

Mission of Mercy

A UFO Story

Written by Matthew R. White

© April 30, 2010

Based on the Characters and series created by
Gerry Anderson



Historian's Note: The events depicted here take place during and immediately after the episode "A Question of Priorities" written by Tony Barwick.

For the past six months, Colonel Virginia Lake had been overseeing the SHADO research section on the outskirts of New York City. She had successfully completed her training, well ahead of schedule, and Commander Straker appointed her as the department head of SHADO's advanced research and development division reporting directly to him. It was a great amount of responsibility that challenged her abilities as she had to stay conversant of all of the ongoing projects. Of course Ginny rose to the challenge, as failure was not an option that she would even consider.

The New York research team had just finished development of the prototype FTL drive for the

B142 space probe and if the propulsion system worked, SHADO would be able to track, and follow a UFO to its origin.

The London team was designing and testing an electron beam camera that would be able to send back high resolution images of the alien world. The project was a massive undertaking for SHADO but before the IAC would give final approval, the prototype systems had to be tested.

Virginia was reading the latest reports concerning these two projects when her phone rang.

“Lake.”

“Hello, Ginny, it’s Janice,” said Miss Ealand, to her over the phone.

“Hi, Janice, how are you?” Virginia asked, pleasantly.

“Not so well, we have an urgent problem over here. Commander Straker’s son was hit by a car this afternoon.”

“Oh my God, how is he?”

“He’s in critical condition. He needs a special hypoallergenic antibiotic that is only available in the States. Commander Straker needs someone to pick it up at Westmore Hospital and bring it, via SST transporter, to London.”

“Give me the information, Janice, I’ll handle this personally.”

Virginia wrote down the information as Janice read it off.

“Tell the Commander not to worry. I’m leaving the office, for the hospital, right now.”

Virginia hung the phone up and spoke into the intercom.

“Jen, can you come in here, please?”

“Right away, Colonel.”

Virginia gathered up the paperwork she was working on and placed them in her briefcase. A few minutes later, Captain Jennifer Wallace walked into the office.

“You wanted to see me, Colonel?”

“Yes, do you know where Westmore Hospital is?”

“I do, ma’am, it’s about thirty minutes from here.”

“Good, I need you to bring me by there and then to JFK International. I have to go to London for a few days.”

Wallace noticed urgency in Virginia’s voice.

“This sounds serious. What’s it all about, ma’am.”

“I’m sorry, Jen, I’m not at liberty to say.”

“I see. When do you want to leave?”

“I ready now, meet me around front where my car is parked. I need to grab my overnight bag.”

“Yes ma’am.”

Virginia Lake did not like leaving her people in the dark, but Commander Straker was a private man, and this was most certainly a private matter. She decided that she would handle this herself as it was not uncommon for her to have to leave at a moment’s notice. She grabbed her jacket, purse, and briefcase, and walked out of the office.

When she arrived at her car, Captain Wallace was waiting for her. She grabbed her bag and put it in the trunk and climbed in the passenger side. They pulled out of the parking lot and headed for Westmore Hospital. Virginia was worried about the traffic as it was rush hour and she still had not gotten used to New York City. Fortunately, Westmore Hospital was on the outskirts of the city and the traffic between the SHADO offices and the hospital was relatively light. In keeping with their cover, the research

offices in New York posed as a movie special effects design firm employed by Harlington Straker Studios in London.

Jennifer Wallace, was not only a native New Yorker, she had a reputation for having a lead foot. They made it to the hospital in twenty five minutes.

“Jen, wait right here. I’ll be out in a few minutes,” said Virginia, as she got out of the car.

Virginia walked into the lobby of the hospital and over to the reception desk and she was greeted by the receptionist.

“Virginia Lake, to see Dr Ashley, please. This is in regard to a medication going to London.”

“One moment, please, Miss Lake.”

The receptionist picked up the phone and dialed. Ginny looked at her watch, in another hour the traffic would be a mess.

“Miss Lake, Dr. Ashley will be down in a few minutes.”

“Thank you.”

Virginia sat down and waited for what seemed like forever. After a while, a slender dark haired woman approached her. She had a package in her hand. Ginny figured they were about the same age.

“Miss Lake, I’m Dr. Veronica Ashley.”

“Virginia Lake, my pleasure, Doctor.”

“This is the new hypoallergenic antibiotic. I’ve already spoken to Dr. Segal, in London, regarding the proper dosage, but if he has any other questions he can call me at this number,” she said, as she handed Virginia her card.

“Thank you, Dr. Ashley.”

Ginny walked out of the lobby and down the stairs to the waiting vehicle and got in.

