

THE ZOMBIE COP



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Transcript of press conference by Earl Katlee (deceased), Commander, US ground forces, Bluff Cove, December 24:

KATLEE:

At 13.57 local time the day before last, the Hubble Space Telescope picked up an unidentified flying object heading toward Earth. This object rapidly disappeared from the radars and was assumed to be space debris. We now know that, in fact, it was an extra-terrestrial space vessel.

This vessel duly crash landed on the beach here in Bluff Cove, southern Cornwall, England. At 19.34 hours last evening, the 23rd of December, reports of further unidentified flying craft were received by the Hubble Space Telescope and relayed to the Operations Team, based Greenbelt. These craft were also headed toward the coast of southern Cornwall. Ballistic Missile Early Warning operatives from RAF Fylindales also picked up the craft and notified central UK government. The US Army division based Northamptonshire was mobilised, and Royal Air Force fighters based Brize Norton scrambled. Upon arrival at Bluff Cove, it was quickly ascertained that the enemy was extra-terrestrial.

In accordance with protocol, the UK alien invasion threat level was raised to critical. Prime Minister Mattison recalled her closest advisors from their Christmas recess for an extra-ordinary meeting at number ten, Downing Street, London, England.

UN-NAMED JOURNALIST #1:
What was extraordinary about it?

KATLEE:

I said no questions. NATO and the United States government also put into effect the agreed and rehearsed response systems. All air-to-air and ground-to-air forces in Northern Europe were mobilised. For the record, these included Euro Fighter Tycoons based Northern France armed with Meteor missiles, as well as three Type 45 destroyers loaded with Sea Vipers and Cruise missiles that were on a training exercise in the East Atlantic. The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory based Porton Down was put on standby, their brief being to engage the enemy with chemical weaponry if required.

Personnel based at the UK nuclear arsenal HQ, location of which is classified, and that of European Union and NATO allies within striking distance, were also put on standby. I, Earl Katlee, commanded the first ground forces to reach Bluff Cove and made the immediate decision to put the location into lockdown in an effort to contain the extra-terrestrial invaders, as well as the reported chemical outbreak resulting from a tanker spillage earlier in the day.

UN-NAMED JOURNALIST #2:
Are the two incidents being linked?

KATLEE:
Sheeez. Another question before I've finished. Concurrent with the extra-terrestrial activity, reports were received of phantasmagoric occurrences in the vicinity, most notably the Atkins Farmhouse on the eastern tip of the village. These are currently under investigation. I can confirm that a number of local residents were casualties of the chemical spillage. We now believe the chemical outbreak to have been contained.

UN-NAMED JOURNALIST #3:
How can you be sure that the outbreak has been contained?

KATLEE:
OK. I've finished. Any questions?

-2

***Police Report, PC Jake Rodwell, December 24
(retrieved mobile phone recording)***

On my way to Kent. Bluff Cove is over-run. The US army unit engaged the alien and undead invaders. All personnel dead. Except one. Escaped with him and DCI Bannen, plus the landlady of the local pub. Hid in house waiting for reinforcements. Did not arrive. Needed to leave to locate my daughter. Landlady (Becky) agreed to accompany. She didn't make it. Status unknown. And to confirm, I sustained a bite to the shoulder. Mystery antidote administered by US army medic now deceased. It seems to be keeping me alive. I have not turned. Yet.

-1

Report, DCI Carl Bannen, 25 December (written statement)

Ground zero is lost. Pulling out of the village. The US army unit posted here wiped out. Promised British reinforcements came under immediate attack from zombie hoards. We've done all we can. Losses heavy. Zombie soldiers everywhere. Out of control. Must stop the spread. Will enter quarantine after locating the other infected.

0

*Police Report, PC Jake Rodwell, December 25,
(Dictated)*

This will likely be my last message. Must conserve phone battery and writing is an impossibility in my deteriorating condition. I have found my daughter Emily. But situation is grim. House is surrounded by undead. And Trudy bit me. Became infected. Stabbed me through the chest. Yet I lived. I don't know how. Has to be the antidote. But she has turned. Cannot stay here much longer.

