

# Ambrosia

## Chapter 14

by Maj Victor Ruble

“**H**ollywood! I told you to stay in place!” Mack screamed over the net, his voice so loud that Aidan nearly had to rip his comm helmet off.

Aidan’s platoon continued to race toward the target building as he furiously tried to search his brain for a justification for breaking from the ROE (rules of engagement) that stated no U.S. Force would conduct kinetic operations unilaterally in Bandar Abbas.

“Look, sir, it’s like you said. This is an Iranian op. But our embedded advisor is in there with them.”

After a delayed pause, Capt Prophet responded clearly confused. “Embed? I didn’t think we had any embeds with the HSF. You were the embed!”

“Roger sir, but we attached a guy with the assault force at the last minute given the high vis of this op.

“You did, huh?” Mack responded, clearly still confused but curious as to where Aidan was going with this.

“Um, yeah ... Sergeant John. ... Smith ... ski.” Aidan rolled his eyes at his own poor attempt at making up a name on the fly.

“Sergeant John Smithski? Who is Sgt John Smithski?!”

“John Smithski” Aidan clarified, trying desperately to make his imaginary Marine sound more legitimate. “He was part of the last batch of combat replacements. I told you all about this at the confirmation brief.”

Another long, awkward pause from the COC. Aidan, thought for sure that Mack was going to call his bluff and end his heroic charge before it even had a chance to really begin.

Finally, Mack responded.

“Well, I guess you need to go get Sergeant Smithski out of there then. You’re well within the ROE to respond.

**>Maj Ruble is an Assault Amphibious Vehicle officer. He is currently serving in the United Arab Emirates.**

We have fixed-wing on station, and the QRF (quick reaction force) is en route to reinforce. Keep me posted, and if you need to, we can level that place to the ground.”

“Roger sir, we’re moving into our assault position now.”

“Copy that. We’re tracking on our end. Hollywood, I hope you know what you’re doing. God speed and happy hunting.”

*Me too*, Aidan thought to himself as his ACVs set into their support by fire position. Ramps lowered and infantrymen began to pour out, assembling in covered positions, waiting for orders.

Aidan jumped from his TC (troop commander’s) hatch and made his way toward his Marines. He hurried toward the position of the squad closest to his vehicles as they were preparing to enter into the building, making last minute gear and ammo checks.

“Alright gents, we need to do this quick and by the numbers. This is a rescue op, not an assault. We need to get to the HSF’s last known position and get them out of there ASAP! We only have sporadic imagery of the building’s schematics so don’t stray from the formation and do not get bogged down in a prolonged fight. Hopefully, we are ahead of the enemy QRF, so we can extract without a shot being fired. Our boys are about half way up the building, but I am not certain if they continued on with the mission or if they bunkered down. But if we make contact, short controlled bursts and make sure you have PID (positive identification). Sup-

pression is the key. We don’t need a high kill ratio today and sure don’t need any green-on-blue! Understood?”

As the Marines “rogered” up, automatic weapons fire erupted from inside the building. Expletives flew from Aidan’s mouth as he looked up at the towering residential building in some vain attempt to assess from his vantage point whether or not the HSF had engaged the HVIs (high value individuals) or had fallen into the ambush. Looking back at his Marines, he screamed, “Okay, we’re officially out of time. In and out, you understand me?!” With a motivated, “Yes sir!” from his squad, they rushed toward the target building.

Aidan was the first to arrive. Hoping to avoid falling prey to the very trap that the HSF were in, the Marines chose the service entrance that looked out on the parking lot that the ACVs were using as their support-by-fire position. Although there was a high probability that it would be locked, or that it opened outward, it was the most direct entryway into the building, providing the Marines the ability to approach the building under the cover of the ACVs’ remote weapons station. As Aidan approached the building, he put his back against the outside wall and directed his squad to stack just a meter or so from the metal door. In urban combat, “stacking”—or bunching up while waiting to enter into a building—is never optimal, but it is oftentimes necessary. The key is to minimize the time in the stack, to be decisive, and to enter in the least expected fashion. This generally means using a window instead of a door; blowing a hole in the wall vice going through a window; starting from the top floor instead of the ground, etc. But, if you had to stack, you would do so in a location with minimal observation, getting out of it and into cover as soon

as possible. Being that this was clearly not a planned assault, Aidan felt his internal clock screaming at him that he and his Marines were exposed for far too long.

