

Honour The Dead Dog By John Borda

The blackened mess in the middle of an otherwise pristine cargo bay shuddered as it slowly lifted off the deck. It turned around slowly, as if inspecting its surroundings, then lowered itself back to rest.

Lt. John Borda walked out the back of where the shuttle's rear door would have been, if it hadn't been blasted off in an attack. He'd known that he could get the engines working again, and he now had an extra EVA platform. Eventually, he might even be able to scrounge enough plating to rebuild the rest of the hull, and some transparent aluminium for the windows.

He took off the blackened overalls he had been wearing to work on the shuttle, and put them in the replicator for recycling. Then he walked out of the cargo hold, and headed for Starbase 410's living quarters. It had been a tiring evening, but he felt a sense of accomplishment, not least because the Klingon Ambassador had wagered a few strips of latinum that he'd never get the "dead dog" going again.

The shuttle he left behind had been screening the USS West Point during an attack, and had taken a fatal hit. The top half, and with it the control systems, had been vaporised, but the engines had shut themselves down and the remains of the shell were still usable. It officially didn't exist- it was classed as destroyed, and been towed in for scrap.

On the way, he caught up with Commodore Jat, who was also turning in for the night. "You're looking cheerful!" she said "Been up to anything?"

"Yes, you know that destroyed shuttle that got towed in last week? I got it working again."

"No you didn't."

"I didn't?" Lt. Borda guessed something was up, but decided to play dumb to see what he could find out.

"You'll list it as dismantled for spares, melted down, whatever, won't you?"

"I'll do the admin first thing tomorrow. Anything else I should know?" he said, fishing again.

"Nothing you can't deduce yourself, I'm sure. Goodnight!" At that point they parted company in the corridors.

Which meant that the "dead dog" would indeed rise again, but as a "ghost", one of Starfleet Intelligence's unlisted and untraceable ships used for clandestine missions. And as the Starbase's best pilot, (in spite of his official Level 7 rating) with the possible exception of perhaps K'bang, that meant that he'd probably be doing the flying. Which left when and where- but then you never knew those until the last minute- he'd done covert operations before. Not that you'd ever know from looking at his official Starfleet record...



Fortunately, the shuttle had been placed in one of the ammunition bays, for safety reasons- there was a danger that the engines would explode after the damage it had taken, and the hold was designed to contain any explosion and direct it outwards into space. It held quantum and photon torpedoes, and the heavy weapons locker, so access was severely restricted. It was also fully shielded to prevent scans and transporter theft. Which was ideal if you wanted to keep something secret.

Over the next few weeks, the shuttle gradually acquired flight controls, sensors, shields and military spec phasers, as well as any other useful equipment Borda could scrounge off other salvaged ships. The hull was left as it was, it was easier to work without it in the way. To a casual observer, it still looked like a burnt-out shuttle. But if you didn't mind using an EVA suit, it was perfectly usable.

Which is how things were when the first call came in. A simple enough clandestine transfer, using a modified torpedo casing. The pickup was in deep space, so he wouldn't know who or where from, just a pickup and drop off point, which just happened to be behind Cardassian lines. Not a problem, if you're small enough, fast enough and sneaky enough. Because he had equipped the shuttle with two torpedo pylons, Borda decided to take a quantum torpedo on the second pylon, just in case. While the shuttle only had a mini-photon launcher, if you could launch the torpedo while flying at Warp 1, it would be as effective as if a starship used a full size launcher. Unorthodox, but then that was how he liked to operate.

The pickup and drop, onto an isolated moon of one of the less well frequented systems, went routinely, the torpedo entering the atmosphere for a pre-programmed parachute landing. Borda was heading back through the lines when his sensors picked up a huge amount of weapons fire. Someone was burning up a lot of space ahead!

The who was clear from the disruptor signature- the IKV HegH QaD was having a busy time against a wing of six Dominion battle cruisers. Strangely enough, they were surviving the onslaught- the General's weaponry was one of the more devastating upgrades to a Klingon disruptor bank ever created! But surviving they were, and pressing forward into Federation space. Borda's curiosity was piqued. Whatever these ships were doing, Starfleet intelligence needed to know about it! He carefully closed and tapped into the Klingon tactical channel.

As the telemetry from the HegH QaD's sensors came in he noticed that the Dominion ships were sharing a single shield array, combining their shields to multiply their strength. It was a risky tactic, as any one ship losing its shields would leave the rest momentarily defenceless, and they would have to stay in close formation throughout. However, it was working, and he could imagine the air turning blue around the General as he was forced backwards by the combined fire of the six battle cruisers.

He was about to leave the area, when he noticed that his own sensors' data for the Dominion shield array didn't match the Klingon data. Hurriedly, he ran an analysis on the shuttle's computer, and found...

Breaking subspace silence, he hailed the Klingon ship.

"Lt Borda calling the HegH QaD"

"Get off the air, Federation p'tagh, can't you see we're in the middle of a battle?" came the testy reply.

"Inform the General that the rear of the Dominion shield array is weakest. Can another ship attack that point?"

