover was taken out by a lucky shot from a Russian-made RPG-7 rocket launcher, causing it to career off the road. Given the lack of professionalism and rampant enthusiasm of the RUF ambushers, they simply hosed the vehicle with automatic fire after it had stopped, killing the driver (a local interpreter) and wounding her cameraman in the process. As her bodyguard got out of the vehicle to defend them, he was gunned down. The driver was dragged into the bush and executed, whilst Ritchie and crew were tied up and marched at gunpoint back to the RUF encampment.

The RUF Base

The RUF base is a colonial farmhouse, situated in the savannah near Bo. Built originally at the turn of the century it was originally of sturdy design, but the constant turmoil in the country has led to it being sadly neglected. Nonetheless, the local RUF chieftain ('Colonel' George M'Bacha) considers it quite a prestigious abode.

Like most of the RUF field commanders, M'Bacha is little more than a local strongman. He has scant experience with the military, and shooting up the town after a good night out is probably as close as he or his men have been to extensive combat experience. Nonetheless, they are numerous and are equipped with modern automatic weapons – always a dangerous combination to run into.

Although he has established the farmhouse as his base of operations, M'Bacha maintains a steady stream of patrols across the surrounding countryside and into Bo. He is tasked as a local commander with preventing access to RUF territory by either government or UNAMSIL troops, and this he accomplishes predominantly by maintaining a number of checkpoints on key routes into and out of Bo, as well as a strong presence of troops in the town itself. The checkpoints themselves largely serve as an opportunity for RUF soldiers to intimidate and rob unarmed civilians, whilst the soldiers in the town claim that they are enforcing martial law. This consists of bullying and fighting with anyone who stands in their way, and after dark the occasional sound of gunshots is not uncommon.

M'Bacha is presently entertaining a 'delegation' from a Russian crime syndicate. Due to the arms embargo and the general difficulties in smuggling large numbers of weapons on an international basis, many of the transfers of weapons are negotiated locally. M'Bacha is presently negotiating details of how he will pay for and obtain a consignment of much-needed rifles and ammunition with the head of the delegation, Sergey Nikolaeovich Kitishev.

Kitishev has the weapons stored at a safe location across the border in Liberia, a drive of some 200 kilometres or so. Since the majority of the territory en route is held by the RUF, this poses little danger to M'Bacha's men. Kitishev is unwilling to bring the weapons into Sierra Leone simply because he doesn't trust the RUF. By taking them to Liberia, the exchange is conducted on his terms.

Locked up in the basement of the farmhouse, M'Bacha's captives are in a pretty sorry state. Conditions are less than sanitary – they simply have a bucket for faeces and urine and another with water to wash in. They are deprived of light beyond the little that seeps through the crack in the shutters and given only rudimentary food and water. Combined with all this, Ritchie's cameraman has a flesh wound in his arm that needs more than the basic attention it has thus far received. Although they have not been mistreated by the RUF as such (beyond the occasional beating administered as punishment for misbehaviour), the total effect upon their morale has been considerable, and they have passed beyond resistance into submission and acceptance of their circumstances. Interestingly enough, Ritchie as the only woman has escaped any form of beating.

There are two entrances to the basement, down sets of stone steps from inside the house and from the external shutters. The external shutters are kept barred and are guarded, as the captive discovered when their

The Farm House:

There is a low (metre high) stone wall surrounding the farm, serving more to denote the perimeter of the immediate property rather than to keep anyone out. RUF soldiers patrol the perimeter, day and night and there are soldiers at the gate as well.

The farmhouse is a two-storey building with a cellar. Built in typical colonial style, it has three entrances at ground level (front door / porch, side door / veranda, and back door (to the kitchen). There is also a shuttered entrance to the cellar (for delivery of heavy goods).

At the rear of the farmhouse are two buildings, now converted into sleeping quarters for the RUF soldiers. Closest are the former stables whilst the other was formerly a cattle barn. Both are large single-storey buildings and are busy throughout the day.

M'Bacha's quarters are on the upper floor of the farmhouse, along with those of his senior officers (there are six bedrooms on the upper floor). His guests are quartered in guest rooms on the ground floor. Gollings, Ritchie and their surviving associates are kept locked up and in the dark in the basement.

The Russians:

Kitishev is travelling with an escort of two bodyguards, and all three are unmistakable for what they are. Dressed in the typical fashion of the Eastern Bloc nouveau-riche gangster class, they wear expensive, flashy clothes with heavy gold jewellery. Combined with their Slavic features and the brand new Toyota Land Cruiser parked outside, it isn't hard to work out who they are and where they come from. Despite this, they are all competent and experienced enough, and the pearl-handled automatics and HK submachineguns are clearly not for show.