1

Jake Rodwell knew the precise moment his life stopped being about him. 9.36pm on the 8th of July five years back. Ten minutes after his daughter had been born. He cradled her in his arms. Felt her weight pull on his shoulders. Not a burden then. Just a life he knew he had to stick around for. Provide for. Protect. Be there to watch her grow. Teach her good from bad, right from wrong. Find ways to keep her entertained that didn't involve screens. So he worked all the shifts he could work to earn all the money he could earn to provide for Emily and her mother, Trudy.

A mother and wife harbouring a family secret that would have ripped them apart had the zombies not got there first.

Easy money, his boss DCI Bannen had told him. Bluff Cove's a one cop village with low-to-no crime. The incumbent's an old school copper about to keel over. He'll groom you to take over so you get to live the easy life. See more of your wife and kid.

Of course, it didn't quite pan out like that. It didn't pan out like that at all. Rodwell had trouble comprehending and remembering all that had conspired. All the people killed. All those who'd turned. And the bite.

It all should have seemed a world away from the luxury of the warm lounge he now sat in, socks sinking into the expensive shag pile, his daughter next to him on the sofa. The latest edition of *Country Homes* magazine open on the coffee table next to the bloodstained Bowie knife.

Emily's grandfather, as Rodwell preferred to refer to his father-in-law, sat snoozing in the armchair opposite. Professionally known as Duke The Duke Nelson, or just The Duke for ease, his pistol was slipping from his sleepy grip as exhaustion took its toll. In the armchair on the other side of the fireplace, his wife Dolores, or Emily's grandmother as Rodwell preferred to refer to her, sat practising meditation as Rodwell finished reading a picture book about a Christmas tree to his daughter.

The scene a stark contrast to the violence that had raged in and around the house barely an hour before.

The undead had paid another visit, their movement triggering the security lights on the gravel drive, an early warning that saw The Duke grab his golf bag and Dolores her Bowie. Rodwell reached into the golf bag, preparing for his first battle against the undead in the Kent mansion.

'Not that one,' The Duke had yelled, snatching the driver from his hand. 'That's signed by Faldo, limited edition.' He replaced it in the bag and selected a less valuable five-iron, handing it to Rodwell.

'Head shots only,' The Duke ordered. Rodwell didn't want to make him look foolish in front of his wife by telling him he knew how to kill undead, having dispatched hundreds over the last few days, so he just nodded.

Rodwell guided Emily up the staircase. She settled on the top step and looked down into the arena, seeing shadows of the dead milling around on the doorstep, hearing the hollow howl of their hunger,

emaciated frames and faces at the window that ran the length of the door.

Fingers fumbled through the letterbox, The Duke instinctively kicking out, causing multiple snaps as fragile bones broke. Rodwell ran back into the lounge, pulled back the curtain, counted three undead on the doorstep. Rushed back into the hallway.

‘Stand back, all of you,’ he ordered.

He reached for the door.

‘No!’ The Duke and Dolores screamed in unison.

‘Don’t, Daddy!’ Emily half cried.

Rodwell turned, smiled at his daughter, then pulled open the door.

Rodwell swung the club, taking the head off the nearest assailant, a woman in a red party dress with an apron of sick down the front. The other two were men in suits, still wearing bow ties, admittedly a little wonky now.

Rodwell lunged at the nearest of the two, its eyes vacant, mouth stained with the haphazard lipstick of another’s blood. The blunt end of his club crashed through the brick wall of the man’s once perfect teeth, the force of the blow enough to impact the man’s lower cerebrum. The final invader, still only alive because Rodwell had selected to kill him last, scraped his nails down Rodwell’s back, drawing blood through an already bloodstained shirt. Rodwell spun on the spot, slowly but surely enough, looked at his assailant who failed to look him straight in the eye before bringing the business end of the club crashing down on a skull already softened by the scourge of infection.

He looked down at his latest kills. Wanted to feel remorse, guilt, sadness. But no emotion would come.

'You'll have to clear up the mess,' he told Dolores and The Duke as he returned into the house. 'I can't bend down.'

He slid the club back into the golf bag and held his hand out to Emily, who ran down the stairs, but shook her head when she saw the blood and exposed bone of her father's hand.

2

The Duke's eyes flicked open. Rodwell already at the window, security lights back on.

