

Safety On:
A [REDACTED] Report
Case File 1 of 9

DOCUMENTING AGENT: Ben Cislowski, alias "Homer"

EDITING ANALYST: Grace McCarthy, alias "Herald"

This file requires DELTA GREEN Security Clearance

- Language
- Tobacco
- Sexual content

ABSTRACT: [REDACTED] Jeremy White, alias "Rooster" [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] 07:34 [REDACTED] 07/20/2021 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] after Operation Shrimp Farm [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Vallejo, California [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Breckenridge Corporation [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I am going to murder my phone.

The alarm is going off again with that horrible cell phone siren sound. Back when I picked it, I chose the most horrifically annoying sound I could find that might encourage me to get up. I have a real civilian job now with an actual schedule, and no matter how little I want to go to sleep or how long I avoid it, when I finally crash, I still have to get up on time.

It's 07:34. That's interesting. Looks like I'm getting better at this alarm thing after all. I only hit snooze twelve times today! I groan and haul my sorry ass out of bed, reminding myself that this is a luxury. Civilian life might have its flaws, but waking up to gunfire doesn't let you hit snooze.

The sun is streaming in through the east-facing window, and I can tell it's going to be a hot one today. I've had the standing fans going 24/7 since I got back from Yuma, but I still have that clammy feeling of dried sweat. It's nothing that a cool shower won't fix. It's a bit sad, actually. This apartment actually has reliable hot water, and here I am not using it. It's one of the benefits of having a decent job with a good paycheck, I guess. When I moved to Vallejo to keep closer to the Green Box, I was still doing the rent-a-fuzz gig, and that kind of pay doesn't go nearly as far in the Bay Area as it did in Tulare.

This place is decent. If I'm honest with myself, it's better than decent. It has a balcony, new carpet, and everything works. It's actually pretty damn nice. Better than I deserve, but if Breckenridge Security is going to pay me this well, I'm not going to complain.

Cool shower done, I pull on the khakis and branded black polo shirt they make us wear. Funny how they pretend we're a

legit business and not a private army, but like I said, they pay me well enough not to point that out. I sweep the remains of last night's drive-thru into the trash, turn off the TV and Xbox that I apparently left on when I stumbled to bed, and put the tequila bottle into the cupboard. It's a new brand to me with a real glass bottle. Thank you, Breckenridge paycheck.

I pop the tab on my first energy drink of the day when I get into the car. It's a 1990-something Tacoma with a camper shell on the back so I can transport "things" without too much scrutiny. You know, the "things" I use for my other, more important, more interesting job that doesn't pay me. Though I hate to admit it, it's also a hell of a lot more practical than my old truck. I still miss my lifted F150 with the king cab and extended bed. But I could never find anywhere to park, and the NRA and "Don't Tread on Me" stickers got keyed within a week of moving to the Bay Area.

The cute barista at Starbucks chats me up when I give my order (biggest size, most caffeine). One of these days I need to put some effort into flirting, but then I'd have to go out of my way to a new Starbucks, and that's not worth it yet. A grunt I knew in Iraq used to say, "don't shit where you sleep." In my case it's more like "don't fuck where you caffeinate."

The Starbucks/Monster combo starts to kick in at 08:13 when I pull onto the freeway. I feel my eyesight sharpen and that ever-present exhaustion starts to fade as I fall onto the "awake" side of the knife edge I live balanced on. All the hundred things I've been trying not to think about the whole time I've been awake disappear into the background. And for now, at least, I can actually start to focus on the road. I-80 Eastbound is starting to fill up with traffic heading toward Sacramento now, and I'll need that focus so I don't ram into

some asshole braking at the littlest thing while I'm going 20 over the speed limit.

I plug my phone into the tape deck adapter and turn my driving playlist on shuffle. The first song to come on is by Offspring. Damn, that takes me back to middle school. Thinking of middle school, I reach for an American Spirit and rip off the filter. My last box of the good Brazilian cigarettes is in my desk drawer at work. The next half hour is bliss. 75 mph, music cranked, smoke streaming out the open windows, and a healthy ratio of blood in my caffeine stream.

