

NOPCON WRITEUPS, CHAPTERS 1-6

CHAPTER 1

This was the first in a string of ops during NOPCON. Target was the water treatment station that Ghost and Sa'Kage explored a few months ago.

Operatives:

- Æternaeon
- Eden
- Ghost
- Sa'Kage
- Teutoni
- Xanatos

Time:

Appx. 0030-0400



Map by Eden

There was no fucking around with this one. For NOPCON I was under the impression that we'd all spend the first week getting to know each other, sharing knowledge & skills and maybe performing one or two small ops later in the week to get everyone warmed up. Instead, straight from the airport, I was gearing up almost immediately after reaching the apartment along with 5 other people I just met.

Helluva good start!

Once we were all in our opping attire, the lights were turned off for everyone to adjust their night vision. It was interesting seeing everyone sink to the floor in the darkness in almost perfect synch; we all had a lot more in common than we thought. After our retinas were accustomed to the dark and rod cells were fired up, we left through the front door one at a time with Ghost taking point. After everyone made it to the dark side of the building, Ghost pointed out the direction we were headed and took off once again. The group followed in suit one at a time, moving from shadow to shadow, cover to cover, through someone's front yard and taking cover behind the vegetation when a car's headlights passed by us. Once the coast was clear, Ghost led the way through the front driveway (using the vehicles & plants as cover) and everyone followed in a similar

fashion, keeping distance between us so the group was less easy to spot. We lost track of Ghost temporarily, but soon met up again and everyone proceeded down the now darkened road towards our objective.

After a stretch of blackened road, we stumbled upon a house with its lights on and a streetlight illuminating the path to our objective. Maintaining discretion, we stuck to the opposite side of the road, using the shadows & vegetation for cover. There was an old barn of some kind that we used as cover to quickly sneak around and into the safety of the shadows once more, but, with Eden taking point this time, we got separated and spent an arduous few minutes trying to regroup. When you can't see anything in the dark and aren't allowed to make a lot of noise, keeping track of one another on an op is a real pain sometimes. Eventually we regrouped, with half of us on each side of the once again darkened street.

After making easy progress once more, we stumbled upon some more houses with fairly bright lights. Circumventing them was easy enough this time, with plenty of trees and shadows to hide in. The rest of the journey was done in a similar fashion; stretches of darkened road lasting a few hundred yards with occasional bright patches outside houses to stealth past (some requiring more finesse than others). Then we reached a turnoff which I almost missed due to being in front with no idea where I was going. It was a humid night, and the fireflies were out doing their Time Square routine which was awfully distracting in the dark. After passing a few intersections, hiding from another vehicle and sneaking behind some apartments we headed towards a Thieve's Highway in the form of a darkened powerline trail through the woods, startling a deer along the way. We came across a stream that was a bit difficult to cross, especially in the dark with slippery rocks. Most of us got our feet wet and Ghost slipped into the water, but our caution was unnecessary as you'll read later on.

After crossing the stream we headed along the trail for a few hundred meters before turning off into the woods, looking for a shortcut to the water treatment station. Even though Ghost & 'Kage had been there before, navigating in the woods at night with no points of reference is as hard as it sounds. The combination of stream water and wet vegetation darkened my camouflage to a near-black state, which Æternaeon pointed out once we started across a small clearing. I tried my best to stick to the shadows a lot more for the duration of the op, maximising the effectiveness of my darkened clothing as much as possible. Once we passed the clearing and proceeded once again through the woods (with me as tail-end Charlie) I couldn't shake the feeling that we were being followed, so I checked our six periodically with the alertness of a startled wolf.

Eventually we got onto the path that lead to the water treatment station, and soon enough we were at the fence surrounding the installation. Æternaeon went around the left, I hopped the fence in front of us near a warm generator and everyone else went around to the right to hop the lower fence. There was a concrete platform joined to the main building with hatches on the far side; this was the main treatment tank full of water that Ghost & 'Kage thought they heard something splashing around on their initial op. We all had a look inside; the water was deep and clear, very tempting to just dive into and swim around in if it weren't for the oppressive smell of chlorine. There was no sign of the mysterious Swamp Thing, so we left it at that and proceeded up onto the roof of the main building.

It began raining quite hard, and when we were all posing for our very first group photo up on the roof my camera got soaked and died. Pity. After getting ourselves soaked in turn, we headed back to ground level and tried looking for a way into the building. There were two doors that couldn't be carded but may have been pickable, and there were a few windows with simple plastic shutters that we didn't feel like breaking. From what could be seen through the shutters, this building housed the main filtration & control unit for the facility, but Æternaeon advised that it wouldn't be wise to explore inside without some sort of protective gear. The strong smell of chlorine in the air backed up his claim, so we decided to call it a night and head back through the increasingly heavy rain.

We headed back along a slightly different route, passing through a small neighbourhood and using all the cover we had available to sneak in between the houses one at a time. Once we were passed that we headed back the same way we came; along the powerlines, across the stream (which we weren't concerned about crossing dry any more), behind the apartments, down Firefly Avenue, back along the long stretch of road, past the houses with the lights and, since we were all dehydrated, tried looking for a faucet in a PYO blueberry farm but to no avail. As we were crossing through the front yard towards the apartments again another car drove by. We all ducked for cover and then headed back to the apartment one by one, making a beeline for the kitchen to dry off and celebrate our first successful NOPCON Night Op.

This was the first group op I've been on, and also the first chance I got to work with other experienced operatives. It was remarkable how similarly we all dressed and conducted ourselves; everyone was aware of spacing and principles of stealth right from the get-go. The only setback was keeping track of such a large group in the dark, especially during the initial stage of the op when we had to be super stealthy. After our second separation however we learned to keep track of one another quite

easily - a lesson well learned.

It was also interesting to see how we operatives actually look in the night; I loved watching everyone else slink in & out of shadows like phantoms. Even when I knew exactly where someone was, their figure was completely lost to me once they stepped out of the light. If any operatives here are concerned they might still be easy to spot in the dark, relax, you're invisible in the shadows!

As mentioned in another recent thread, seeing the dynamic between camo & solids was informative. Æternaeon & I were wearing camo (he in Multicam, I in my custom pattern) while everyone else was wearing black, and everyone performed pretty much equally. While the camo did marginally better in the light against the vegetation, the people in black just appeared as shadows against the backdrop. Unless they were casting a recognisable silhouette or moving, they just looked like ordinary blobs of darkness. And in the shadows, everyone was practically invisible.