'Is it them?' The Duke asked, searching for his club.

Rodwell shook his head. The Duke joined him by the window.

'That's even worse,' The Duke whispered, peering over Rodwell's shoulder. A minute later both men were standing on the doorstep watching DCI Carl Bannen struggle out of the lead car. He was early-sixties, way out of shape for over thirty years now.

'Jake,' he called out brightly. 'Merry Christmas.'

'What are you doing here?' Rodwell asked.

'I've got to take you in.'

'What?'

'Quarantine. Emily too. We have to do all we can to contain this. Whoever's in the house with you will need to come too.'

'I'm not going anywhere,' Dolores declared, looking down from a first floor window.

Then the window of the last of the three cars that had pulled into the mansion's driveway smashed. A scream followed. Bannen turned to see movement in the trees either side of the entrance. The doors of the last car flung open. Rapid flashes lit the bitter air as shots were fired.

'What's going on?' Bannen called.

Bodies fell from the trees surrounding the front of the property. More shots were fired. More walking bodies appeared. One sunk its teeth into the exposed neck of a police officer as she emerged from the vehicle.

Rodwell recognised Nathan, the US Army officer who'd helped him escape from Bluff Cove turn and let loose a round which took down two, maybe three undead. It was hard to see much except for more staggering shapes emerging from the shadows.

Bannen drew his gun.

'No,' Rodwell shouted. 'You'll only attract more. Get in here.'

'No way,' Dolores shouted, 'I'm not having more filth in the house.'

'They can't stay out there. They'll die.'

'The same fate awaits 'em in here. Trust me.'

Rodwell looked to The Duke. 'Come on, Dol,' The Duke called up. 'This is an emergency.'

Dolores slammed shut the upper floor window she was leaning out of.

The second police car was now surrounded by undead clawing at its windows. Two WPCs Rodwell recognised as Strickland and Nestor who worked with him in Turperton, exited the back of the car Bannen had arrived in and ran up the steps.

‘Get inside, all of you,’ Rodwell ordered as he edged down the steps.

None of the undead surrounding the second police car registered his presence. He pulled a dagger from his lapel and jammed it into the head of the nearest walking corpse, another smartly dressed Christmas reveller whose party was over. Two more police officers in the car were fumbling for their tasers. Rodwell took another dead walker down trying to reach them. Heard another window smash. Saw undead frantically dive into the rear of the vehicle, the inside of the windscreen then stained with blood, like a morbid interior screenwash.

Rodwell took two more down, their blurred outlines difficult for him to make out, the twin pinpoints of their yellow eyes his only reliable targets.

He heard a taser discharge in the car followed by screams. He glanced at the third car, invisible now under a mass of writhing, feeding undead.

‘Jake!’

Rodwell turned to see Bannen imploring him to return to the house. He had the look of a man who’d been shouting for ages. Rodwell simply hadn’t heard him such was his focus. But now he turned and hobbled back to the house, all three cars on the driveway now overwhelmed, their occupants destined to join the legions of the dead.

Bannen dragged him up the steps.

‘There was nothing I could do,’ said Rodwell.

‘I know. Get in. We can’t afford to lose you as well.’

Feasting on the occupants of the police vehicles kept the dead busy for ten minutes, during which time those sheltering in the mansion armed themselves.

'Not that one,' The Duke cried as Strickland reached into his golf bag and pulled out his cherished driver. He sized up Strickland and offered her a seven-iron instead, handing Nestor a nine, watching her rehearse a chip.

'You play?' he asked.

'Off nine,' Nestor answered.

The Duke nodded. 'Head shots only.'

'Yeah, we know, thanks.' Nestor told him. 'How you doing, Jake?' Nestor asked, turning to him.

'This good,' he said pointing to his face.

'Got to say I hardly recognised the station's pin-up boy.'

'Got to be pretty sick to want to pin-up anything looking like this,' he replied.

'I don't know. It could be interesting' She smiled at him. Rodwell nodded at Bannen standing behind her.

'Are we fighting or flirting?' Bannen asked.

Nestor's light mood evaporated. 'Fighting sir, definitely fighting.'

'Good.'

'Please don't say headshots only, sir.'

'OK, I won't.'