The Breckenridge facility is a collection of squat buildings out in the middle of farmland near Davis. I'm pretty sure it was supposed to be a modern office park with that generic brick-and-glass look, but the checkpoint and the razor wire fence kind of ruin the illusion.

I roll my window down as I get to the guard post. The same guy as usual does the reverse nod where he points his chin at me in that I'm-too-cool-to-show-respect-or-deference motion. He's a big guy with a ton of muscle on his upper body. But it's that weightlifting muscle that just looks bulky instead of useful. Like most things Breckenridge, he looks tough until you see through the layers.

"Hey man," he says, scanning the badge I flash him. "You're in early today."

I glance at the clock and manage not to scoff. 08:57. No matter how hard they try, Breckenridge is never going to be military. I flash a cocky grin. "Yeah, well you know me. Got to take care of things before the big shots get in."

"I hear that," the guy says. Required anonymous small talk complete, he pushes a button to open the gate and waves me through.

My parking spot (I know, right?) is near the furthest building from the entrance. I still can't get over the fact they actually assigned me a fucking parking spot. It's another example of Breckenridge's split personality, and this time the corporate side is showing over the military. But the spot labeled 577 is also right outside the gun range, which is where I need to be.

I clip my badge to the left side of my belt and go open the camper shell to the truck bed. The pistol case is right by the tailgate since I wedged it there with sandbags for easy reach. I key in the code, pull out the holstered Beretta 9 mm, check that the safety's on, insert a magazine, and attach the holster to my belt. California isn't an open-carry state, but this is private property. And I have the added bonus of being the gun range master, which lets me get away with it on campus where they lightly discourage carrying unless you really need to.

Lights click on automatically when I badge myself into the range, and I check to make sure all twelve stalls have eye and ear protection before going to my office. That's right, I don't just have a parking space. I have a fucking office. As I sit down at the desk and log into the shiny Apple laptop they gave me, I marvel again at the money they throw around in this place.

There are fourteen emails waiting for me, all filled with so much corporate doublespeak I can barely make out what they're trying to say. As I'm about to get up, the laptop dings and I see another message appear in my inbox. I sigh, sit back down, and open it. This one's addressed directly to me instead of one of the eight hundred email lists they attached me to, and it's from Harris, the closest I have to a manager here at Breckenridge.

Morning Gunny!

Sorry I didn't check in with you yesterday, but I hope you had a good weekend. Good news, we have a new hire! Charlie has a logistics background, which will take some of the paperwork off your shoulders. That way you can focus on continuing to do such an amazing job teaching the boys to shoot. I'll introduce you sometime this morning after we finish all the onboarding paperwork. See you then!

Josh

I groan. The overly cheerful idiot got here via business school washout instead of military washout, but he's well-meaning enough, if obnoxious. He loves calling me "Gunny" instead of my name. It's not like he earned the right to use the slang for gunnery sergeant, but I think he thinks he gets credit somehow by acting official. Then he turns around and insists I call him Josh instead of Harris. It's some kind of I'm-your-friend-but-not-enough-to-call-you-by-your-firstname-because-I-want-to-make-sure-you-remember-I'm-better-than-you-and-we're-here-to-make-money-and-not-be-friends bullcrap.

But it's the fact that I'm going to have an assistant that rankles me. It's been more than six months since I got back from Brazil and they stuck me in charge of the gun range. In that time, I've somehow made a name for myself. The last guy was another corporate suit who knew just enough about how to avoid liability lawsuits to keep people from shooting each other. When they canned me from active field missions, I ran the range the only way I knew how: militarily. It was amazing. Almost overnight, the "recruits" miraculously learned how not to not kill themselves, and as a bonus they could actually hit what

they were aiming at! Amazing, right? The cherry on top is how scared of me they all are because word somehow got around that I'll kick their ass if they do something stupid or dangerous. How did this rumor get spread, you may ask? Easy. I did it.