Aidan felt the *tap, tap* on his right shoulder from the Marine behind him, a non-verbal signal that the Marines behind him were set and ready to enter. He returned the signal to the Marine in front of him, which travelled up the stack until it was received by the point man. Lt Rosado and his Marines had rehearsed this procedure tirelessly in garrison and in rehearsals in preparation for this mission, so when the “number three guy” displaced from the stack to interrogate the door, everyone knew exactly what he was doing. Slowly but efficiently, the Marine slid from his position and approached the door, visually checking for booby traps or signs of tampering. Although the Marine’s technique was flawless, Aidan felt exposed and vulnerable out there against the outside wall. In his mind, he wished the kid would just hurry up. Not seeing anything out of the ordinary, the Marine moved toward the door and, still moving slowly and deliberately, pushed down on the door handle to verify whether or not the door was locked. Aidan could tell by the movement of the Marine’s shoulder downward that they were in luck and that it was unlocked, and they would not have to spend any more time outside preparing a mechanical or explosive breach. They may just be able to swiftly get in and get out before the JAS QRF was able to get there.

As the Marine opened the door, it became very apparent that they were not going to be so fortunate.

With a loud BANG, the Marine flew backward about 5 meters like a rag doll. In the center of his chest was a smoldering crater, but Aidan could tell by the way the Marine groaned and reeled on the ground that the plate carrier had done its job and kept him alive.

“Fall back!” Aidan screamed.

Disciplined in even the most chaotic of situations, the Marines did not scurry away like a group of roaches when the lights go on. They remained in their formation and with weapons at the

ready, gliding backward with eyes on the opened hatch.

“Gator 1, I need immediate suppression on the door!” Aidan commanded over the platoon tac. SSgt Washington, ever vigilant in her support-by-fire position, was ready. Almost as soon as the transmission went out over the net, rounds from the four ACV 30mm chain guns began to decimate any and everything in the entryway. The metallic door, which once stood in unyielding defiance of their entry, was ripped from its hinges by the barrage and flew over head of the Marines as they continued to fall back from the main gun’s surface danger zone, nearly ending Aidan’s rescue attempt before it had really even begun.

“Cease fire! Cease fire!” Aidan shouted into his comm helmet. Although the suppressive salvo only lasted a few seconds, by the look of the now cavernous entryway, it did its job. Sensing by the eerie silence that any enemy combatant—be it human or automaton—was no longer a threat, Aidan yelled “Go! Go! Go!” and pushed the Marines around him toward the entrance, hoping to exploit the opportunity that the ACVs afforded them. Two of the Marines broke from the formation and raced toward their downed comrade. As if rehearsed and without order, one Marine provided over watch as the other grabbed the young Marine by the shoulder straps of his plate carrier and dragged the wounded man back to the safe haven of the ACV support-by-fire position. Clearly the presence of the JAS QRF on the ground floor of the target building meant that Aidan’s hopes of making a quick entry and egress were gone. Now essentially down by three men, it was even more critical that he and his Marines make their way to the HSF and evacuate their allies from the building as quickly as possible without becoming decisively engaged.

As the Marines made their way into the building, stepping over the bedlam and debris from the 30mm storm, Aidan could tell by the remains of automated body parts and robotic carnage that this building was definitely the JAS safe house; it was apparent that they were willing to send all that they had

to protect its occupants. Which also meant that the force that they accidentally came across was not going to be the last of the enemy, and the deafening boom from the fire fight above them confirmed that they were far from being “out of the woods” just yet.