“How fast can you get to JFK?”

Jennifer Wallace smiled as she said, “Fasten your seatbelts, Colonel.”

As Wallace pulled out of the parking lot, Ginny picked up the phone and called the studio.

“Janice, it’s Ginny. Is the Commander in?”

“No, he hasn’t arrived yet. Do you want me to pass a message?”

“Yes, please. I picked up the package from Westmore Hospital and I’m on my way to JFK now.”

“All right, I’ll tell him when he comes in.”

“Thanks, Janice.”

The rush hour traffic was already a mess but Wallace was still able to get to the airport by 4:00 pm. She drove around the main lot and pulled up to the SHADAIR terminal parking area.

“Do you need any help?” asked Wallace.

“No, I’m all set, thanks for the lift, Jen.”

Colonel Lake grabbed her bags and rushed into the terminal.

Commander Straker sat at his desk, having just gotten off the phone with his ex-wife. Ed was gravely worried for his son John. He tortured himself, second guessing his actions, *what could I have done different? If I had only brought him home on time...* And Mary, he agonized over the fact that he was still in love with her, now she was out of reach forever. Steven Rutland had been a friend of Mary's family for many years and Mary's mother had always wanted her to marry him. Mary finally caved in to the pressure, two years ago.

Ed found it ironic that the organization, that took away everything he held dear, now held the key to saving his son's life. He took some small comfort in the fact that his position in SHADO would help his family this time. He flipped on the intercom.

“Where’s that transporter?” he asked, in a hard voice.

“It's just taken off, sir. ETA London 23:30 hours,” replied Ford.

“I want a car and escort at the airport to meet it.”

“Yes sir.”

Straker flipped off the intercom and bowed his head, clenching his fists. The office doors opened and Alec walked in. Straker recovered quickly, but he was sure that Alec had noticed.

“Great steak...medium rare...with a side order of salad,” he said.

“It sounds, appetizing.”

“It was...it certainly was,” said Alec, as he walked to the servitor and picked up a glass.

“Look, Ed, it’s pretty quiet, why don’t you go home?” he added.

“What home?” asked Straker, with pain in his eyes.

Neither man spoke for a moment.

“I’m sorry Alec. I’ve just got a lot on my mind right now.”

Alec knew better than to pry, if Ed needed him, he would ask.

“I’ll go see how Skydiver is making out.”

“Thanks, Alec.”

As Alec left for the control room Straker’s phone rang.

“Yes.”

Miss Ealand was calling down, “I know you didn’t want to take any calls, sir, but I have Colonel Lake on the line. Shall I take a message?”

“No, put her through, thank you.”

Virginia Lake came on the line, “Commander, I’m on the transporter with the package you requested, sir,” she said.

“Thank you, Colonel. I take it that no one else knows the circumstances?”

“No sir. I thought this to be a private matter,” she said.

Straker actually smiled. Virginia Lake was one of his best officers. She was very perceptive and she had a reputation, for integrity, that was above reproach. Ed had no doubt that she would keep his confidence.

“I appreciate you handling this personally, Colonel, much more than I can say. When you arrive at Heathrow, there will be a car and an escort waiting for you.”

“Thank you, sir. Is there any change in his condition?” she asked, hesitantly.

“No, there isn’t. Thank you for asking.”

Straker finished the call and walked into control.

Virginia sat in the back, of the cockpit, of the transporter. She had been in the air for almost fifty minutes and she was worried about her commanding officer. Although she did not know all the details, she knew that the commander's marriage was destroyed by his dedication to his duty, to SHADO. *He must be going through pure hell right now.*

She thought about the similar circumstances surrounding her divorce to Brad. Virginia had been putting in sixteen hour days during the prototype testing of the Utronic equipment. She had been married for less than a year, when she had caught her husband in an affair with her best friend. For a long time, Ginny had blamed herself for not being home more, but the truth of the matter was, it would have happened anyway. Somehow, her mother found out that

her ex-husband had a long history of wild and loose behavior.

Virginia had been divorced since 1974, and had not been in a serious relationship since. Every man she had met, since then, seemed like they were only interested in one thing and Ginny was old fashioned in that respect. One of the few men she had met, that didn't fit the pattern, was Ed Straker.

She met him a few years before she joined SHADO. The development of the Utronic Beam was being hampered by a lack of critical information. By an IAC decree, none of the contractors were told of the extraterrestrial threat. They were told only what the IAC deemed they needed to know.