M'Bacha's Dilemma:

Colonel M'Bacha finds himself torn between two options at the moment. To add to his dilemma, he has reported the capture of Ritchie, Gollings and co to his superior, and has yet to receive a reply. This is quite simply because of the confused situation in Sierra Leone at the moment and because his superiors have the same dilemma.

On the one hand, Ritchie, her two associates and the four British soldiers as hostages represent a bargaining chip – one that might potentially be cashed in for valuable medical supplies with the UN. Although he doesn't know who Ritchie is, he knows she is an American civilian, since she quite vocally told him.

On the other hand, the likelihood that M'Bacha will be able to realise these

initial attempts to kick at them resulted in RUF soldiers coming in and kicking and beating them. The door to the house is similarly barred and guarded.

assets into something substantial is slim, and at present they realistically serve no useful purpose to him. However, were he to execute them, the political consequences might be considerably more dire than they already are, risking retribution from the British and the involvement of the Americans. For the moment, it would appear that M'Bacha is as stuck with his captives as they are with him.

Finding the Diamonds

Once clear of the RUF stronghold and in possession of a decent map, Gollings will want to look at his map to find out where the diamonds are alleged to be. He will do this surreptitiously and at night if possible. To give the players a fighting chance, they should at the very least be suspicious of his behaviour, if they don't actually catch him in the act of comparing the map.

This will most likely annoy the players. Having extricated Ritchie and her companions from the RUF stronghold, to find out that the very object of their desire *might* actually still be there is not a pleasant thought. A variety of possible circumstances could result from this.

Firstly, Gollings will not wish to simply return to Freetown empty handed. His ultimate plan is to get the diamonds and then disappear off the face of the earth. That he will insist upon the players cutting him and his fellow soldiers loose may well strike the players as a little unusual when there is obvious safety in numbers. If it doesn't strike the players as such, then it will occur to Ritchie.

Secondly, Ritchie wants her story. She didn't travel out into the West African grasslands, get captured by rebels and be subjected to an uncomfortable existence for nothing, and she has a good nose for a story. She knows that Gollings is up to something, but not quite what. She intends fully to find that out and make this whole regrettable experience worthwhile. The only thing that will stop her is should she sustain an injury that means she must return to Freetown.

Gollings and his companions will reluctantly cut the players and Ritchie in on the deal, provided that their share isn't damaged too much. He won't be keen about the publicity associated with Ritchie tagging along (since this is sure to make him a wanted man), but equally she will put him in a difficult position: either cut her in, or risk being exposed and face a court-martial and dishonourable discharge.

Additional Help

Smaller cells may find that they lack the firepower to successfully raid the RUF base, and some GMs may find that this hinders the flow of the scenario (particularly with relatively new / inexperienced groups). This section is included as an additional optional dimension, which may be included.

The British deployment in Sierra Leone has included elements from 22 SAS Regiment operating in small, isolated teams. These teams are principally used to gather intelligence on RUF forces and their movements, and one such team may be watching the RUF base. This

The Diamonds:

The diamonds are presently locked in an old-fashioned steel safe in the ground floor office of M'Bacha's residence.

The safe is bolted to the floor and weighs somewhere in the region of 250 kg – lifting it without specialised lifting equipment is likely to prove impossible.

Cracking the safe will require some specialised equipment and maybe some heavy tools. In practice the players need to come up with a way of getting someone to open the safe voluntarily.

Analysing the map:

Given the rough (hand-drawn) nature of the map, getting any meaningful information from it is no mean task. A

Natural Skills / Navigation roll at -20 will enable the players to analyse the map effectively.

Pondering this will eliminate any other possibility from the available map features that the diamonds are anywhere else other than in M'Bacha's stronghold. Fortunately, the map is in English, and the word 'Diamonds' is unequivocal. The only problem is that there aren't exactly detailed directions.

SAS Teams in Sierra Leone:

The role of the SAS in Sierra Leone is characteristically low-key, and is predominantly orientated around providing intelligence on RUF forces and movements. However, despite this the teams are well equipped for undertaking commando actions in support of British / UN forces.

The teams are typically from four to eight men, armed with a combination of

could lead the players into coming into contact with one such team.

automatic infantry weapons and support gear. Naturally, they will also be equipped to the teeth with all manner of communications and survival gear.

This also allows for an additional dimension, in that although the SAS teams will not be keen to support any action that the players wish to take (they are under orders to gather intelligence only, and not to initiate combat directly), they equally are not likely to stand by and let them get shot to pieces. There is also the aspect that the presence of the SAS will act as a deterrent for Gollings to desert once rescued.

Getting Out

Once the characters have decided that they have achieved their objectives, there remains the main problem of getting out. Players should consider this as part of their original plan, but in all probability the extraction is likely to be a confused and desperate affair.