“Gator 1, this is Hollywood,” Aidan announced as he tried to reach his ACV vehicle commander.

“Send it.”

“I think we just split their QRF,” he stated as he motioned to his squad to begin their ascent up the staircase. “We’re quite literally in the middle of a poop sandwich right now. We’re heading to the last known HSF position but are going to need an evac on the quick, as we’re going to be coming out hot.”

“Roger sir,” SSgt Washington replied. “We’ll keep the engines running and fingers on the trigger.”

“Tango. Out.” Aidan said as he fell into the squad file snaking its way up stairs toward to the sounds of chaos above.

As the Marines made their way up the building one floor after another, Aidan was definitely feeling the effects of nearly a year long degraded PT regimen. But as they got closer to HSF’s position, the sounds and smells of the engagement kept his adrenaline surging. From his position in the middle of the file, Aidan had very little visibility of what was ahead of them as they climbed the ladder well. But the eruption of gun fire from the front and shouts of “contact!” painted a very clear picture that Aidan and his Marines were once again in the fray.

“Chaff out!” the point man yelled over the volley of rifle fire coming from the number two and three man, indicating that he was throwing a chaff grenade. But Aidan was also able to surmise from this call that the enemy combatants they faced were once again of the robotic variety. With a bang, the air on the floor above sparkled with what looked like glitter and tin foil confetti.

“Frag out!” he heard the number two man yell, and with an even louder bang, the foyer in front of the stairs erupted in dust, smoke, and fire. Although he was only a few meters or so from the actual engagement, from his position in the

stairwell, Aidan couldn't get a visual on the actual engagement, only assessing what was going on by interpreting the chaos unfolding from behind the three-foot wall that housed the stair railing. The anxiety from his lack of situational awareness had him chomping at the bit to get moving forward, but the next call from up front froze him in place.

"Grenade!"

Time seemed to freeze as the pine cone shaped munitions bounced down the stairs. When it reached Aidan, it bounced one more time and in mid air, and as if by design, Aidan turned and swiftly kicked it, sending it flying down the stairs. The grenade ping ponged off of the walls, and as Marines ducked and dodged to avoid its inevitable discharge, it flew over the railing and exploded on the staircase below.

*That was too close*, Aidan thought himself, the event highlighting the fact that not only were they in a completely compromising position, but that the

bulk of his combat power was stuck in the stairwell.

"Go!" Aidan shouted to his Marines. "Get up those stairs! Clear the breach!" Pushing and shoving, the Marines around him hurried up the stairs, and with the front three Marines setting a base of fire, made their way into the ambush site. Now having a visual of the situation, Aidan was immediately struck with the gravity of what was in front of him. Bodies of HSF militiamen and both human and robotic JAS soldiers littered the floor. From what Aidan could tell, the JAS had what remained of the HSF assault team pinned between elements at the far end of the hall and the QRF. With the Marines entering into the battle, there was now a multilayered skirmish in the corridor of this once pristine hotel. Aidan had to assess threats one at a time or else the scene in front of him would become too overwhelming. Knowing they had to relieve the HSF of one of the "legs"

of the pincer ambush, Aidan ordered his Marines to concentrate their fire on the robotic targets closest to them, who, because of the precision marksmanship and quick reactions by the Marines' lead element, had been significantly attrited.

With his squad now fully set in the engagement, the few remaining QRF "bots" were quickly dealt with, relieving the HSF assault force from the threat to their rear and allowing them to focus their efforts in the direction of the JAS hardliners to their front. As the Marines moved forward toward the HSF, joining their fire with that of their allies, Aidan scanned what remained of their force for their commander. What he found only brought him a modicum of relief.