So aside from bogging my camera and putting a hole in one of my diving boots, I'd say this was a helluva good start to NOPCON.

CHAPTER 2

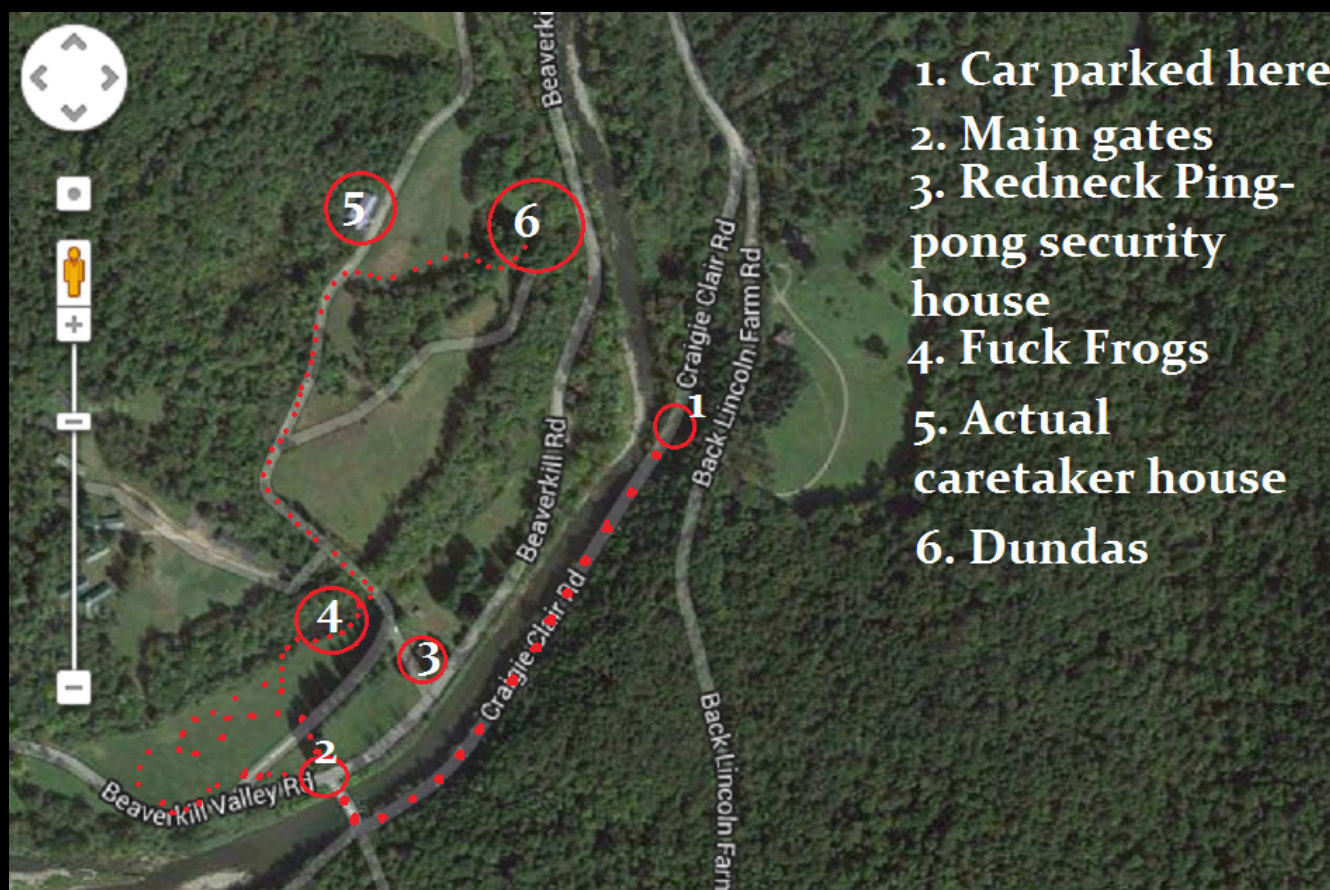
This was the second op planned for NOPCON. The Big One. Dundas Castle.

Operatives:

- Æternaeon
- Eden
- Ghost
- Sa'Kage
- Scout
- Teutoni
- Xanatos

Time:

Appx. 2100 - 0030/0100 - 0430



1. Car parked here
2. Main gates
3. Redneck Ping-pong security house
4. Fuck Frogs
5. Actual caretaker house
6. Dundas

Map by Eden

This was the op we'd all been waiting for; been planning it since last year, and now it was finally happening. After packing all our gear and leaving camp in two separate cars, we arrived at the AO roughly 3 hours later. Our original parking area turned out to be a no-go, so we drove along the road hoping to find a better place to park the cars. We found a place to park on the opposite side of the river, far enough down the road that our cars wouldn't be easily spotted from the other side. After gearing up, the seven of us started along down the road towards the bridge. Across the river we spotted a light and thought we heard voices coming from a house near the main gate, so we proceeded with extra caution. After making it to the bridge, I took point and headed across first, climbing along the outside of the bridge to stay in the shadow cast by the moonlight. I signalled the 'all clear' with my fucking pocket spotlight (I swear, this flashlight of mine is bright enough to shoot down helicopters) and waited in the vegetation for 'Kage, Ghost and Æternaeon to join me, after which I bolted across the road and hopped up onto the wall near the tall, spiked gate. I waited for the others to come into view before dropping down on the other side.

There was a row of tall, thick trees to my right lining the driveway towards the house with the light, and a field out in front that

was illuminated by the half-moon. I sat concealed in the shadow of the wall and waited for the rest of the group to join me, keeping an eye on that house. The light turned on & off every now and then and I could hear voices coming from the back, but other than that I saw no movement. Once everyone was over we discussed our next move; Æternaeon and I would cross the field first and scout the back of the house from the safety of the vegetation, then once the coast was clear everyone else would head over and we'd figure out what to do from there. Æternaeon & I crept along the treeline of the driveway and quickly crossed the field. From the safety of the vegetation, we could see the back of the house. No movement detected, but we could still hear the voices, although not clearly. It sounded like a bunch of rednecks playing beer pong indoors, but there may have been others in the woods out back that we couldn't see. The coast was clear on our end though, so I signalled for the others to come across with my flashlight (probably not a good idea considering how bright the fucking thing is) but since we didn't really establish any sort of signal code we just waited in silence for a few tense minutes.

