

LONE SURVIVOR



THE EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT
OF OPERATION REDWING AND
THE LOST HEROES OF
SEAL TEAM 10

★ ★ ★

MARCUS LUTTRELL
WITH PATRICK ROBINSON

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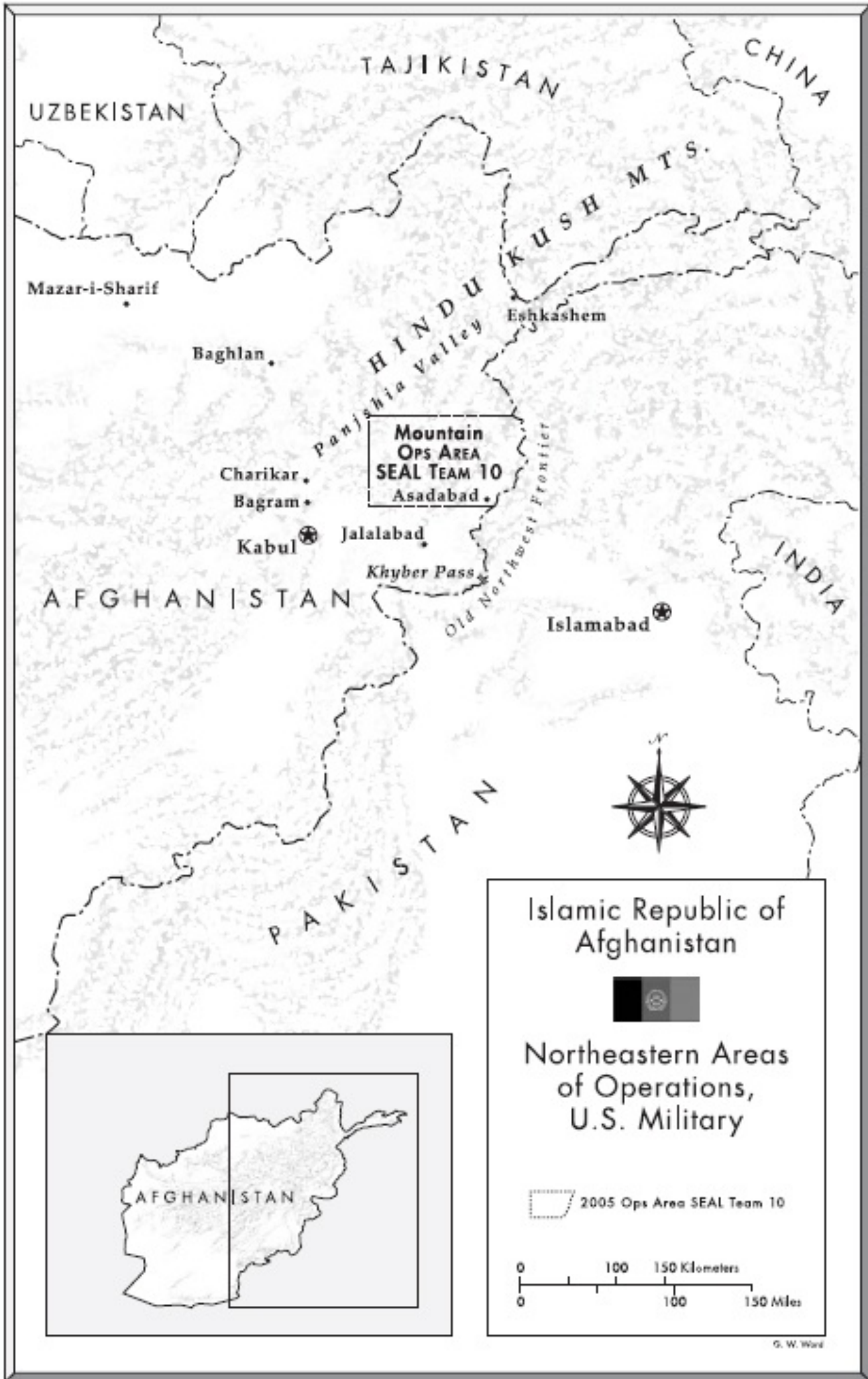
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This book is dedicated to the memory of Murph, Axe, and Danny Boy, Kristensen, Shane, James, Senior, Jeff, Jacques, Taylor, and Mac. These were the eleven men of Alfa and Echo Platoons who fought and died in the mountains of Afghanistan trying to save my life, and with whom I was honored to serve my country. There is no waking hour when I do not remember them all with the deepest affection and the most profound, heartbreaking sadness.