Reza was alive, but based on the blood that was showing through his body armor and the fact that he was firing a pistol with his right hand while his left shoulder drooped, Aidan feared that with any further delay he may very

## What Lessons Learned From the Battle of Belleau Wood Still Resonate With the Marine Corps Today?



### Battle of Belleau Wood ESSAY CONTEST

Sponsored by the Marine Corps University and the  
Marine Corps Association & Foundation.



### Prizes

Winners will attend the centennial commemoration of the Battle of Belleau Wood in France in May 2018 and winning essays will be published in *Leatherneck*, *Marine Corps Gazette*, or the *Marine Corps University Journal*.

Honorable mentions in each category will receive a cash prize.

**Submission deadline | 15 FEB 2018**

Contest Details | [https://www.mca-marines.org/belleau\\_MCUessay\\_contest2017](https://www.mca-marines.org/belleau_MCUessay_contest2017)

well be watching the death of his new friend.

“Get me the MGL up here now!” Aidan shouted. Without a beat, a Marine went running past the platoon commander carrying a large, shoulder-fired 40 mm grenade launcher with a six-round spring-driven revolver-style magazine. The MGL—or multiple grenade launcher—was a shoulder-fired grenade launcher with a cylindrical, multi-round ammunition drum that was originally developed in the early 2000s—the design was simple and effective enough to not go through a lot of changes since then. Intended to significantly increase a small squad’s firepower when compared to traditional single-shot grenade launchers like the M203, the MGL began to do just that. The Marine rushed forward, took a knee, and with six successive “THUMPFs”, cratered the end of the hallway with high explosive 40mm grenades. As the enemy fire ceased, Aidan was not going to let this momentary relief pass him by.

“Fall back! Fall back!” he screamed in the direction of the HSF as he and his Marines rushed forward to assist with the evacuation of any casualties. Aidan made a “bee line” for Reza, clinging to the hope that the extent of his injuries merely looked worse than what he was able to glean through the fighting. The dust at the end of the hall from the MGL’s volley still had not settled, so Aidan wasn’t completely sure how effectively the enemy had been neutralized, but he wasn’t willing to wait around to see what may or may not be emerging from the thick cloud of smoke just a few dozen meters away. Reza had already slung his good arm over one of his HSF lieutenants, and the two of them were already limping toward the temporary sanctuary that the Marines had provided when Aidan reached them. Col Ebrahimi screamed out in pain as Aidan grabbed his left arm and hoisted his left arm over his shoulder, pulling him and his other escort toward the stairs. Aidan could feel moisture begin to accumulate on his right side, and being that it was a thick liquid that started warm and

then cooled, he knew it wasn’t sweat. Reza was bleeding out, and there was no time to triage his wounds. They needed to get out of there now!

“Delay and defend! Travelling over watch! Keep those JAS off our butts but maintain your dispersion! Don’t get too far separated from the group. I don’t want to have to come back into this place!” *If we even make it out of this place*, he thought to himself as he barked orders at the combined force of Marines and Iranian militiamen. “Travelling over watch” is a tactical term meaning that the front and rear elements would provide security for the group while moving with them at a varying pace, maintaining enough dispersion to effectively repel any further enemy contact without becoming completely separated and isolated. As the cacophony of wounded and able fighters trudged down the serpentine staircase, the burning in Aidan’s legs, back and lungs signaled to him that they were going to need that ground evac on the ready.

“Gator 1, we’re coming in hot. Need that ground evac at the breach site now!”

“Oscar mike.” she replied.

“Almost there, aqa. Almost there. Just hang in there. You’ll be streaming illegally downloaded movies before you know it.” Aidan said to the HSF colonel, trying to be encouraging while simultaneously hiding his fear. In what seemed like an eternity, Aidan and his motley crew finally made it to the ground floor. After stumbling over the debris and remains of what was earlier a maintenance access doorway, the exhausted band of brothers entered into the late morning sunlight by a much welcomed sight. Two of Lt Rosado’s ACVs were just a few meters away, waiting with lowered ramps and a tight 180-degree security perimeter of dismounts protecting their withdrawal. Aidan’s mind was still frantic as he tried to address the issues of the HSF wounded, accountability of his Marines, and the dying comrade slumped in his arms. The rear crewman of Aidan’s ACV and platoon corpsman hurried down the ramp and grabbed Col Ebrahimi from their platoon commander. As the two pulled the HSF

commander into the armored vehicle to begin life saving aid, Aidan turned to scan the area to make sure that everyone was accounted for and was preparing for a quick getaway.

