

“Okay guys, here’s the plan.” Murphy went on after hanging up the radio, all business now as he laid out the arrest sequence. “We will wait until the Seasprite is safely past, then we will follow discreetly, keeping an eye on her with the binoculars to see if we can spot Gutierrez, either jumping, or after he climbs into the life raft.”

“What about the pickup boat? Jack Devana asked, knowing that their earlier intercept plan was scuttled, with the motor boat now on the wrong side of them.”

“The main difference will be to make sure that after the pick-up they don’t get back to the four by four and away before the spotters arrive to block them from leaving. Otherwise, we will have to get between them and the shore and make the arrest ourselves.”

“That’s not going to be that easy,” the Captain of the Sutil retorted. “We don’t have armament on this thing and the Coast Guard doesn’t carry handguns.”

“Well, Craig and I are armed and it will be up to us to make the arrest, if it comes to that. You just keep them from getting to shore until the other guys arrive and we will be fine.”

As they talked, they watched the Seasprite sail past. It was about seven kilometres off shore and it was unlikely that anyone onboard would have spotted them from that distance, particularly if, as Bernie had reported, the crew was mainly below deck. After about ten minutes, the Cape Sutil followed, proceeding eastward along the shore, maintaining a discreet distance behind the freighter. Meanwhile, the crew watched carefully for activity aboard the Seasprite and for any sign of the pick-up motorboat.

Tim asked Devana to duck into a small cove close to Botanical Beach so that they wouldn’t get too close to the motorboat’s estimated location. Botanical Beach is a marine park where intertidal pools full of various plant and animal organisms drew a crowd in the summer, but it was deserted at this time of year. They were partially hidden in the cove, but would still be able to spot the motorboat as it headed out to the rendezvous with Gutierrez.

Sure enough, after another ten minutes and with the Seasprite now long gone, they spotted a boat, under high speed, heading directly out into the Straits. Craig aimed the binoculars well ahead of the motorboat.

“Well, what do you know, partner. Maybe this isn’t a big wild-goose chase after all,” he said with a big grin as he passed the glasses to Tim. “Look at that thing bobbing around in the water out there.”

Tim trained the binoculars to the spot where Craig was pointing and finally made it out. He estimated they were about eight kilometres from the raft and all he could see from this distance was a blurry black shape riding above the waterline and maybe a bump where a man might be sitting.

“You might be right old buddy,” he answered, the relief evident in his voice. “Now to see what happens. And while they are busy, Jack, how about moving further along the shore so we can get into position between Parkinson’s Creek and the motorboat? Later we can let them by if we hear that the other guys are in position to block off their escape by road.”

As they watched, they saw the motorboat close in on the life raft. Finally, when it was almost on top of the raft they were able to spot movement from the “bump” that Tim had observed.

“Christ, he made it!” he exclaimed. “Not something I would want to do, no matter how much that cocaine is worth. Now to make sure he doesn’t get to keep it.”

The transfer was made quickly and the life raft set free, as Roberto obviously had no intention of attempting to salvage it once they got back to shore. Within seconds, the motorboat was heading back to the landing site, with nothing but a fully-crewed Coast Guard ship and a couple of police officers to block their progress.

“Still nothing from Roy,” Tim muttered, as he picked up the microphone for the radio. “Where in hell are those spotters?” he asked Cooper, after reporting that the pick-up had been made and the motorboat was on its way back to the shoreline. “We need to know if they are in position to block these guys off.”

“What, already?” Roy answered. “I was just talking to them and they are not even back to Port Renfrew yet. Apparently those logging roads to the west are like finding your way through a maze. It’s taking some time for them to zigzag their way out. They figure it will be close to half an hour before they are in position at Parkinson’s Creek.”

“Alright guys. We’re going to take them ourselves,” Tim announced as he hung up. “We will intercept the motorboat as it approaches, come alongside, and Craig and I’ll go aboard and arrest them. One of you guys can drive their boat back to Port Renfrew. After the arrest, the spotters can transport them to Victoria.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Craig responded, drawing his Smith and Wesson out of its holster. “I just hope these guys agree to go along with it.”

