

>> 00834-19223-HS // VADM STANFORTH, HIERONYMUS MICHAEL
<< 00230-00923-MP // ADM PARANGOSKY, MARGARET ORLENDA

RE: OPERATION: RED FLAG
STATUS: GREEN

Margaret,

Some days I really get the feeling that we're going to burn in hell for the things we do. Today is one of those days.

Just finished briefing the team with Halsey and they still don't suspect a thing. No one does on this side of the planet. We're keeping them well away from the primary target sites where, as far as I can tell, all hell is breaking loose and has been for some time. Army says they've got it handled groundside, but I'll believe that when I see it. Regardless, we can't allow RED FLAG to be compromised by what's going on over there. If it does, this'll all be for naught.

I feel like we're going to need to tell Keyes at some point, otherwise, as soon as the Covenant show up - and I mean really show up - he'll scrub RED FLAG and jump in with guns blazing. He's not the type to avoid a fight, hell, he ran headlong into one just last month, all on his own. Our one hope is that the Covenant bring their big ships to the front early and that the Spartans can do what they do best.

Holland's informed me that the only [CLASS-FIVE CSO] they've confirmed, a vessel called "LONG NIGHT OF SOLACE," was dropped just outside of New Alexandria a few days ago. That could have been ours if SpecWar wasn't so damn trigger happy. Now we'll just have to wait, pull the Covenant in deep enough to bring the damn trap down right on top of them.

ATTACHED: Cortana's catalogued metrics for the key staff/assets (including herself), with some of my notes affixed to each. Let me know what you think within the next few hours. Otherwise, as per our talk last week, we're green-lit for RED FLAG as of 0100 hours...and I pray to God that we're doing the right thing.

- HMS

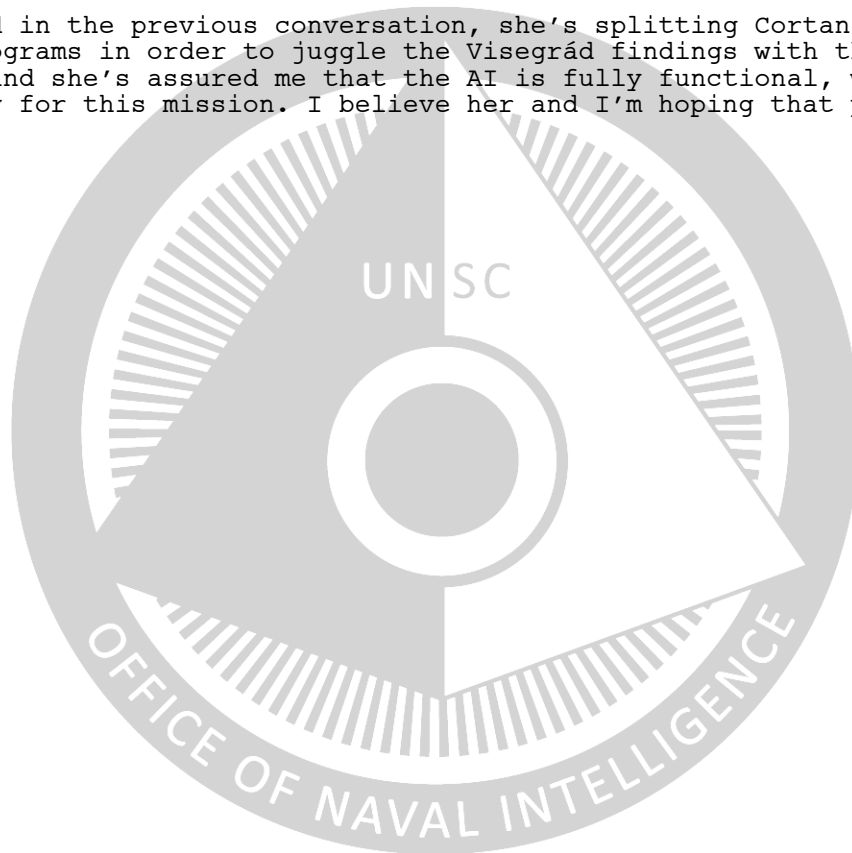
CORTANA

SERVICE NUMBER: CTN 0452-9
ACTIVATION DATE: November 7, 2549
BRANCH: UNSC Navy, Office of Naval Intelligence
RANK: Smart AI Construct

Not a lot on file here, so it looks like Halsey's done a decent job of covering her tracks (and I can't blame her, given the AI's actual origin).