“We up?!” Aidan yelled at one of the Marines as he left the target building, running past the lieutenant with hopes of finding a seat in the ACV.

“I’m the last guy, sir. We’re good.”

“Okay, Gator 1, we’re up!” Aidan shouted to SSgt Washington. “Now get us outta of here.”

The ACV’s ramp began to raise, and just to make sure there were no last minute heroics from the enemy, Aidan pulled two munitions from the ammo pouches on his plate carrier. In one hand, he held a frag grenade, and in the other, smoke. With two quick jerks, he primed the explosives and tossed them into the doorway. As the ramp closed behind him, he heard the loud BANG of the frag, hoping that between the concussion of the blast and obscuration of the smoke, anyone in pursuit would think otherwise about trying to prevent their withdrawal. Climbing over the chaos that had become the ACV’s troop compartment, he made his way to the troop commander’s station, wanting to check on the colonel, but knowing that the mission wasn’t complete. Punching up the company net on the radio, he made the call.

“Apache 6. Apache 6. This is Hollywood. HSF personnel secure but that’s a no joy on ‘jackpot.’ I say again, no joy on ‘jackpot.’” In this simple transmission, Lt Rosado let his company commander and the task force COC know that their mission to capture or neutralize the JAS leadership was unsuccessful. But they still had one last play.

Climbing into the troop commander’s seat and bringing the full communications suite on line, he said, “Stand by for fire mission.”

After a few key punches and brief radio transmission, a deep, booming voice said, “Roger. Apache 6 out.”

Pulling himself up so that he was standing shoulder high in the hatch, Aidan looked back as they sped away from the target area. Switching his comm over to the vehicle’s intercom system, Aidan asked bluntly, “How’s the colonel?”

After a brief pause, the corpsman replied, "He's gone, sir."

Piercing his lips together, Aidan felt his heart sink. Looking back to see the site of the absolute bedlam that had just transpired shrink into the horizon as his convoy hurriedly made its way home, the area looked quite peaceful. And as the air delivered, laser guided, 2,000-pound JDAM-equipped bomb dropped from 32,000 feet struck with absolute precision, Aidan could only muster a modicum of satisfaction watching the JAS safe house disappear in pile of smoke and rubble.

**Epilogue**

"Still smoking those things?"

With the close confines of an amphibious vessel, time alone was at a premium. Normally, sneaking away to the ship's outside observation deck would afford someone a few moments of needed isolation and fresh air. But clearly for newly-promoted Capt Rosado, those moments were going to be brief. As Aidan took another drag of his cigarette, he knew by the deep voice and gruff attitude exactly who had come to interrupt his brief moment of quiet solitude.

"You got me, sir," Aidan said as he turned toward Capt Prophet walking toward him with a large grin on his face.

"Well, first off, you can cut the 'sir' stuff off now," Mack replied, slapping Aidan a little hard on the shoulder and nearly forcing his half-smoked cigarette to tumble to the deep blue expanse of the Pacific Ocean. "But don't get too used to it."

"Fair enough ... Mack. What brings you by at this most unwanted of times?"