They were able to get within 100 metres by the time the men on the motorboat decided they weren’t going to be able to get straight back to shore. The motorboat suddenly made a sharp 90 degree turn to starboard, following the shoreline.

“It looks like they are taking issue with your script, Tim. Now what?”

“Follow them and stay between them and the shore, Jack,” Tim responded, ignoring Craig. “You guys have a loudspeaker, right? Get on it and order these guys to stop. Tell that we are coming onboard.”

Dennis Ping nodded and promptly made the announcement, but the motorboat kept going, its lone outboard motor roaring, obviously at full throttle.

“We’re gaining slowly,” Devana reported, the Cape Sutil also at its top speed of 25 knots.

When they had closed to 50 metres, the motorboat suddenly turned and headed straight for shore, only 200 metres away.

“Look, they’re heading for that small creek mouth,” Devana yelled. “I think they’re planning to ditch it and escape by foot.”

“Not if I can help it,” Tim responded, “follow them in.”

“Are you crazy? Do you realize the draft under our hull is well over a metre? We’ll ground as soon as we hit the creek and I’m not going to be responsible for the damages.”

“Do it anyway and that’s an order. You may be the Captain here, but when it comes to an operational decision I’m the on-scene commander. Follow them in.”

Devana shook his head, but did as he was told. Up ahead, the motorboat slammed into the creek mouth and the three men scrambled out, Roberto and Gurney attempting to drag the bag of cocaine with them. Realizing the futility of it, they dropped it and fled up the creek bank and across the rocky shore as the Cape Sutil quickly closed.

“Brace,” Devana yelled, as the SAR lifeboat came to a screeching halt, its bow pointing skyward as it slammed into the creek bank, its motors suddenly quiet.

“You four stay here behind the cabin,” Tim instructed. He and Ballard lurched from the deck, staggering forward as they jumped into the creek bank. Scrambling upward they followed the fleeing threesome, who, having spotted them, had ducked behind a large log close to the forest’s edge and begun firing.

“Get down, Craig,” Tim yelled, diving for cover behind the bank he had just scaled.

Ballard had already left the safety of the bank and was caught in the open. He made for a log to his left, a bullet striking him in the thigh, just as he was diving for cover. Ignoring his wound, he quickly brought his revolver over the top of the log, squeezed the trigger, and in an amazing display of marksmanship, caught Gurney, with only his head and gun arm exposed, squarely between the eyes.

They continued to trade shots for the next few minutes, both sides wary now about revealing themselves to more danger.

“You okay, Craig?” Tim asked.

“Merely a flesh wound, partner. I’ve tied it off with my belt, which seems to have slowed down the messy, red stuff a bit.”

“Can you hang on until the spotters get here?”

“I’m not sure. I might try getting back to the creek bed and get one of the SAR guys to patch me up.” He replied weakly.

“All right, tell me when you’re ready to move and I’ll keep these guys occupied.”

“Go for it pal,” Craig promptly answered, achieving a pretty good imitation of a garter snake as he scuttled back to the creek. Tim provided cover as he fired off a succession of rounds at the log in front of him.

When Craig made it back to the creek bank, Chipps figured out what was happening and left the safety of the boat to go to his rescue. He was able to attend to him behind the bank and with Dennis Ping’s assistance they got him back aboard the Sutil and into a bunk below decks.

Meanwhile, the shooting had nearly stopped and Tim was content to wait it out until help arrived. He fired off the odd round to ensure his would-be assailants kept their heads down and to alert the spotters to their location.

Finally he heard a yell from the direction of the road above them to his left.

“Down here, on the beach,” he yelled back as he heard them approach, crashing through the underbrush. “Be careful, for Christ’s sake, these guys are armed,” he added.

As they closed in, Ronny Meldrum slowly stood up from his cover, his arms raised well above his head. “Don’t shoot,” he said carefully, throwing his police revolver out in front of him. “I’ve had enough.”

“What about you Gutierrez, you ready to quit?” Tim asked.

“He’s not here,” Meldrum answered. “He made it into the woods, the same time as Gurney and I got behind the log.”

“Son-of-o-bitch. Well, he can’t get far in this country. In the meantime, we’ll be pleased to provide you with an escorted ride back to Victoria, you being an important gang member and all.”