Ginny convinced her boss, Kurt Mahler, to arrange a meeting with the head of the organization, a USAF Colonel. She needed more information, if she was expected to properly engineer the system needed. Keenly aware of

her effect on the opposite sex, she expected to easily sway him to her way of thinking. That task turned out to be much harder than she expected it would be. Colonel Straker was not intimidated by her intelligence, nor was he affected by her appearance. Virginia had to make her case on its merits, and she found herself struggling to not be affected by him.

That day, she debated higher physics with him, which was something she was not normally able to do with a ranking officer. It was refreshing for her to be treated as an equal by a member of the opposite sex. Ginny was able to convince him, after a heated debate, that she needed to know what they were looking for. The information came with a price tag, SHADO needed a research physicist, and Straker wanted her to fill that role. Her decision took all of a nanosecond, and to this day, she had no regrets.

Virginia considered her reaction to meeting Straker as she found him more than just

strikingly handsome, she considered him to be a gorgeous man. His apparent diffidence to feminine beauty intrigued her, especially since she had to summon all of her self control to avoid reacting to his appearance. Having seen a picture of his wife, she knew that he appreciated female beauty. She made the mistake of asking about the picture, one day, and found out that they were divorced. Ginny would never forget the pain she saw in his eyes that day.

“Colonel Lake?”

Virginia brought her thoughts back to the present when the pilot addressed her.

“Yes,” she answered.

“We just received orders, from SHADO HQ, to divert to Western Ireland.”

“Who gave the order?”

“Colonel Freeman, ma’am.”

“I see, what will that do to our arrival time in London?” she asked.

“Assuming that we take off immediately after dropping our cargo, our ETA London will be 00:15Z, ma’am.”

Forty five minutes, damn.

“Very well, thank you, Captain.”

“Well, there's no doubt about it. The UFO was damaged before it crashed. But what by?” said Alec, as he looks at photographs sent by Carlin.

Ed Straker, uncharacteristically, was still unable to focus on the problem, his mind on his son.

“Let's make a couple of educated guesses,” Alec continued. “An alien survives the crash, he goes to a house, and the occupant is an old lady.”

“She said she was blind,” said Ed.

“So she thinks he's a man, an intruder possibly. The alien has a transmitter and he beams in on our waveband.”

“Why?”

“We'll find that out when we track him down,” said Alec.

“It won't be easy.”

“With mobiles in the area, we can pinpoint the exact position.”

“It will take time to set it up,” said Ed.

“Less than an hour,” said Alec. “We're in luck. A transporter will be landing in minutes.”

Straker looked at his friend as an icy ball formed in his stomach.

“The mobiles can move into the area immediately,” Alec continued. “When they are in position we can get a fix on the next transmission ...”

“A...transporter?” asked Ed, afraid of what he was about to hear.

“Yes...The one from New York. You ordered an early take off.”

“What have you done?”

“Diverted it...what else?” asked Alec, somewhat confused. “Is anything wrong?”

Straker didn't answer. He was beside himself, now clearly torn between his responsibility to SHADO and to his son.

“I'll contact Carlin and tell him to go ashore as field commander,” Alec finished.

Straker walked out of his office into control, having just informed Mary of the delay. The conversation was not pleasant as, once again, he was not able to explain the circumstances due to security.

“Where's the transporter?” he asked, as he walked up to the communications console.

”Just landed in Ireland, sir,” said Ford.

“The minute it's unloaded I want it back in the air for London.”

“Yes sir.”

Freeman walked over to Straker.

“I'm sorry about the transporter...was it important?” he asked.

“These things are always a question of priorities.”

Straker forced himself into full command mode for the first time that night, immersing himself into his duty.

“Tell the mobiles they don't move until I give the word.”

“Yes sir,” said Lt. Janis.

“And I want a large scale map of the area.”

“Yes sir,” said Ford.

“And get me Captain Carlin.”

Colonel Lake watched out the window as the transporter unloaded the mobiles.

“How soon before we can be back in the air?” she asked the Captain.

“If we don’t wait for fuel, maybe fifteen minutes.”

“Do we have enough fuel to make Heathrow?”

The pilot checked the gauges. “It puts us close to the minimums, but we should have enough,” he said.

“Is the weather still clear there?” she asked.

“Yes ma’am, fifty miles visibility.”

“Very well, I want us back in the air as soon as we are unloaded, and see if you can get a priority clearance.” said Lake.

“Yes ma’am.”

Mary Rutland walked into the room where her son lay in critical condition. The doctor had finally allowed her in, knowing it may be the last time she would see him alive. The drug had

still not arrived and they were just about out of time. Mary was grief stricken. She had allowed herself to believe again that Ed would not let them down. She watched in agony as the heartbeat monitor began to slow.