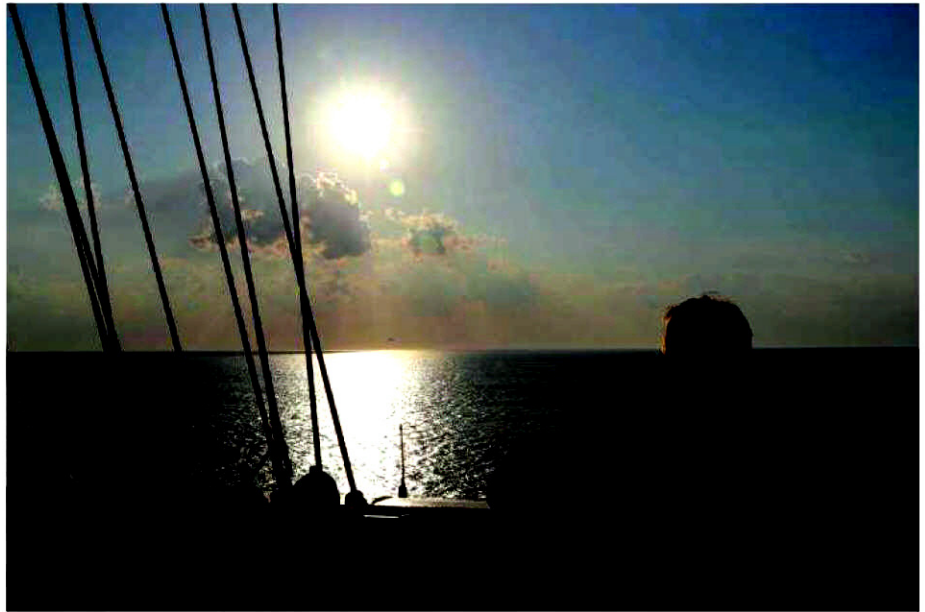
"Oh, I'm sorry. Am I interrupting your 'personal time'? My bad." Mack jabbed back. "This must be your lucky day, and I wanted to personally give you the good news."

"Sensational." Aidan replied sarcastically. "What's up?"

"I guess it depends. How's your Spanish?"

"Mas o menos," Aidan responded, loosely translated in Spanish to mean "so-so."

"Well, you better get on it, 'cause it looks like you're headed to paradise. SouthCom. Miami. Going off to be



*Aidan had some time to ponder his future. (Photo by MCS3 Jessica Paulauskas, USN.)*

a liaison officer in South America or something." Mack said as he handed Aidan a single piece of paper that looked to be in AMHS (automated message handling system) format.

Although it was only a few lines long, basically directing where to go and when, Aidan stared at the piece of paper as if he were trying to read a scientific dissertation. Taking note

---

**... Aidan looked back as they sped away from the target area.**

---

of Aidan's lack of enthusiasm at this generally sought after assignment, Mack spoke up.

"What's up? I think you might be the only person in the Corps who wouldn't be happy as a pig in slop right now."

"Well, after all of this, I was hoping to get some down time. You know, head back to the battalion and just be an 'extra guy' for a little while. Hand out towels at the gym, be the 'coffee guy' or something. Wasn't even thinking I'd be PCSing as soon as we got back."

"Hey man. You did a lot of good work here. A lot! And you've got the chest candy to prove it. Not a lot of ju-

nior captains running around the Corps with what you got. You should be proud of what you've done. Really. You'll get your post-deployment leave and, if you work it right, get some travel and proceed out of it too. And I'm sure once you get down south, they'll recognize who you are and what you did." For the first time that Aidan could remember, Mack was actually being unassuming and reassuring.

"Careful bro, you're starting to sound like you care." Aidan teased.

"Shoot, if the word gets out, yours is the first butt I'll kick." Mack replied, faking a sucker punch to the gut. "But seriously, it's Miami. Or whatever post in whatever paradise they assign you to. I'm pretty sure that ole 'Sergeant Martinez' won't have any trouble finding ways of getting some R&R in the SouthCom AO."

Aidan laughed. Mack was right. Patrolling a beach in board shorts was going to be a nice change of pace from patrolling a desert in body armor.

"Plus," Mack continued, "there ain't spit going on down in that AO right now. Other than battling a hangover, I think you're days of fighting are well behind you."



Reproduced with permission of copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.