I know full well that neither of you get along and I'm definitely not claiming that she shouldn't be held accountable for some of the stunts she's pulled. Reality is that we need her for this op. That's why she's been here for the last three decades.

As indicated in the previous conversation, she's splitting Cortana into two separate programs in order to juggle the Visegrád findings with this operation, and she's assured me that the AI is fully functional, well within her capacity for this mission. I believe her and I'm hoping that you can believe me.



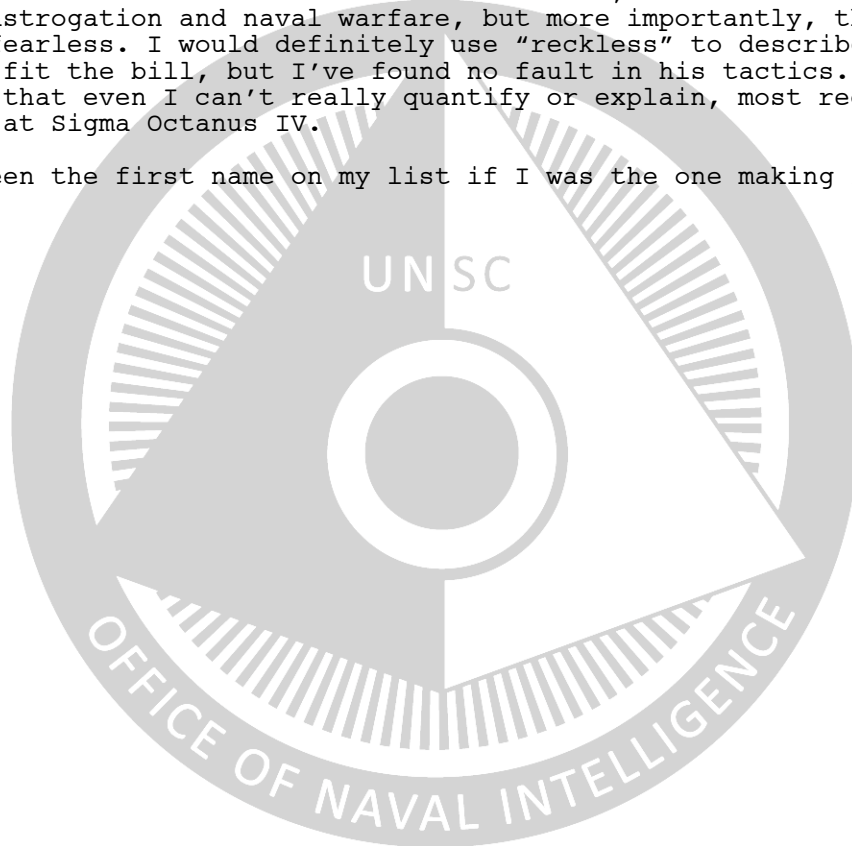
FULL NAME: JACOB KEYES

SERVICE NUMBER: 01928-19912-JK
DATE OF BIRTH: February 8, 2495
HEIGHT: 194.3cm
WEIGHT: 96.2kg

BRANCH: UNSC Navy
RANK: Captain
BIRTHWORLD: Earth
CURRENT RESIDENCE: Luna

At the end of the day, there are half a dozen CO's we could easily slot here, but there's only one who I'd trust with my life and that's Keyes. Having worked with him several times over the last decade, I can attest to his innate prowess in astrogation and naval warfare, but more importantly, the man is just plain fearless. I would definitely use "reckless" to describe anyone who I'd thought fit the bill, but I've found no fault in his tactics. He's handled some things that even I can't really quantify or explain, most recently the "Loop" deal at Sigma Octanus IV.

He'd have been the first name on my list if I was the one making it.