UZBEKISTAN

TAJIKISTAN

CHINA

Mazar-i-Sharif

Baghlan

Charikar

Bagram

Kabul

Jalalabad

Khyber Pass

Eshkashem

Mountain
Ops Area
SEAL TEAM 10
Asadabad

AFGHANISTAN

Panjshir Valley
Old Northwest Frontier

Islamabad

INDIA

PAKISTAN



Islamic Republic of
Afghanistan



Northeastern Areas
of Operations,
U.S. Military

2005 Ops Area SEAL Team 10

0 100 150 Kilometers
0 100 150 Miles

AFGHANISTAN

Prologue

Would this ever become easier? House to house, freeway to freeway, state to state? Not so far. And here I was again, behind the wheel of a hired SUV, driving along another Main Street, past the shops and the gas station, this time in a windswept little town on Long Island, New York, South Shore, down by the long Atlantic beaches. Winter was coming. The skies were platinum. The whitecaps rolled beneath dark, lowering clouds. So utterly appropriate, because this time was going to be worse than the others. A whole lot worse.

I found my landmark, the local post office, pulled in behind the building, and parked. We all stepped out of the vehicle, into a chill November day, the remains of the fall leaves swirling around our feet. No one wanted to lead the way, none of the five guys who accompanied me, and for a few moments we just stood there, like a group of mailmen on their break.

I knew where to go. The house was just a few yards down the street. And in a sense, I'd been there before — in Southern California, northern California, and Nevada. In the next few days, I still had to visit Washington and Virginia Beach. And so many things would always be precisely the same.

There would be the familiar devastated sadness, the kind of pain that wells up when young men are cut down in their prime. The same hollow feeling in each of the homes. The same uncontrollable tears. The same feeling of desolation, of brave people trying to be brave, lives which had uniformly been shot to pieces. Inconsolable. Sorrowful.

As before, I was the bearer of the terrible news, as if no one knew the truth until I arrived, so many weeks and months after so many funerals. And for me, this small gathering in Patchogue, Long Island, was going to be the worst.

I tried to get a hold of myself. But again in my mind I heard that terrible, terrible scream, the same one that awakens me, bullying its way into my solitary dreams, night after night, the confirmation of guilt. The endless guilt of the survivor.

“Help me, Marcus! Please help me!”

It was a desperate appeal in the mountains of a foreign land. It was a scream cried out in the echoing high canyons of one of the loneliest places on earth. It was the nearly unrecognizable cry of a mortally wounded creature. And it was a plea I could not answer. I can't forget it. Because it was made by one of the finest people I ever met, a man who happened to be my best friend.

All the visits had been bad. Dan's sister and wife, propping each other up; Eric's father, an admiral, alone with his grief; James's fiancée and father; Axe's wife and family friends; Shane's shattered mother in Las Vegas. They were all terrible. But this one would be worse.

I finally led the way through the blowing leaves, out into the cold, strange street, and along to the little house with its tiny garden, the grass uncut these days. But the lights of an illuminated American flag were still right there in the front window. They were the lights of a patriot, and they still shone defiantly, just as if he were still here. Mikey would have liked that.

We all stopped for a few moments, and then we climbed the little flight of steps and knocked on

the door. She was pretty, the lady who answered the door, long dark hair, her eyes already brimming with tears. His mother.

She knew I had been the last person to see him alive. And she stared up at me with a look of such profound sadness it damn near broke me in half and said, quietly, "Thank you for coming."

I somehow replied, "It's because of your son that I am standing here."

As we all walked inside, I looked straight at the hall table and on it was a large framed photograph of a man looking straight at me, half grinning. There was Mikey, all over again, and I could hear her mom saying, "He didn't suffer, did he? Please tell me he didn't suffer."

I had to wipe the sleeve of my jacket across my eyes before I answered that. But I did answer. "No, Maureen. He didn't. He died instantly."

I had told her what she'd asked me to tell her. That kind of tactical response was turning out to be essential equipment for the lone survivor.

I tried to tell her of her son's unbending courage, his will, his iron control. And as I'd come to expect, she seemed as if she had not yet accepted anything. Not until I related it. I was the essential bearer of the final bad news.

In the course of the next hour we tried to talk like adults. But it was too difficult. There was so much that could have been said, and so much that would never be said. And no amount of backup from my three buddies, plus the New York City fireman and policeman who accompanied us, made much difference.

But this was a journey I had to complete. I had promised myself I would do it, no matter what it took, because I knew what it would mean to each and every one of them. The sharing of personal anguish with someone who was there. House to house, grief to grief.

I considered it my sworn duty. But that did not make it any easier. Maureen hugged us all as we left. I nodded formally to the photograph of my best friend, and we walked down that sad little path to the street.

Tonight it would be just as bad, because we were going to see Heather, Mikey's fiancée, in her downtown New York City apartment. It wasn't fair. They would have been married by now. And the day after this, I had to go to Arlington National Cemetery to visit the graves of two more absent friends.

By any standards it was an expensive, long, and melancholy journey across the United States and America, paid for by the organization for which I work. Like me, like all of us, they understand. And as with many big corporations which have a dedicated workforce, you can tell a lot about them by their corporate philosophy, their written constitution, if you like.

