

Silent Weapon by Andy McNab

A high-speed chase through the backstreets of Lagos and an unexpected bomb explosion in the jungle – all in a day's work for soldier Sean Harker.

Sean Harker saw the danger racing towards them in the headlights.

'Target is fifty – that's five zero—'

'Brace!' Sean shouted. He kept his grip on the steering wheel – too late, too dangerous to swerve – and felt the bone-crunching thud run through his body as the Land Rover Wolf hit the pothole. He lurched into his seat belt. In the split second before the engine caught up with the fact that the vehicle had slowed down, Sean had jammed his foot on the clutch, shoved the stick one gear too low and released the clutch again.

His foot stayed on the accelerator. The engine howled and the whole vehicle lunged forward, hurling him and a section of seven heavily armed bastards down the streets of night-time Lagos in pursuit of two fleeing terrorist suspects.

'Bloody hell, Stenders!' That was Johnny Bright, one member of his human cargo clinging on in the back. None of them had belts.

Corporal Joe Wolston, next to him in the front, tugged at his seat belt to loosen its death grip on his body.

'Try not to lose the lads, Harker?' he grunted with all the cool and authority of a man who had faced worse things than Sean ever had. He tugged the mike of his PRR back towards his mouth and finished his report.

'Target is fifty – that's five zero metres ahead.'

Sean bared his teeth. Even at this speed, the blast of warm tropical night air in his face made sweat trickle down beneath the rim of his domed Mk 7 helmet. He shook his head to keep the drops from stinging his eyes as he fixed them on the swerving tail light of the target ahead. His arms ached from hauling the powerful vehicle round the rubbish heaps, and clapped-out cars, and crowds of Nigerians out to enjoy the city nightlife.

But it felt good. After six months of taking care – looking twice at every shadow in case it contained an insurgent, at every bump in the road in case it concealed an IED – the British Army were now the ones in pursuit. Pity the two guys ahead. If the lads could just catch up with this pair, then they would be on the receiving end of six months' pent-up tension.

And the Wolf was gaining. The two suspects were on a scooter, and its little putt-putt engine could never compete with a 300Tdi – on the straight and level, that is. Earlier they had tried to make a break down Lagos's A1 highway, and the Wolf had come within metres of them. Then they had veered off onto a side road, and the game got harder again. The Wolf had power, but it also had bulk. It couldn't just dance round any obstacles in the way, and it couldn't just go through them, either.

But, Sean told himself as the speedo crept up and the revs crept down, all things considered, a fifty-metre gap swerving about in this traffic stream was pretty fucking good. None of the other lads could have done it. It wasn't the first car chase he had been in, though it was the first where he was the one doing the chasing. He wondered if the cops he had so often led a dance round the North Circular in a wired Beamer or Merc had got as much of a blast as he was getting now.

And speaking of cops, there they were – a fence of flashing blue and red lights racing down the road towards them. Within a couple of minutes the suspects would have to turn off again.

Left or right? Sean braced himself, ready to match whichever way they went

Wolston spoke into the PRR. 'Hound One, what is your position?'

'On Herbert Macaulay Road, heading south. Estimate we are running parallel to your course, probably half a k behind.'

The platoon's other section was in a Wolf like theirs, under the command of Sergeant Phil Adams. Adams's voice was crackly in their ears. PRR was designed to hold platoons together on foot, not coordinate vehicle chases, and the second Wolf must have been right on the edge of the radio's 500-metre range.

'Roger that, Hound One,' Wolston confirmed. 'You going to come and join us?'

'Negative – local int suggests that any moment now your lads are going to hang a left, and then we will converge—'

The scooter's red tail light suddenly ducked off to the left, darting between a bus and an ancient VW Beetle.

'There they go!' Sean shouted. He just managed to bring the speeding two-tonne vehicle round without turning it over. The tyres ground against the road surface, digging into the loose grit and gravel and spitting them behind as the Wolf took to its new course.

'Hound One, that's the players heading towards Herbert Macaulay, ETA one minute. How did you know it would be left?' Wolston asked.

'Local liaison says they'll be heading for Makoko. That is a shanty town – half of it's on stilts over the lagoon.'

Sean filled in the blanks, and coaxed another five mph out of the engine without being asked. They had to get the suspects before they reached Makoko. A Wolf could never follow a scooter into a town built on stilts.

The Wolf shuddered so much on the bad road that it was like driving into a succession of brick walls, but now its powerful headlamps were close enough to light up the scooter. The next few things happened almost simultaneously. The pillion passenger on the scooter twisted round and raised his right arm in a gesture Sean recognized.

A gun!

It took all his self-control not to stamp on the brakes or twist the wheel over – following the basic human instinct to avoid death. The windshield in front of his face starred and cracked, and he was squinting at the embedded lump of lead that would have drilled right between his eyes but for the Wolf's armoured glass. The part of his mind not concentrating on navigating took a moment to realize that the shit had finally got real. In nearly two years of army service – in nearly nineteen years of life – it was the first shot ever fired at Sean in anger. It made a subtle but very important change to their situation. The section was no longer just in pursuit of suspects. It could now reasonably say that it was in danger, and take the appropriate action to defend itself.

Line of Fire by Andy McNab

Having found what they are looking for, Nick and Rio return to their home but are caught by the enemies and need to run... or fight.

We crossed the grass and, as Rio pulled out his jailer-size set of keys, his front door opened and three bodies spilt out. They saw us and it was Rio who spotted their reaction. 'Gun!'

Two bodies loomed up front; a third hung back. I kept my eyes on the one to the left. It wasn't a gun in his right hand. It was a Taser!