The transporter landed at Heathrow International twenty minutes after midnight. The SHADO car and escort were waiting at the gate. As soon as the aircraft was stopped, Virginia grabbed the medicine and her bags and disembarked from the plane. She quickly put her things in the back of the car and jumped in the passenger side.

“Let’s go,” she said.

Ed Straker pulled out of the parking lot of the studio. A UFO had slipped through the outer defenses and managed to kill the alien defector before Sky 1 could intercept it. The whole

operation had been for naught. The diversion to Ireland had cost fifty minutes, and Ed feared the worst.

Virginia's car pulled up to the hospital forty minutes past midnight. She grabbed the medical package and ran into the lobby.

"I need to see Dr. Segal. I have the medication he needs from the States," Virginia said, without preamble.

The night nurse took the package and handed it to an orderly, "Run this over to Dr. Segal, stat."

The orderly took off in a full run down the corridor.

"How is he," Ginny asked, quietly.

The nurse shook her head as she said, "It doesn't look good, ma'am."

Virginia sat down in a chair in the back of the lobby to wait for the Commander. She had

called HQ from the car and found out that he was on his way.

A few minutes later, Ed Straker walked into the lobby, as he walked toward the desk Virginia saw a young woman who she recognized as the Commander's ex-wife, walking out of the ward. She was crying uncontrollably and being supported by a, middle aged, man. *Oh my God, please not this. No!* She began to silently weep.

As Ginny watched, Ed called to his ex-wife.

“Mary...”

Slowly she turned to him, still crying uncontrollably. Through her tears she said to Ed, “I never...want...to see you...again...”

That was cruel, poor Ed, she thought.

Ed Straker looked devastated as he watched Mary, and her husband, walk out. He gradually turned to reception desk when he noticed Virginia standing there. He slowly walked up to

her but did not speak right away. When he finally found his voice, it was unsteady.

“I’m sorry you had to see that, Colonel,” Ed said, quietly.

“It’s not your fault, sir. I’m very sorry for your loss,” said Virginia, fighting back tears herself.

“Thank you, Colonel, and I appreciate your effort.” He paused for a moment. “Let me give you a ride to your hotel.”

“You are sure it’s not an imposition? I’m staying at HQ tonight.”

“No, it’s the very least I can do.”

Straker and Lake walked out of the hospital into the parking lot. Ever the gentleman, Ed grabbed her bags for her and dismissed the SHADO car and escort. They got into his car and pulled out onto the road.

Virginia was silent on the way back to HQ. She knew the commander didn't like small talk on a good day, never mind now. She could have just as easily had the escort take her back to HQ, but she sensed that he wanted the company. Ginny was angry about the way Mary had treated him. The woman obviously had no idea what kind of man he was, or what she had lost when she left him. *Ed Straker has more integrity than anyone I know, he didn't deserve to be treated that way.*

“Colonel Lake, I need a favor, if you would?”

“Yes Commander?”

“Alec doesn't know why I ordered the transporter to leave early. I would like to keep it that way.”

Virginia thought this was a mistake but she respected the Commander's wishes.

“Of course, sir.”

“And Colonel?”

“Sir?”

“Thank you, for being a friend.”

Virginia gave him a grateful smile. Her heart was greatly warmed by his admission. Commander Straker was very selective of the people he chose to revere with the title of friend. The list was very small and she was immensely honored to be among them.

John Rutland’s funeral was two days later. Virginia Lake watched the service from the edge of the cemetery. Ed was there but, out of respect for his ex-wife’s wishes, he stayed out of her sight. After Mary and her family had left, Ed stood at the casket to say his goodbyes. Virginia could see that he was crying, and out of respect for his privacy, she turned away and got in her car. Ginny did not want Ed to see her so she waited in the car until he left.

Alone, she got out and walked to the grave. She noticed that Ed's family name wasn't even on the headstone. Between that, and the way Mary had treated Ed at the hospital, Virginia had trouble feeling anything but animosity towards this woman. *It's just not fair*, she thought, as she started to cry, not sure if the tears were for the young boy, or for his father.

"Are you okay, ma'am?" asked the graveyard attendant.

She hadn't noticed him walk up and was startled, "Oh, yes, just give me a few minutes."

"I'm sorry for your loss, ma'am."

"Thank you," she said, not bothering to mention she wasn't family.

She looked back down at the casket, as she wiped her tears and composed herself. Virginia had always believed that there was a reason and a purpose for everything, but today that statement seemed hollow and empty. They

didn't even have the comfort of serving a greater good, as the mission to recover the alien, alive, was a failure. She looked at her watch. Her flight, back to New York, was due to leave in a couple of hours. She walked back to her car and drove herself to the airport.

END