Eventually Æternaeon decided to head around the long way and lead everyone to this side via the perimeter just in case anybody came out and saw their dark silhouettes crossing the field. I moved further down the field to where it dips slightly and held position for everyone to regroup. Once everyone was together again we tried to figure out the best way to the castle; Eden had the best idea of the layout of the area but there were a few details we were unsure about. Namely, the field we were all sitting in and the house with the light blocking our pathway. It was apparently the caretaker's house, but wasn't that supposed to be *behind* the castle and not next to the road? We had the options of sneaking along the road in front of the house, creeping behind the house or pressing our way through the woods (all somewhat risky) but since neither of us knew which direction the castle was in we couldn't do a thing. Eventually we decided we needed to look at the map again - which was conveniently left in the car.

After making our way back around the field, along the road and back to the safety of the wall, Ghost & 'Kage decided to head back to the cars to look for the map while the rest of us waited for them; I sitting atop the wall behind where the gateway rises up and the rest of the group in the shadow of the wall. I was keeping an eye out for our map-runners and any traffic heading our way, having to drop down behind the wall once when a car drove past. After a long while I spotted two shadows slinking their way across the bridge, and once the map was back in our possession we all gathered behind the wall once again to discuss our next move. Eden was right about the castle being further behind the house, up the driveway lined with trees, and during the long wait for the map she also discovered that the light was on a timer and not activated either manually or by any motion sensor. We figured the voices were coming from inside and that it'd be safe to try crossing along the vegetation behind the house.

After crossing the field once again we started moving in on the house, sticking close to the vegetation. But as we got closer the "voices" became more clear - they sounded more like geese. Great. To avoid startling them further, we decided to head into the woods a little bit further and go around. Æternaeon scouted ahead and found another house with lights on the other side of the wooded area, so our only option was to keep pushing ahead past the other house with the light. But as we got closer to the "geese" we discovered them to actually be frogs in a pond. All this time, we were working so hard to sneak past Goddamn amphibians.

A team comprised of some of the site's best operatives just got outsmarted by frogs and essentially a light hooked up to an egg timer!

After that humorous realisation we continued on with greater ease, but still wary of the house because of the numerous cars parked outside of it. We carried on up the driveway in the safety of the trees before crossing another, wider field, double-checking the map to make sure we were going the right way. After crossing the field we headed along the continuing driveway which lead to what could only be the caretaker's house (the real one this time). Steering clear of the house, we made our way along another treeline towards the bottom of the hill. Once we were in the safety of the shadows provided by the trees, we finally stumbled upon the gatehouse to Dundas Castle.

After Æternaeon checked the entrance for security, we proceeded inside. The gatehouse itself had a small cellar of some kind but it was flooded, and I've played enough *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* to know you don't want to explore flooded castle cellars. The courtyard was completely enclosed, with the entrance to the castle itself towards the right and another door in the wall to the left with a big firepit in the middle. The shadows cast by the moon illuminated half the courtyard, highlighting the gorgeous irregular stonework that marks a different age. The darkened half of the castle was silhouetted against the night sky, the vegetation growing on the roof blending together with the towers and arched windows, giving the place a very haunted feel. Æternaeon and a few others headed to the door on the left to go explore, Eden and myself went straight for the castle door and I don't remember what everyone else was doing at the time. Too eager to explore inside, I was.

The door to the castle was missing a handle but wasn't locked, although it still took some considerable force to push open. This wasn't at all helped by another door being wide open behind it, meaning when I shoved the main door open it bounced back off the other door into my shoulder. I found myself standing in a kitchen of sorts, the place in a decrepit and unfurnished state but still mostly intact. Cupboards lined the walls with doors broken or missing entirely, the shelves littered with whatever the renovators and vandals were drinking at the time. Æternaeon and the others poured in shortly afterwards, and so we all split up into pairs to explore the rest of the castle from top to bottom.

It had a very vintage vibe to it; being built in 1924, it had a lot of old-fashioned light switches, heaters, hearths and panels with coils of blue copper wire for contacting other rooms of the castle (probably for servants). The bathrooms were quite spacious and there was more than one on every floor. The doors & windows had decorative Gothic arches, and the bats present in the upper floors really gave it that 'Dracula' allure. The basement was home to a single dead rat (although there was evidence of hoards of previous tiny tenants) and a host of dated generators, heaters and other machinery I wouldn't be able to identify, with pipes extending all across the ceiling like the roots of an iron tree leading to different parts of the house. While not exactly in the same league as "proper" castles, it was a very splendid building to behold and was easy to get lost in. It's just such a shame it was left to decay like that; the owners really ought to have the place retrofitted & restored to its former glory.

After a thorough exploration, the team regrouped in the kitchen and shared a small bottle of white wine before gathering around a hearth in one of the main rooms for a group photo:



Have you ever seen so many operatives in one picture?

It was about 0400 when we left through the kitchen, I being tail-end Charlie for the exfiltration. Since the door had no handle I couldn't shut it from the outside, and we didn't want to leave any trace that we were there. So I booted the door closed from the inside, ran up the stairs, dodged some bats and jumped out a 2nd-storey window (all the ones on ground level were boarded up) into the courtyard below. We made our way back up the trail, snuck past the caretakers' house (whose lights were on by then), back across the field, down the driveway, behind the house with the *fucking light*, past the *fucking frogs*, across the other field, over the wall, across the bridge, up the road and back to the cars where we de-geared and headed home.

Despite the level of planning, the majority of this op was spent trying to figure out where the fuck we were and where the fuck we were going. A lesson to be learned about preparation; nothing ever goes according to plan, so have backups. Also, when operating over such a large area, have a good knowledge of the general area and not just that around the target. We learned our lesson from our last op for operating in large groups and managed to keep tabs on each other; everyone knew where everyone else was at all times, even if we didn't know where we all were as a whole. We also managed to coordinate moves and conduct recon with ease. Good teamwork is essential for when operating over such distances. Keen observation definitely played a good part in this op; once Eden had figured out the light was on a timer, it made moving forward that much easier.

To be honest, I don't think this op would've been half as enjoyable without all the frustration of getting to the castle in the first place - the only thing I would've done different was conduct some CTR on the house to better identify the source of the sound. All-in-all: we coped under difficult circumstances, explored an interesting historical site and all made it back in one piece. I'd say this was a successful op.