'Rio, run. Go for it. Run! Run!'

My eyes were glued to the lump of yellow plastic. Rio ran and so did I – straight at the Taser to stop it coming into the aim.

The dark shape holding it swung the weapon up. I jumped the final couple of metres, arms outstretched, head down so I didn't knock myself out on his body. I rammed into him, throwing my arms to pinion his to his waist. I powered my toes into the tarmac and kept running, semi-stooped. My momentum was too much for him and he fell back on the path.

As he went down he attempted to tilt his wrist. The Taser popped and I braced for the zap. Nothing happened. The barbs bounced off the tarmac as we made contact with the ground, my knuckles taking the first contact.

I kept my grip, head down, burying myself in his bulk. He bucked, trying to wrench his arms free. I held on, knowing what would come a millisecond later. A flurry of punches from one of the others, still upright, rained into my head, arms and back as he tried to haul me off his mate. I squeezed in tight as the body below still bucked and heaved. I kept my head down and took what was piling into me.

The fact it was a Taser was a good sign: it meant they didn't want us dead. If all four of us were being lifted at the same time, and Rio got away, there would be a memory stick in circulation and whoever else survived the lift would have some leverage.

I held on as the breathing of the body above me became laboured, his hands pulling hard at my arms as he worked to get me off his mate. My face was buried so hard in the man's stomach I had to fight for breath. His abs tensed, and a second later went soft, then tensed again in his effort to disentangle himself.

The hands let go of my arms now their owner had realised he wasn't going to move me with them. Kicks thudded into my legs. I took a big dead leg on the right. It didn't matter: so long as these two were focused on me, only one could be running after Rio.

I took the pain and held on. The one I was gripping dug his heels into the path and pushed. My knuckles scraped along the tarmac again. He could do what he wanted: I wasn't letting go.

Still no verbal reaction. I wanted to hear their accents. I wanted some indication of who they were.

I tilted my head just enough to free my mouth from his stomach. 'That all you got?'

No reaction. All I could hear were grunts and laboured breathing. Somebody in one of the houses must have seen what was going on but round here people would turn a blind eye. So what if a dealer or the TV

Licensing guy got filled in? Eventually somebody would call the police, and these guys knew that as well as I did. They wanted out of this as much as I did.

The standing one's hands grabbed the back of my jacket and pulled. I didn't let go of his mate. He pulled even harder and I suddenly released my grip and he flew backwards.

In that instant, I got what I wanted.

A voice, clearly American, clearly east coast. 'You jerk'

War Horse by Michael Morpurgo

Joey and Tophorn, two trained horses, are charging into their first battle in WW1.

FOR JUST A few short moments we moved forward at the trot as we had done in training. In the eery silence of no man's land all that could be heard was the jingle of the harness and the snorting of the horses. We picked our way around the craters keeping our line as best we could. Up ahead of us at the top of a gentle sloping hill were the battered remnants of a wood and just below a hideous, rusting roll of barbed wire that stretched out along the horizon as far as the eye could see.

'Wire,' I heard Trooper Warren whisper through his teeth. 'Oh God, Joey, they said the wire would be gone, they said the guns would deal with the wire. Oh my God!'

We were into a canter now and still there was no sound nor sight of any enemy. The troopers were shouting at an invisible foe, leaning over their horses' necks, their sabres stretched out in front of them. I galvanised myself into a gallop to keep with Tophorn and as I did, so the first terrible shells fell amongst us and the machine guns opened up. The bedlam of battle had begun. All around me men cried and fell to the ground, and horses reared and screamed in an agony of fear and pain. The ground erupted on either side of me, throwing horses and riders clear into the air. The shells whined and roared overhead, and every explosion seemed like an earthquake to us. But the squadron galloped on inexorably through it all towards the wire at the top of the hill, and I went with them.

On my back Trooper Warren held me in an iron grip with his knees. I stumbled once and felt him lose a stirrup, and slowed so that he could find it again. Tophorn was still ahead of me, his head up, his tail whisking from side to side. I found more strength in my legs and charged after him. Trooper Warren prayed aloud as he rode, but his prayers turned soon to curses as he saw the carnage around him. Only a few horses reached the wire and Tophorn and I were amongst them. There were indeed a few holes blasted through the wire by our bombardment so that some of us could find a way through; and we came at last upon the first line of enemy trenches, but they were empty. The firing came now from higher up in amongst the trees; and so the squadron, or what was left of it, regrouped and galloped up into the wood, only to be met by a line of hidden wire in amongst the trees. Some of the horses ran into the wire before they could be stopped, and stuck there, their riders trying feverishly to extract them. I saw one trooper dismount deliberately once he saw his horse was caught. He pulled out his rifle and shot his mount before falling dead himself on the wire. I could see at once that there was no way through, that the only way was to jump the wire and when I saw Tophorn and Captain Stewart leap over where the wire was lowest, I followed them and we found ourselves at last in amongst the enemy. From behind every tree, from trenches all around it seemed, they ran forward in their piked helmets to counter-attack. They rushed past us, ignoring us until we found ourselves surrounded by an entire company of soldiers, their rifles pointing up at us.

The crump of the shelling and the spitting of rifle-fire had suddenly stopped. I looked around me for the rest of the squadron, to discover that we were alone. Behind us the riderless horses, all that was left of a proud cavalry squadron, galloped back towards our trenches, and the hillside below was strewn with the dead and dying.

'Throw down your sword, Trooper,' said Captain Stewart, bending in his saddle and dropping his sword to the ground. 'There's been enough useless slaughter today. No sense in adding to it.'