Once aroused, the RUF troops will be under great pressure to track down and kill or capture any infiltrators. M'Bacha is not a man to treat failure amongst his subordinates likely. Couple this with the loss of his principal bargaining chips and the likely outcome of his discovering the loss of Ritchie and company is that he will throw all available resources into the pursuit and capture of the infiltrators.

The form that this takes will be dependent upon how the characters propose to extract themselves from the objective. Consequently, the actual extraction is left for the GM to decide upon in the context of their plans. Some suggested elements include:

- A dramatic helicopter rescue under fire, with the characters attempting to get everyone out whilst the RUF shoot at them.
- A tense pursuit with intermittent hostile contacts, as the characters play the fox to the RUFs hounds. This could involve the characters laying up and attempting to find a way around pursuing RUF forces.
- Vehicles failing due to unexpected mechanical problems or damage under fire.
- Injuries to personnel, sustained either through combat or accidents.

The main consideration in this is that even the best planned operations can frequently go awry, with simple aspects such as opposing forces turning up in the wrong place unexpectedly playing a key part in this. Whilst much of the action may appear to be concentrated around the rescue and recovery of the diamonds, this phase of the scenario should provide a fitting finale.

GM Reference: Sierra Leone

The situation in Sierra Leone is a particularly tense one, complicated by contradictory reports and a highly confused political situation. No area of the country is deemed safe, particularly for westerners. The main players in this situation are as follows.

Revolutionary United Front:

Led by Foday Sankoh, the RUF are a political organisation and guerrilla force, based predominantly in the east of the country. They were formed by Sankoh in 1991, comprising Libyan-trained cadres formed from the radical student movement in the country, and are comprised mostly of youths aged 17-25 (although they are known to include a number of child soldiers). Their aims are to gain control of the country (forcibly if necessary), in order to gain control of infrastructure such as the diamond mines.

The RUF number between 5,000 and 10,000 troops. They are relatively well equipped with Eastern European weapons (rifles, machineguns and rocket-propelled grenades), but their general level of training and military cohesiveness remains far below that of developed nations. Their soldiers are barbaric and volatile.

Sankoh shapes the ideology of the RUF. His rhetoric is strongly anti-Western (particularly British) and is aggressively negative concerning the United Nations and particularly General Secretary Kofi Annan. He is however a charismatic figure, carrying widespread support, and remains a serious player in the country's political arena, and is one of the few constants in the ever-shifting leadership of the organisation. However, the RUF's reputation for barbarity during the recent civil war may be a significant factor in their support as Sierra Leonans fear reprisals for failing to support them.

The RUF's ties with neighbouring Liberia are unclear. Liberian President Charles Taylor (himself a former rebel leader) overtly tries to distance himself from the conflict in Sierra Leone. However, it is clear that Liberia has much to gain from the conflict, as since the RUF seized many of the country's diamond fields, Liberian diamond exports have risen dramatically.

Sierra Leone Government:

Led by President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah (Sierra Leone Peoples' Party), the government was reinstated in March 1998 following a coup by Major General Johnny Paul Koroma, but holds little real power. The government have strong ties with Britain, although remain a member of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). The OIC is a conference of 52 Islamic states, whose priority is African liberation.

Government forces number around 3,000 troops who are poorly armed and trained. Most are equipped with Belgian FN rifles, but possess few support weapons and limited supplies of ammunition. Defections to the RUF are commonplace.

The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL):

The UN holds a beleaguered position in the country. The 8,700 strong peacekeeping force is comprised of disparate factions from Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, India, Guinea, Jordan and Zambia. Whilst equal to or in some cases slightly superior to RUF and government forces in terms of training

and professionalism, these troops are hindered by their poor armament (squad and support weapons only) and lack of cohesion.

British Forces:

Despatched originally to assist the 'friendly' government of Sierra Leone and UNAMSIL in maintaining order, the role of the British Army is becoming increasingly unclear. With elements of the Air Assault Brigade (Parachute Regiment), Royal Marine Commandos, Ghurkhas and other support units, the presence is sizeable (around 1,500 men), and is headquartered at Freetown's Lungi airport. They maintain control of the airport and also maintain a base in the city within the British Ambassador's residence.

Although relatively well equipped and trained (the professionalism of British troops is recognised around the world), they are considerably outnumbered and are unable to assume any role other than a peacekeeping mission in Freetown.

There are daily patrols around the city and into the surrounding countryside, and the British position appears to be in supporting the government forces and consolidating defences around Freetown. Since their arrival, the RUF has halted its advance on the capital. However, even with the support of UNAMSIL forces, they would be unable to mount an offensive against the RUF and such a conflict would be a logistical nightmare for a force that is thousands of miles from home.