They watched the shadows outside.

'The kid needs to be upstairs,' Bannen ordered. 'Can you take her?' He nodded at Dolores.

'You can sod right off mate,' she replied. 'I've never ran from a fight in my life, and I ain't about to change that for a load of dead people.'

Bannen was taken aback by the ferocity of her reply. He turned to Rodwell 'Jake, we need to get Emily away.'

Rodwell nodded at the stairs and Emily resumed her front row seat on the top step.

'All other entrances have been secured,' Rodwell told Bannen. 'Windows across the ground floor boarded.'

'Good.'

'So the front and side doors are the only feasible entry points.'

A bony fist shorn of skin sporting a fake Rolex on its wrist smashed through the frosted glass window that ran the full height of the front door. The shower of sharp debris hit Rodwell full in the face. He felt no pain. Saw no blood. Just yanked glass shards out of his forehead and cheeks and carried on the fight. The spindly forearm belonging to the fist snaked through the jagged hole. Rodwell brutally brought his club crashing down on the quivering digits, sending them falling to the bloodstained welcome mat.

More arms reached through. The door creaked under the pressure of the weight of bodies leaning against it.

'It's a good door,' Dolores called out. 'Several thousand quid. Five lever mortice deadlock.'

'Fall back, Jake. We've got this,' Bannen shouted.

Rodwell feigned deafness. Brought the golf club crashing down again, this time on the arm of the now fingerless hand, the force separating forearm from upper arm. A follow-up blow separated upper arm from shoulder. Still the zombie attacked.

‘I’m serious, Jake,’ Bannen urged. ‘Move away. That’s an order.’

Nestor pulled Rodwell away from the door and took his place on the front line, her feet crunching on the glass that had missed Rodwell’s face.

Rodwell attempted to re-take his position, but this time Bannen pulled him back and glared at him. ‘You’ve never disobeyed me before, Jake. Don’t start now.’

Nestor plunged a kitchen knife into the soft marrow of the brain of the now armless undead assailant, a former colleague she no longer recognised, sporting a bloodstained police uniform. The speed of rotting had set in fast with this one, the stench of death from the head wound almost overpowering.

Rodwell turned to The Duke who was crouching on the floor by the side door, beating reanimated dead limbs with the thick end of a three-iron as they reached in through the cat flap trying to drag him out.

‘What gets me is we don’t even have a bloody cat anymore,’ The Duke spluttered as silhouettes of dead hands thumped against the window, threatening to shatter the glass.

Further down the hallway, Strickland struck out at undead trying to enter the kitchen from the garden. Rodwell ambled over to The Duke, running no longer an option. He drew his club again, the dried blood of previous kills already forming a crust on its smooth face.

‘Away,’ Bannen shouted, seeing Rodwell preparing to return to the battlefield.

‘I’m needed here,’ Rodwell shouted.

‘You’re not. We’ve got this.’

Rodwell couldn’t work out why Bannen was being so protective. It wasn’t like him.

‘Get Emily out of here,’ Bannen ordered. ‘That’s another order.’ It was even less like Bannen to give two hoots about a kid.

Emily stood as Rodwell beckoned to her to come down the stairs.

‘I need him,’ The Duke shouted, crashing his club against a deep purple hand with broken green nails. Dolores crossed the hallway to join her husband, jabbing her Bowie at the invaders.

‘I’m in charge here,’ Bannen shouted back, tiring now as he battled to keep undead invaders from the front door alongside Nestor. ‘If this house didn’t have so many ways in, our task would be a lot easier. Now, Jake, go!’

Rodwell picked up Emily and carried her across the hall.

‘What’s the matter with you?’ The Duke snarled at Rodwell. ‘Can’t you think for yourself? Are you going to blindly follow his orders? Surely you can see what’s happening here?’

‘Daddy!’ Emily screamed as a face crashed through the remains of the front door, bloodstained teeth sinking into Nestor’s shoulder.

Rodwell and Emily both saw Nestor’s look of fear, witnessed her fall, clutching her wound, saw Strickland rush to her and drag her away from the door as Bannen stood dumbfounded. Rodwell administered a savage blow with his club to the temple of the undead assailant who’d got Nestor.