CHAPTER 3

This was the third operation of NOPCON, and the last one to be enjoyed in the company of Æternaeon: the Saratoga Sanitarium.

Operatives:

- Æternaeon
- Eden
- Ghost
- Sa'Kage
- Scout
- Teutoni
- Xanatos

Time:

1230-0300



Map by Eden

The sanitarium was only about a half hour drive away, but we spend an extra 10-15 minutes looking for a suitable place to park. We eventually found a relatively inconspicuous spot near a driveway about half a mile from the sanitarium; it was out of view of the house at the top of the driveway and to any cars that may be driving past it'd look like the occupants of the cars were staying overnight at that house. As we were gearing up a car drove by and we all hid behind the cars & in the vegetation on the side of the road. Once we were all ready, we proceeded along the darkened road in single file, evenly spaced and keeping our ears open for any traffic. The fog was rather thick that morning, meaning we'd be able to see any headlights long before we were ever in view of the driver. It felt like we were walking through Silent Hill.

After a long, rather uneventful hike down the road we reached the turnoff into the field where the sanitarium lay, but it was impossible to see anything clearly through the fog so we weren't sure we were going the right direction. The ground was uneven so trekking across the field was a slow process, and then seemingly out of nowhere the big black building was suddenly before us, its menacing silhouette looming over us as if to say "I've been expecting you". We somehow got split up into two groups whilst admiring the building, but managed to regroup after getting past the fence which seemed to mark some invisible ward rather than actually prohibiting physical entry. We found a semi-boarded up doorway at the back with a

hole just big enough to crouch under, so we all made our way into the sanitarium one at a time and found ourselves deposited on a rotting staircase.

This building was in an even worse state than Dundas castle. There was evidence of every kind of vandalism streaked, sprayed, smeared & scorched all over the place. There wasn't a clear patch of floor anywhere and the walls either had all the paint peeled off or were missing entirely. The air was thick with dust and moisture, so I was glad to have worn my thicker t-shirt mask for this op. The weather certainly took its toll on the place as well, with the aforementioned stairs in too precarious a condition to warrant a trip to the second floor, and the dipping ceiling indicated that the place was slowly collapsing in on itself. Thankfully we weren't in there long enough to be consumed as well.

We began exploring the ground floor first, weaving in & out of the many barren rooms that were once cells for the various inmates. They followed a pretty linear pattern of cell-cell-bathroom-cell-cell-bathroom, occasionally broken up by a bigger room of some description or a storage closet. Some of the cells still had bed frames in them and we found the charred remains of mattresses scattered here & there. Towards the end of the long building we came across the remains of the library, with pages and partially intact books strewn all over the place - literature from various periods, left to rot on the ground. While the team was poring over the scraps of knowledge on the floor, Æternaeon, Kage and myself proceeded into the small room on the other end of the library. This one was much cleaner than the rest of the building, with a smooth concrete floor and miscellaneous objects set up around the room as makeshift furniture. There was a bag of stuff in one corner, including a DVD player, clothing and some other electronics. This room was clearly used as a stash or dwelling of a squatter, so we left it undisturbed.

The team regrouped and headed for the nearest staircase, proceeding down into the basement. I don't know if it was just me, but the air seemed thicker down there. The basement was a little more intact, having solid concrete walls which meant the team got split up more easily so we had to check in every now & then to make sure we were all within earshot. The basement held a few more interests, having more rooms with a greater variety of curiosities to examine; old fuse boxes, bits of machinery, shelving with all kinds of mysterious items on them and bags of asbestos in one room (which we elected to stay out of). It was while exploring the basement that Scout's flashlight and mine started to flicker; probably due to low batteries, but incredibly poor timing. After reaching one end of the basement we decided to check out the other end, but the ceiling had already collapsed in on the passageway to the other side. Pity... that's probably where the morgue was.

After finishing up our exploration of the accessible parts of the sanitarium, we headed back out the way we came and proceeded back to the cars through the now thinner fog. Upon reaching the cars another set of headlights was spotted heading our way, so we all took cover as before. This time however, the approaching vehicle stopped in the middle of the road near our cars, and we all waited in a perpetual state of readiness should the occupant(s) exit their vehicle to investigate. After a few tense moments, the car drove away and I could see the distinctive lights of a local cop car on its roof as it sped into the mist. We all agreed it'd be wise to get out of there as soon as possible before that cop car made another pass.

This op went fairly smooth, at least when compared to the last one. We all managed to work coherently as a team and made it to the target with ease - checking the maps this time. The target itself seemed less interesting than Dundas due to the empty and vandalised interior. Since it was a comparatively more contemporary structure there wasn't even much history or character to admire in the architecture - what little of it was still intact. It would've been interesting to see what was on the 2nd floor, but I wouldn't trust those stairs to hold the weight of 7 operatives. Curious to find that stash room near the library, I wonder who uses it?

The timing of those two cars approaching couldn't have been any more perfect; especially in the case of the police cruiser since we were already about to leave the area anyway. We were near our cars and surrounded by thick vegetation, giving us plenty of cover to hand. Add to that the thick fog and we were at a significant advantage when it came to detecting headlights and sound.

CHAPTER 4

This was a quick op we performed while up near the lake: an abandoned house opposite a Crossroads general store.

Operatives:

- Eden
- Ghost
- Teutoni
- Xanatos

Time:

1230-0215



Map by Eden

It was difficult finding a decent place to park. We eventually found an incognito spot on the other side of the river, about half a mile from a bridge, which itself was about half a mile from the house. We geared up quickly and wasted no time moving along the darkened road; Eden & Ghost in black, Teu & I in camo. With no moon, we were able to move fairly seamlessly along the road until we got to the corner, which was well lit by streetlights. There was a house to our right and another dead ahead on the other side of the T junction, the one on the right with an open window and lights on inside. Ghost took point and headed across the grassy corner towards the road on our left, everyone else following shortly after with me as Tail End Charlie. After checking we weren't spotted, we continued towards the bridge; Eden & Ghost on one side of the road, Teu & I on the other.

Upon reaching the bridge, Teu and I ran across as quickly as possible, ducking behind the railings on the other side just as a car came past. Ghost got pinned and had to hop over the railing and hang from the bridge to avoid the headlights. Once we were all across, we avoided the light from a nearby house (taking note of the hydro electric station opposite) and continued on towards the target. Upon reaching the Crossroads, we waited in the shadows and observed the intersection ahead. We were positioned in the vegetation next to the general store and spotted a caravan on the opposite corner, although we couldn't tell if it was occupied. After a quick recon by Ghost, he determined the most efficient way of crossing the intersection would be to head to the other side of the road and sprint past the trailer to avoid the store's security. We did so, and ended up in the vegetation on the corner across from the store.