"Negative, we are the only ship in the area, now fight with us or flee, but leave us be!"

"Engaging target 2. Watch for an opportunity- it won't last long!"

"Bah! What good can a shuttle do! Seek an honourable death elsewhere, Federation!"

Borda closed the channel, and lined his shuttle up for a torpedo run.

On board the HegH QaD, General LodnI quizzed his signaller.

"Who was that? Any other vessel here?"

"Just some Federation in a shuttle- a Lt. borDaH saying he thinks he can help." He used the Klingon pronunciation of Borda's name.

"That borDaH is no fool! What did he say?"

"That he was engaging target 2, and to watch for an opportunity."

"Then watch we shall! Gunners! Prepare to switch all fire to target 2 on my mark!"

The secret of launching a torpedo with a shuttle is not to be too close when it hits, Lt Borda kept reminding himself as he programmed the shuttle's navigation computer. He had to run up to Warp 1, launch the torpedo and drop out of warp far enough away not to get caught in the blast. Not an easy set of calculations to make, especially as this was a completely novel tactic. Satisfied he'd done his best, he aimed straight at the cruiser he'd selected and pressed the "commit" button. The navcomp took over, flying a warp one collision course until what seemed like the last minute, then the jolt as the torpedo detached! Borda dropped the glare shield on his helmet visor just in time as the blast filled his front screen! But he was still going too fast! He pushed the impulse engines to emergency reverse and the shuttle jolted violently as it hit the oncoming blast wave. For a few moments it spiralled out of control, every system aboard momentarily failing, then restarting, the shuttle now under control, but flying backwards, losing speed, then coming to a stop.

Lt. Borda breathed a sigh of relief, then tried to get his bearings. It didn't help that there seemed to be weapons fire bursting all around him, but not hitting, and then he realised that the dark mass above him was his intended target! He'd flown straight through the weakened shield array straight after the torpedo had hit, and now he was trapped inside it! His sensors showed that the front array had nevertheless held fast, which is where he was picking up the weapons fire. He wondered why he hadn't been attacked, and then it hit him: the shuttle's hull was still unrepaired! It looked like it had been caught in the blast and destroyed!

So he still had a chance, but how to get out? He looked closer at the hull of the battle cruiser and spotted a shield emitter: maybe if he damaged it, he could make enough of a crack to squeeze through. Or let something in... Borda started manoeuvring the shuttle towards the front of the Dominion ship.

As he approached, he scanned for power readings; the forward shield emitters would be reading off the scale right now. No time to waste, as soon as some Vorta realised that he wasn't dead, they'd be after him! Found them! Heavy duty and highly reinforced, but vulnerable from inside their own shield grid.

A volley of mini photon torpedoes blasted into the shield emitter array! Lt. Borda veered the shuttle clear of the battle cruiser, just in time as multiple disruptor blasts started ripping holes through it!

"We have them now!" shouted the General. "Target the rest with quantum torpedoes and fire!"

The Klingon gunners fell to with a relish, in a race between them and the Dominion cruisers reinitialising their shield array.

It was close; two more battle cruisers lit up as quantum torpedoes tore through them! The other three managed to get their individual shields working before the torpedoes struck, and turned to flee, rocking as the blasts hammered them. But their fate was

sealed, even as they ran, the HegH QaD's disruptor arrays found them and cut them to pieces.

Aboard the Klingon battle cruiser, roars of victory rang out as the crew celebrated the turnabout on this enemy who had nearly driven them back.

"Call that Federation shuttle!" called the General. "We will drink bloodwine with its pilot tonight!"

There were roars of approval from the rest of the bridge.



Back aboard the Starbase, the Klingon Ambassador sought Lt. Borda out after he returned.

"So, it would seem that not only do I owe you some latinum, but the General has the Ferengi barman scrabbling to find every last barrel of bloodwine in the sector because of that dead dog of yours! Truly I'm impressed. Tell me, what name have you given him?"

"*She* has none, so far. She wasn't even supposed to exist!"

"Too late for that now- for some reason the General ordered his communications officer to commemorate your efforts in song. You'll just have to think of one."

"I have, but every good name is already in use somewhere in Starfleet."

"How does your saying go: "give the dog a bad name" is that it? Better than no name at all."

"Hmmm... you've given me an idea. Let me check it out..." Borda turned to a computer console, keyed in a name, and started a registry search...

Nothing! Borda didn't know whether to be pleased or appalled that no ship should be named after the first martyr of spaceflight.

A few minutes later, he took a bottle of champagne from the shuttlebay replicator and walked up to the shuttle. A group of curious Klingons looked on, as well as some of the Starbase's personnel. They were none too steady, Lt Borda had dragged them out of the bar to see this.

"Would you do the honours, Laura?" he asked the pretty Ops officer, handing her the bottle and a padd with a single word on it.

Laura-Jean took the bottle and padd, turned, and struck the shuttle's nose with the bottle, spraying both the shuttle and most of the onlookers with champagne!

"I name this ship...Laika!"