‘Go, Jake,’ Bannen shouted.

He dragged Emily into the front room, slammed the door shut and pointed to Emily to sit on one of two white leather three-seater sofas as he drew the curtains.

The living room was traditionally decorated with added blood stains giving it a contemporary twist. Mahogany bookshelves, a TV cabinet, floral wallpaper were the order of the day. He and The Duke had reinforced its shuttered windows with oak panels ripped from wardrobes from all five of the bedrooms upstairs. They'd nailed them into the window frames in a desperate attempt to keep the dead out.

Rodwell stumbled slowly across the plush light blue deep pile carpet, dirty now, but unmistakably expensive underfoot.

Emily put on her wireless Bose headphones, one of many expensive Christmas presents from her grandparents. She tried to look pleased about being stuck in a room with her dad, but he didn't look or sound much like her dad anymore, his skin grey, hair thinning, bald in patches, eyes tinged yellow, voice rasping and weak. And what were those things sticking out of his face?

The door burst open and Dolores rushed in, heading straight for the gin in the drinks cabinet. 'I thought I might find you in here,' she said, adopting the despairing tone of voice she always used when addressing Rodwell.

Since he'd arrived, her criticisms had been relentless, focusing on his unkempt appearance, and the smell of his bite wound. Rodwell had ignored her. His existence was no longer about how he looked or

smelled. It was about how he looked after his daughter.

Finally, Dolores deigned to look at him and grimaced as she saw the stains Rodwell's dirty boots had added to her carpet, and the shards of glass that were falling from his face onto the floor.

'Would you do that to your carpet at home?' she asked.

'We have lino.'

Dolores paused. 'Why are you shirking your duties on the battlefield?'

'I'm in here protecting Emily,' Rodwell croaked.

'She's fine, aren't you sweetie. So you can get back out there and do your job.'

Rodwell glanced at his daughter, aware she was desperately trying to blot out what was happening by turning up her music in her headphones. She smiled weakly at him.

'I'm staying here.'

'You don't want to fight them because you're one of them. That's the truth, isn't it? You're a monster and you don't want to kill your own.'

Dolores picked up the magazine and wafted his stench away, dropped it and tipped down more gin.

Emily slipped off her headphones and looked from her father to her grandmother.

'Have you nothing to say in your defence?' Dolores asked.

Rodwell looked at Emily and forced a smile.

Dolores slammed her empty glass on the sideboard. 'Well, there's no way I'm just sitting here while all hell breaks loose in my hallway.' She picked up her Bowie knife from the coffee table, cleaned its

stained blade on the Orion velvet curtains. 'You stay here, rely on us oldies, just like you do for everything.' She looked at Emily. 'If your Daddy isn't prepared to fight, Nanny's going to have to.'

She slammed the door behind her, leaving father and daughter to endure an awkward silence. The sounds of battle outside rose several levels when Dolores joined the fray.

Rodwell smiled awkwardly at Emily. 'Will you be OK? Daddy needs to go back out there.' Rodwell pointed to the door.

She shook her head. 'I don't want to be left alone, Daddy,' Emily insisted.

Rodwell inched open the door. Saw Strickland drag Nestor's jolting body across the hall floor.

'I'll take her,' Bannen shouted, dragging her toward the kitchen.

Rodwell gently shut the door. Heard the sound turned up loud in Emily's headphones. Motioned for her to take them off. She obeyed slowly.

'Are you OK?' he asked.

She shook her head. Fighting back tears. 'Are we going to die, Daddy?'

Rodwell felt sick hearing her say that. It was the most scared he'd ever seen his daughter. He wanted to hug her, but knew she'd refuse any contact. 'I'm doing all I can to keep you safe. Do you want to go upstairs?'

She shook her head. 'Don't like being alone. Nanny says you're sick.'

'I'm fine. It's OK. Daddy might look like a monster on the outside, but I'm still the same person on the inside. I'm going to look after you. I promise.'

'Promise promise?'

He threw his arms wide, inviting his daughter for a hug. She shook her head, still unsure about getting anywhere near him. And that hurt Rodwell more than the bite he'd taken, the abuse he'd endured, and any of the wounds he'd sustained in multiple battles against the undead.

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