From here, Ghost was going to cross the road again towards the house (which was somewhere further into the forest, barely in view during daylight). Unfortunately Ghost lived up to his name and we lost sight of him as soon as he hit the shadows on the other side. After the rest of us crossed, we spent a fair amount of time trying to track down Ghost whilst maintaining light & noise discipline, which obviously makes things very difficult in the dark. The streetlight pouring in through the trees didn't make navigation any easier, as it only thickened the shadows on the ground thus impeding our navigation through the thorny vegetation. Eventually we met up with Ghost who found a path toward the house, and soon we were outside the front doorway of a house straight out of a horror film.

Vines & shrubs had engulfed the wall surrounding the house and more vines were slowly creeping up the house itself, the structure gradually being consumed by the forest. The flaking white paint on the exterior of the house only amplified the darkness within its walls, the blackened doorways & windows were not unlike the empty eye sockets and hollow mouth of a skull. The interior of the house was similarly dreary; dust blown from outside had engulfed everything, the colour bled away, and the signs of life replaced by a heavy stillness. The rooms were barren of furniture and there was glass scattered all over the floor from the broken windows, so I'm glad I chose to wear my combats that night. The house had plenty of tall windows and several doorways with missing doors, and I couldn't help but think that this would be an awful place to be during a zombie raid. Upstairs was similarly empty, containing nothing but the shadows of memories and the dust of age. And a shit tonne of flyers for miniature Shelties, for some reason.

Back downstairs, I explored the first floor in more detail while Ghost & Teu went upstairs. There was a passageway leading to an old basement under the stairs, but the way was blocked by a heap of old car tires. The kitchen was a bit more interesting, the old floral wallpaper still retaining some of its colour. It was a little more furnished as well, but every appliance far from operational and the floor was starting to sink in one corner. The only part of the house one could still consider "intact" were the fireplaces in the room where we entered and the room next to the kitchen, having that vintage style of irregular stonework characteristic of early-mid 20th century American architecture.

Satisfied with our little exploration, we exited the house and trudged back towards the bridge the same route we came. Upon approaching the bridge however, Ghost and myself decided to check out the hydro power station across from the well-lit house. The station was surrounded by barbed wire fencing and Ghost & I were the only ones nimble enough to get around it, so Eden & Teu kept a lookout whilst hiding behind the rocks circling the gravel parking lot out front. There wasn't much to see in the station, aside from a little control booth/shack that was locked, so we made our way back out and headed across the bridge. We all took care when passing the houses at the T junction again and returned to the car with haste.

Considering the relatively boring nature of this op compared to the previous targets, it was actually a pretty fun night. Getting to the house involved crossing a lot of well lit areas with varying degrees of cover, and crossing that bridge definitely shook things up. The only thing I would've done differently was keep an eye on Ghost when he crossed the road to the house so I could see where he was going, but other than that everything went fairly smooth. Nobody got lost, hurt or detected, and that's all one can really hope for.

CHAPTER 5

This was the fifth op of NOPCON; a decommissioned radar base of the 656th Radar Squadron.

Operatives:

- Eden
- Ghost
- Teutoni
- Xanatos

Time:

Appx. 0130-0420



Map by Eden

After a cancelled night of drinking out on the town, we needed to find something else to do. And what better way to pass the time than opping? After a quick search of nearby sites, we found out about the decommissioned radar base about a half hour's drive away, so we got our gear together and found a place to park in a cornfield 400m from the AO. There were no streetlights and we parked far enough off the road so the car wouldn't be seen by passing vehicles, so we started heading up the road with me on point. About 300m later we turned off into a field to try and find a back entrance into the base, since the front gate was barbed, well lit and in plain view of the houses next to the base. The field had fairly tall grass for going prone in, but other than that it was devoid of cover and the flashing strobe of the tall antennae from the base illuminated the field enough for our silhouettes to be noticeable. Thankfully there was a tall line of vegetation obscuring the view from both the houses and the road.

Upon reaching the other side of the field, Ghost took point with his red headlamp through the thick vegetation surrounding the back fence. Within moments he was back reporting a possible way in. After making our way through the thorns and dry leaves, we reached a fairly clear section of the back fence to work with. Now in addition to the barbed wire along the top of the fence, it was also extremely overgrown, meaning there was no way we were all going to climb over it, and since we didn't bring any cutting tools the only way we were going to bypass the fence was by going under. After some strenuous effort, we managed to lift up a section of the fence and prop it up with a sturdy branch enough for us to crawl under. Once we were all through, we

found ourselves deposited in a field of tall weeds that provided ample cover. From here we could see some of the buildings in the base, one of which still had power and cast spotlights down upon the field in which we were hiding. Marching along in single file, we cut a path through the field and sat in some shadows to decide on our next move.

We headed to the nearest building at the bottom of the hill and, sticking to the dark side, had a peek in through the broken windows. The interior was littered with rust & rubble, and since we couldn't find a quiet way in (being so close to the houses outside the perimeter) we decided to head up the hill to the powered building. We got up through the tall grass and took cover in the shadows between the two big buildings on top of the small hill, and after ascertaining we weren't spotted we headed into the unpowered building. This one was a bit more interesting; there was an empty key rack in the first room which listed a number of interesting buildings, including dorms, mess halls, officer's quarters, armouries and a fallout shelter. Sadly, though the labels were numbered, there wasn't any sort of map around to indicate where these buildings were and all the keys were missing. The building held some other secrets however; folders containing ledgers and inventories of equipment, as well as numerous other record books in fairly good condition, and some other curiosities. Including several coils of wiring, and a storage closet with explosive hazard signs in it indicated this building as a demolitions storage building. Sadly though, all explosive materials were removed when the base was decommissioned.

There was a door at the back which was still locked for some reason, and seeing as it was the only locked door (or intact door, for that matter) in such an interesting building, we were dying to see what was on the other side. Since we didn't bring any B&E tools other than a makeshift prybar, we were forced to LAPD that shit. **Note:** There is no quiet way of kicking down a door. Once we were through we found ourselves in a workshop of sorts - with an open doorway right in front of us leading outside. So we effectively made a great deal of noise for nothing. This workshop was rather interesting though; it looked like something out of a *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* game with rusty but neat shelves cluttered with all kinds of old tools, as well as large metal bolts on the ground for triggering anomalies. In addition to that there was a section of floor unearthed and bulging upwards as if ripped up by a gravitational anomaly. And to put the cherry on top, there was an all too familiar phrase spray painted in big red letters on the wall behind us: "GET OUT OF HERE, STALKER!"