SHIP NAME: UNSC PILLAR OF AUTUMN

REGISTRY: C-709

CLASS: *Halcyon*-class Light Cruiser

LAUNCH DATE: December 1, 2510

REFIT DATE: March 19, 2550

LENGTH: 1,171m

BEAM: 352m

ENGINE CONFIG:

Mark II Hanley-Messer DFR (3)
Series V CODEN/SFTE - Main (1)

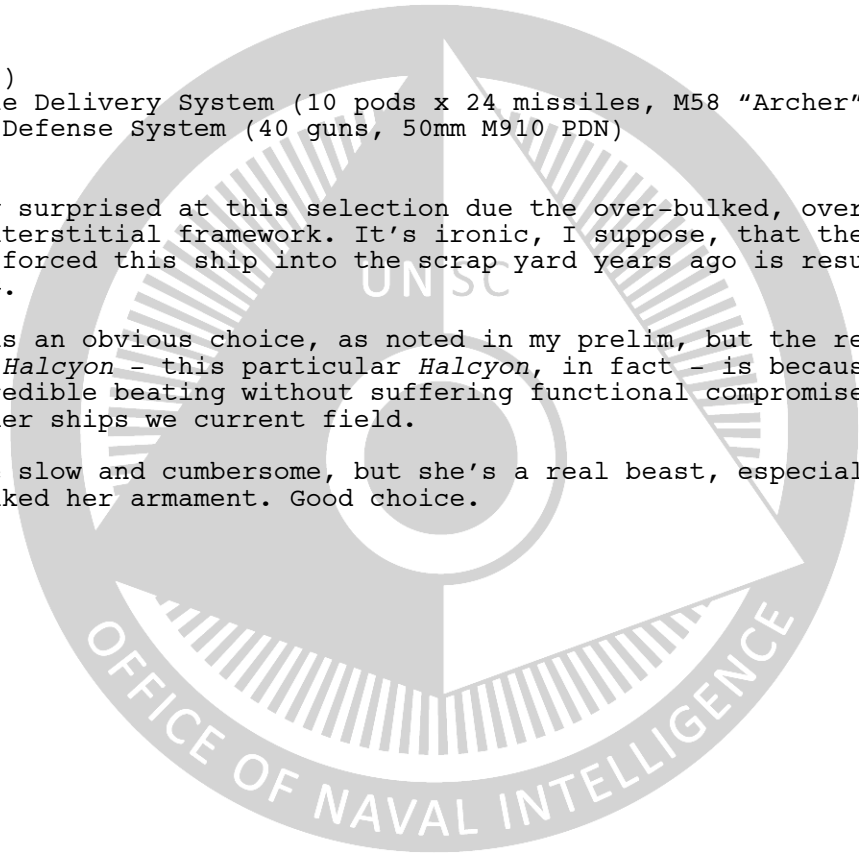
ARMAMENT:

MAC (1)
Missile Delivery System (10 pods x 24 missiles, M58 "Archer")
Point Defense System (40 guns, 50mm M910 PDN)

Not terribly surprised at this selection due the over-bulked, overmassed honeycomb interstitial framework. It's ironic, I suppose, that the same absurd design that forced this ship into the scrap yard years ago is resurrecting it for RED FLAG.

A cruiser was an obvious choice, as noted in my prelim, but the reason she opted for a *Halcyon* - this particular *Halcyon*, in fact - is because it can take an incredible beating without suffering functional compromise far longer than any other ships we current field.

She might be slow and cumbersome, but she's a real beast, especially now that they've tweaked her armament. Good choice.



FULL NAME: JOHN-117

SERVICE NUMBER: S-117
DATE OF BIRTH: [CLASSIFIED]
HEIGHT: 208.3cm
WEIGHT: 130kg

MJOLNIR MARK V INTEGRATION:

HEIGHT IN ARMOR: 218cm
WEIGHT WITH UNDERARMOR: 179kg
WEIGHT WITH FULL ARMOR: 451.3kg

BRANCH: UNSC Navy, Naval Special Weapons
RANK: Master Chief Petty Officer
BIRTHWORLD: Eridanus II
CURRENT RESIDENCE: N/A

Looking at his CSV en total, my first thought is that this is fabricated. His service record reads like a career composite of three full Tier-1/L5 ODST squads, back to back for two and a half decades.

Dear God, active in 207 ground engagements and those are just the ones that we're able to file on record. If I wasn't on line to approve his deployment for these, again and again, I wouldn't believe any of it.

And he's just one of the SPARTAN-II assets we'll have onboard, there's 25 of them being recalled for this op, all from a multitude of theaters, some even being pulled directly from combat.

If that doesn't scream last resort, I don't know what does.