That name I made gives me some nice perks too. People actually treat me with legit respect instead of lip service, which is nice, and they keep their noses out of the range unless they have actual business. So when a box of 9 mm goes missing, or a few flashbangs are defective, or I only give out eight rounds for the sniper rifle instead of the twelve that come in the box, no one asks questions. Which is a very good thing. Because all that "extra" materiel becomes the "things" I put in the closed-in bed of my truck. And then somehow, it all ends up in the Green Box, just ready to go for the next Delta Green mission. Weird how that works, isn't it? I have no idea how it happens. I swear.

But now an assistant is going to ruin my careful embezzling. If some smug paper-pusher is doing the numbers, it's going to be a whole lot more difficult trying to equip R Cell. And to top it off, I'll have to deal with some smug paper-pusher in my face all the time.

I take my frustration out on a fresh paper target in Stall Four. Instead of the usual humanoid torso outline, it's an alien from some nerd movie I don't recognize. Glasses would probably know it, but she's off doing official FBI spook shit. I warm up with a few rounds to help my focus (center mass each time, of course) and then have some fun giving the alien a mustache out of bullet holes.

I police my brass, deposit it in the handy dandy "Brass Trash" can nearby (not my name for it), and go back to my office. The mini fridge is freshly stocked, so I crack open a

Red Bull and start playing a mindless game on my phone. It's 09:47. The online calendar they make me use says I don't have anyone booked until 13:30, but Harris (excuse me, *Josh*) is supposed to show up with my new asshole assistant sometime before lunch.

I make sure I look like I'm working on my computer when Josh knocks on the door frame with the "shave and a haircut" pattern at 09:58. He's a white guy in his late twenties, with a greasy slick for hair and a black company polo that looks far too natural on him. "Hey there, Gunny! How's your morning?"

"Same old, same old," I reply, putting on my best business-competent face. "Give me a just a second while I finish this up."

"Take your time," he says, giving me a chance to close the browser window where I was playing the original Wolfenstein (nothing beats the classics where you get to kill Nazis). "I want to introduce you to Charlie."

I finally look up, making a bet with myself over whether Charlie is the just-out-of-the-fraternity smug asshole type or the old-guy-who's-only-good-at-running-an-office smug asshole type. And then my jaw drops.

Charlie is a chick.

Charlie is hot.

She's 5'4", maybe 5'5", early 20s, with a thin build like she does treadmill and yoga at the gym. Her dark hair is pulled back into a ponytail at the back of her head, so it sways when she moves, and she's got a smile that lights up the office. She's wearing the same khakis and polo shirt the rest of us have, but she makes them look damn good. The khakis are painted onto her so tight that I can almost read the raised credit card numbers in her pocket, and her polo must be a size too small. It

shows a beautiful amount of cleavage, since it's impossible to do up any of the buttons. If I was at a bar somewhere, my tactical computer would be lighting up and labeling this Charlie as my prime target. But I'm at work, and if she's my assistant, then that would definitely qualify as "fucking where I caffeinate."

I stand up, glad that there's a computer screen between us to hide my excitement, as Josh says, "This is Jeremy White, or Gunny as I call him, the Marine vet I was telling you about."

"Oh hi, Mr. White!" Charlie says perkily, extending her hand.

I take her hand with a smile and revel in the touch of her skin. "No Mister. Call me White. Or Gunny if you want."

"Oh, okay Gunny!" She pumps my hand once before letting go to look back at Josh. I immediately feel a twinge of jealousy and an urge to wipe that fake grin off his face with his hundred-dollar haircut.

"You'll be working with Gunny White here, and I made sure no one's coming in until this afternoon so you can have some time to get settled. Gunny, you think you can show her the ropes? Maybe give her the grand tour of the place and a crash course in shooting?"

I smile, barely noticing that it's for real. Showing a hot chick how to do one of the two things I'm good at? Yes please. "I think I can do that," I respond.

"Excellent! I'll leave you in his capable hands then. Semper Fi!" he exclaims with the exact wrong type of enthusiasm, then takes off. Leaving me alone in the gun range with the type of girl I live to hook up with.