After finishing up our recon of the workshop we did exactly that, leaving through the open doorway opposite the one we broke down and headed through the thick vegetation to the dorms. There were two or three dorm buildings we searched, and were probably the most uninteresting buildings in the entire complex. The only things I can remember from those structures were a huge old TV (in its vintage wooden casing) and tonnes of bird droppings. There was a red splatter on one of the doorposts that indicated this site was probably used for paintball games at some point. Not a bad place for combat training, I might add. The next building we searched wasn't a dorm exactly, but some sort of rec room that the ceiling had since collapsed in on, leaving huge piles of rubble all over the floor. Among the rubble towards the back were boxes of old videotapes, ranging from old taped TV shows to training/instructional vids.

The next building was in a similar state of ruin, the elements taking their toll on the structure that was now leaking, rotting and slowly collapsing. It appeared to be a DFAC, with old kitchen equipment in the back and a big walk-in freezer/meat locker. After exiting the building we made our way up a driveway towards the back of the base, sticking to the cover of the overgrown vegetation surrounding it. The relatively clear state of the driveway indicated that vehicles pass along it on a regular basis since it wasn't completely overgrown yet. Along the way we stopped to explore a small overgrown building about halfway up the driveway; Ghost & I climbing in through the broken front window (naturally), Teu & Eden taking the more sensible route through the back door. It was a lot bigger on the inside, not quite sure what it was used for though (vehicle repair, perhaps). Had some raised sections of flooring and electronic gizmos on the walls, and an old safe in one of the back rooms that was sadly empty. We headed up along to the base of that giant blinking antenna, but with the barbed wire fence surrounding it we couldn't get a closer look. There was a driveway we thought led to the main road so, after checking the time, we decided to call it a night.

We headed back to the shadows in between the two buildings at the top of the small grassy hill (we decided not to tackle the building with power for fear of triggering an alarm) and just as we were about to head down into the overgrown field a dog began barking from the houses near the entrance. We weren't sure if it was because of us or some other disturbance, but since we were in clear view of the houses we decided to head around the long way to avoid being spotted by anyone curious enough to poke their head through the curtains. Heading around to the other side of the powered building (under the spotlights) we made use of the taller vegetation here to slip down the hill unnoticed and crept back through the overgrown field to our point of infiltration. After crawling under the fence, I removed the branch supporting the gap (breaking it in the process) and kicked the fence back into position to avoid leaving any obvious trace of an intrusion. The team made their way back through the thorns, across the field, down the road and back to the car smoothly.

This op went as smooth as one could hope for, and the target couldn't have been any better for opping. Not much security, lots of shadows & cover to hide in and clear lines of sight all around. The AO itself was interesting to be in as well, and we seem to have infiltrated at the right time. The place was built in 1952, and was closed down in 1977 after 25 years of service. This means that the place had enough time to decay & become overgrown to give it that 'apocalyptic' feel yet remain intact enough to be interesting and contain some history, giving it a very *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* appeal. The combination of urban shadows and overgrown vegetation made it a target suitable for either camo or blacks. Upon our return it turns out we only explored about half the base according to the map; we opped the other half another night.

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This was the second attempt on the radar base, although since Ghost had to work that night Scout took his place.

Operatives:

- Eden
- Scout
- Teutoni
- Xanatos

Time:

Appx. 0100-0400

Modus operandi was identical to the previous op, however with Ghost's absence I took point most of the time. After getting to the fence via the usual route we were faced with a problem; the stick we used to prop the fence up earlier was broken, so we needed to rely on our own manpower to lift the fence and crawl under. Eden & myself held up the fence while Teu & Scout crawled under, then I held it up for Eden. Although now there was no one on my side to hold up the fence, and it only bends one way. I had to resort to climbing over the barbed wire through the tangle of branches and vines, but once I was over I took point and led the team through the overgrown field, up the overgrown part of the hill we exfiltrated down last time, and around the shadowed corner of the powered building.

From here we went through some of the more interesting buildings we explored last time for Scout to look at, and then proceeded up the driveway to the base of that antenna. Turns out that driveway we saw last time actually led to the more interesting part of the complex - the 'radar' part of the radar base. First structure we checked out was a concrete... thing, couldn't quite tell what it was. Looked like either some sort of fortified parking garage or a landing pad for flying saucers. Next building we explored was a bit more interesting, being an old warehouse/workshop of some kind. In this building I found an old lightbulb that, when I pressed my flashlight up against, became a lantern of sorts. Instead of casting a bright directional beam, the lightbulb emitted a soft light around the whole room. I used this little trick for the majority of our indoor explorations, holding the globe above my head so as to provide the best amount of ambient light while preserving my nightvision.

We then moved on to a larger warehouse of some kind, with plenty of big rooms and various bits of machinery. This must've been the primary loading bay, as its large doors opened right onto the driveway and was spacious enough for trucks & forklifts. There seemed to be a boiler room in the back, and another large room with several manholes in the floor; some covered, some not. Heading down a small corridor that felt claustrophobic compared to the rest of the building, we stumbled upon some miscellaneous machinery in one of the back rooms, including a breaker box with "FALLOUT SHELTER" written on it. However we couldn't ascertain where exactly the shelter was due to the relatively bleak nature of the building. Heading back through the corridor, I started climbing a ladder up into an observation booth when Teu suddenly told everyone to freeze and switch our flashlights off. We sat silently for a few tense moments, waiting to see what the emergency was. It turned out the beam of my flashlight shone through the open doorway of the observation booth to the loading bay, making it look like somebody was approaching from the outside. Good to see we didn't let our guard down though.

Once we cleared that building, we checked out a smaller factory of some kind towards the back of the base. There were long planks and metal railings spanning the length of the building, and there was an odd noise coming from the ventilation. Probably branches scraping along the ducts in the wind, but it was still eerie. After completing that building we moved onto the big circular structure behind the big building we explored beforehand. There was a rusted stairwell circling around and up the

side of the building, but despite the level of wear the door was shut tight and secured with a relatively new padlock. Fortunately there was one stair missing which left a gap wide enough for Eden and myself to slip through underneath; Teu & Scout remaining at the bottom to keep watch.

Getting up the stairs was precarious due to the age of the structure and the level of wear; the rusty walls were crumbling and there were stairs missing at irregular intervals. We made it up in one piece but the next floor was far from sturdy; the floor was gradually rusting away and each footstep sent bits of rubble hurtling downwards. Eden and I had to move along the girders & planks on the floor to reach the interior stairwell, the third floor barely supporting my weight as I circumnavigated the room. The building was completely empty aside from rust, but had a nice view. Must've once been an observation tower of some description. There was also a ladder leading to the roof but the entrance had been sealed off, denying me access. After finishing up my search, Eden and I headed back down to the other two carefully.

After regrouping downstairs, we moved onto a tall structure on the other side of the thick vegetation growing between the buildings. It was a multi-storied factory of sorts, complete with a service lift that was now inoperable. The old stairwell was heavily rusted, but sturdy enough to climb safely. The same couldn't be said of the flooring, which audibly crackled as I walked over it. Eden & I explored the 2nd floor while Teu & Scout investigated the third, and after finding nothing of interest we headed back down. There were a few more buildings we didn't get to yet but we were running low on time so decided to head out. We returned to the fence via the same route we came in and crawled under (being easier this time due to the fence bending outwards in our favour). We then returned to the car and headed home as the rest of the world was waking up.

This op went, surprisingly, smoother than last time due to three of us having a pretty good idea of the territory we were operating in. That light bulb trick worked a charm for indoor exploration, but I think I was a bit too flashlight-happy this op. Still, what're you gonna do when navigating in near pitch blackness? The radar base was certainly a lot bigger than we realised, and after two ops we still haven't managed to explore everything. The only way to realistically cover the whole area would be to set up camp somewhere in the grounds and op it two full nights in a row. Maybe next NOPCON.

CHAPTER 6

This was the final op of NOPCON, and probably one of our best targets: the abandoned Mary Mc Clellan Hospital

Operatives:

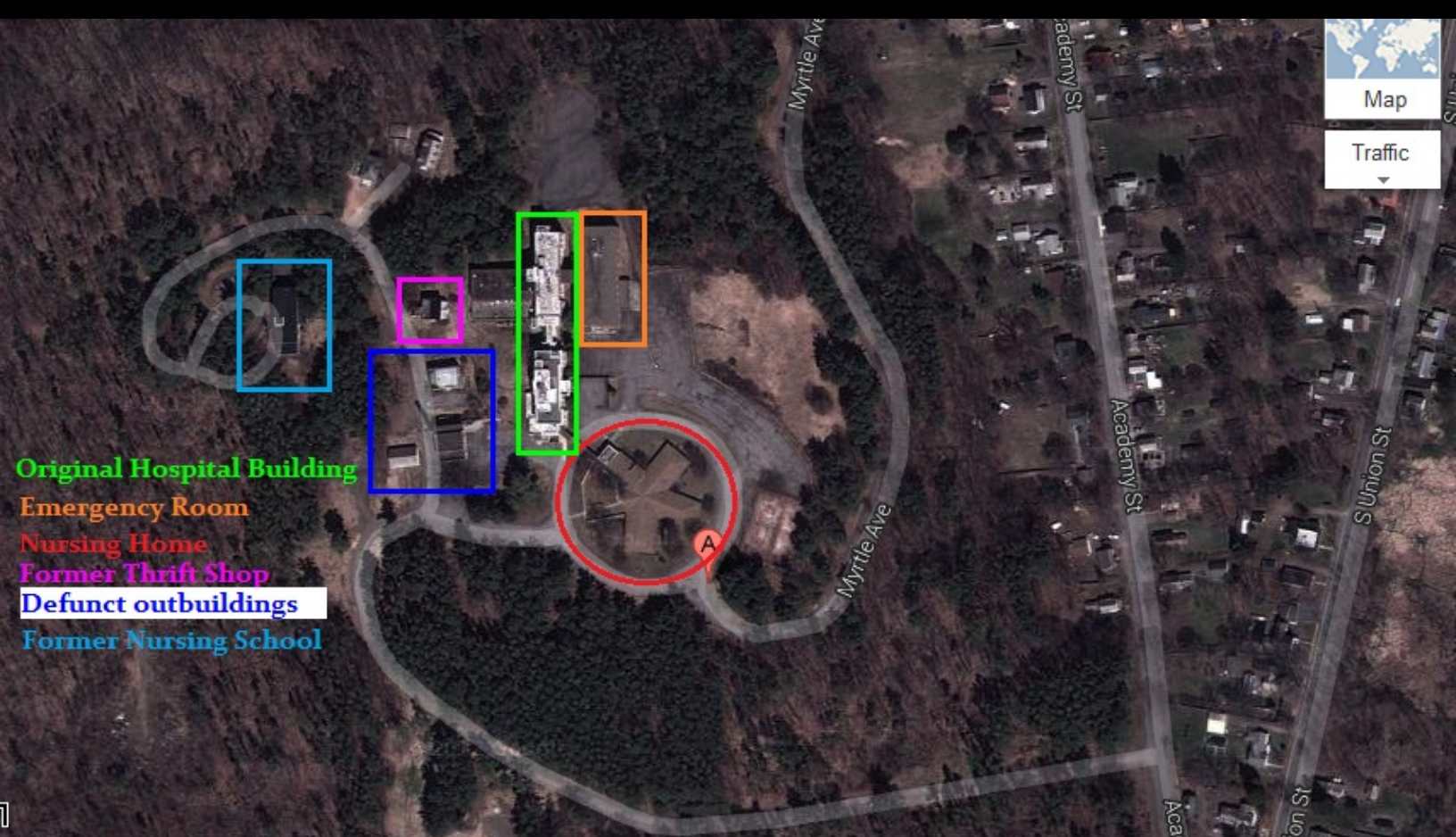
- Eden
- Ghost
- Teutoni
- Xanatos

Time:

Appx. 2230-0430



Map by Eden



I was supposed to leave earlier that day but my flight got delayed, so we thought we'd squeeze in one last op before NOPCON was officially over. We left the apartment at around 2230 but didn't find a suitable place to park until about an hour later. The neighbourhood around the entrance to the hospital was well lit and surprisingly busy at that time of night, with cars frequently going along the main road. Eventually we found an incognito place to park across from a liquor store and proceeded on foot in civvies towards the main gate. After ducking aside in some bushes, we geared up, stashed our supplies and headed along one of the backroads, sticking to the shadows & vegetation. We reached the gate barring the long driveway up to the hospital and began our ascent. There was no moon that night, and though the sky was clear the tall trees obscured any light from the stars, leaving us to navigate through the perpetual darkness. We passed some tennis courts and swung a right, and before we knew it we were on the hospital grounds.

The place was abandoned in 2002, so was still quite "fresh" compared to our other targets. Nevertheless, the grounds already had large weeds poking through the concrete and the external signs of deterioration were already present, even in the dark. The place was remarkably well preserved however, with all the windows intact and functioning locks on the doors. After a bit of recon to ascertain the area was clear, we headed around a retirement building to the front entrance of the main hospital building; a massive multi-storied structure which would make for one of the most interesting ops yet. The front doors were locked and we didn't feel like breaking through the glass, so we scoured this side of the building for a sneakier way in. Ghost & Teu were working on getting through the ventilation into the basement, I was working on trying to open one of the windows, Eden was keeping a lookout in case anybody came up to investigate the noise.

Eventually Teu & Ghost managed to make a gap large enough for us to squeeze through, which was a little more destructive and noisy than we thought, but once we were in we were instantly drawn to the numerous curiosities that were before us. Being only a decade since its abandonment, the hospital was still fully furnished and only had the mildest taint of dust on its articles. The desks and rooms were cluttered with documents, stationary and miscellaneous medical equipment, albeit in a rather untidy state from the sudden departure of the staff & patients. The hallways weren't exactly clear either, with papers, labcoats and bits of equipment strewn all up & down the expanse. The building wasn't entirely unoccupied either; a solitary bat made this floor its home and fluttered up & down the hallway rather annoyingly. We explored the floor, finding all kinds of interesting articles (including unopened packets of drugs and medical equipment) and proceeded down a stairwell into the basement.

It was suddenly a lot darker down here with the absence of the white wallpaper. To our immediate left was a workshop cluttered with all kinds of tools, which Teu & Ghost promptly went to investigate while Eden and myself pushed on ahead. There was another bat fluttering about down here, and due to the lower ceiling we had to crouch walk to avoid getting a face full of furry *fledermaus*. We stumbled upon a body freezer, the kind one finds in a morgue, with a metal table inside a refrigeration unit. There was no body in it, and the unit looked like it was broken anyhow, so the former staff probably moved it down here via the nearby service lift for storage. We pressed on towards the end of the basement, but the walls & ceiling had evidently been dripping and there was a foul smell in the air so we turned back in case it was hazardous. We returned to the stairwell and moved up to the previous floor to investigate the other end of it.

After clearing this floor we proceeded up a different stairwell to the next floor, which proved to be a bit more interesting. Among the many rooms up here were a blood bank (empty, sadly, since I was thirsty), a furnished chapel and a room with a safe in it. I spied the safe from the window I tried getting through earlier, so I knew roughly where we were in relation to our infiltration point, but up close the safe appeared to be open. It was a tall walk-in safe, and inside were many deposit boxes - some opened, some locked. Unfortunately we didn't bring any tools to attempt picking those locks, so those will have to be tackled at a later date. I wonder what was kept in there... Among the other treasures on this floor was an old library, the walls completely lined with cabinets full of antique medical books dating back to as early as the 1850s. We took a break in this room, eating & drinking some of the provisions we'd brought along (we knew it was going to be a long op and we hadn't gotten that much sleep the night before). Of all the things the previous occupants made off with when the hospital got decommissioned, the library was completely untouched. So much antiquated knowledge, just left here to collect dust.

We then headed further down the hallway after securing the library, locating the front door and finding we couldn't open it from this side either, decided to head upstairs and check out the rest of the building. The main stairwell on this end was far more ornate and decorative than the staff one down the other end, having tiled flooring, wooden rails and a Gothic chandelier dangling from the ceiling (its Gothic nature accentuated by the bats who seemed to patrol every floor). The remaining floors contained nothing but the vestiges of life and empty records halls, all the important paperwork & equipment having been moved in apparent haste for some unknown reason. The place still seemed to be in operation in some rooms, which did give it that haunted feeling people find in abandoned structures. Despite all the untidiness, there wasn't a single mark of vandalism anywhere; no broken walls or windows, no crass graffiti, no signs of modern litter... it's like the place was untouchable.

Eventually we made our way to the roof, spending some time up there gazing out over the world and reminiscing about the tumultuous past few weeks. There was a small structure on the roof which seemed to have become a home to pigeons, but the roof itself was relatively spotless. The damage caused by the elements was much more noticeable up here, the paint and stonework slowly crumbling away. I wonder how long it'll take to finally start eating away at the interior. From up here we could see the other buildings around the main hospital building, but our time was running out so we decided to head back down. Instead of leaving through the basement again, we decided to try getting through that window in the room with the safe. Not only was it locked from the inside, but the window frame had screws put in place to prevent the window from sliding up at all. After a few minutes of fruitlessly trying to pry the window open, I had the bright idea of trying the window in the next room; it opened, of course, and we all made our exit.

Before leaving we investigated one last little wooden house behind the main building; it was in a terrible state, the wood slowly rotting away and the interior decaying at a similar rate. The place seemed like it had been abandoned before the hospital was; the basement, first and second floors were barren and filthy, with the staircase at the back in a rusty state. Despite this it still took considerable effort to pry the front door open. After checking the time and realising we only had a couple of hours before sunrise, we headed back down the darkened driveway, along the backstreet and to the spot where we stashed our belongings. Instead of carrying everything back to the car, Eden & I headed back while Teu & Ghost civvied back up. We got to the car after dodging traffic, drove back to pick up the other two who were waiting in the shadows, and returned home.

This was probably the biggest op we attempted for NOPCON - and done on a whim at the last minute as well. The scale of the target was, again, too much to cover in one evening, and while the size of the AO is smaller than the radar base there's far more to be found in terms of content. Another target that would require a sleepover to adequately explore, it seems. However it seems our little intrusion didn't go unnoticed, as when the NY crew opped the target again a few weeks later they found the basement boarded up, the windows sealed and a guard was stationed there (still waiting on that write up, guys!) It was funny sitting at the airport afterwards in my stylish attire; only a few hours before that I was clad in darkness like a Ninja. I began NOPCON with an op, and ended with one.

Helluva good start.