It's the piece of writing which defines their employees and their standards. I have for several years tried to base my life on the opening paragraph:

"In times of uncertainty there is a special breed of warrior ready to answer our Nation's call; a common man with uncommon desire to succeed. Forged by adversity, he stands alongside America's finest special operations forces to serve his country and the American people, and to protect their way of life. I am that man."

My name is Marcus. Marcus Luttrell. I'm a United States Navy SEAL, Team Leader, SDV Team 1, Alfa Platoon. Like every other SEAL, I'm trained in weapons, demolition, and unarmed combat. I'm a sniper, and I'm the platoon medic. But most of all, I'm an American. And when the bell sounds I will come out fighting for my country and for my teammates. If necessary, to the death.

And that's not just because the SEALs trained me to do so; it's because I'm willing to do so. I'm a patriot, and I fight with the Lone Star of Texas on my right arm and another Texas flag over my head.

For me, defeat is unthinkable.

~~Mikey died in the summer of 2005, fighting shoulder to shoulder with me in the high country northeast Afghanistan. He was the best officer I ever knew, an iron-souled warrior of colossal, almost unbelievable courage in the face of the enemy.~~

Two who *would* believe it were my other buddies who also fought and died up there. That's Danny and Axe: two American heroes, two towering figures in a fighting force where valor is a common virtue. Their lives stand as a testimony to the central paragraph of the philosophy of the U.S. Navy SEALs:

"I will never quit. I persevere and thrive on adversity. My Nation expects me to be physically harder and mentally stronger than my enemies. If knocked down, I will get back up, every time. I will draw on every remaining ounce of strength to protect my teammates and to accomplish our mission. I am never out of the fight."

As I mentioned, my name is Marcus. And I'm writing this book because of my three buddies: Mikey, Danny, and Axe. If I don't write it, no one will ever understand the indomitable courage under fire of those three Americans. And that would be the biggest tragedy of all.

To Afghanistan... in a Flying Warehouse

This was payback time for the World Trade Center. We were coming after the guys who did it. If not the actual guys, then their blood brothers, the lunatics who still wished us dead and might try it again.

Good-byes tend to be curt among Navy SEALs. A quick backslap, a friendly bear hug, no one uttering what we're all thinking: *Here we go again, guys, going to war, to another trouble spot, another half-assed enemy willing to try their luck against us...they must be out of their minds.*

It's a SEAL thing, our unspoken invincibility, the silent code of the elite warriors of the U.S. Armed Forces. Big, fast, highly trained guys, armed to the teeth, expert in unarmed combat, stealthy no one ever hears us coming. SEALs are masters of strategy, professional marksmen with rifles, artists with machine guns, and, if necessary, pretty handy with knives. In general terms, we believe there are very few of the world's problems we could not solve with high explosive or a well-aimed bullet.

We operate on sea, air, and land. That's where we got our name. U.S. Navy SEALs, underwater, on the water, or out of the water. Man, we can do it all. And where we were going, it was likely to be strictly out of the water. Way out of the water. Ten thousand feet up some treeless moonscape of mountain range in one of the loneliest and sometimes most lawless places in the world. Afghanistan.

" 'Bye, Marcus." "Good luck, Mikey." "Take it easy, Matt." "See you later, guys." I remember like it was yesterday, someone pulling open the door to our barracks room, the light spilling out into the warm, dark night of Bahrain, this strange desert kingdom, which is joined to Saudi Arabia by the two-mile-long King Fahd Causeway.

The six of us, dressed in our light combat gear — flat desert khakis with Oakley assault boots — stepped outside into a light, warm breeze. It was March 2005, not yet hotter than hell, like it is in summer. But still unusually warm for a group of Americans in springtime, even for a Texan like me. Bahrain stands on the 26° north line of latitude. That's more than four hundred miles to the south of Baghdad, and that's hot.

Our particular unit was situated on the south side of the capital city of Manama, way up in the northeast corner of the island. This meant we had to be transported right through the middle of town to the U.S. air base on Muharraq Island for all flights to and from Bahrain. We didn't mind this, but we didn't love it either.

That little journey, maybe five miles, took us through a city that felt much as we did. The locals didn't love us either. There was a kind of sullen look to them, as if they were sick to death of having the American military around them. In fact, there were districts in Manama known as black flag areas.

where tradesmen, shopkeepers, and private citizens hung black flags outside their properties to signify *Americans are not welcome*.

I guess it wasn't quite as vicious as *Juden Verboten* was in Hitler's Germany. But there are undercurrents of hatred all over the Arab world, and we knew there were many sympathizers with the Muslim extremist fanatics of the Taliban and al Qaeda. The black flags worked. We stayed well clear of those places.

Nonetheless we had to drive through the city in an unprotected vehicle over another causeway, the Sheik Hamad, named for the emir. They're big on causeways, and I guess they will build more, since there are thirty-two other much smaller islands forming the low-lying Bahrainian archipelago, right off the Saudi western shore, in the Gulf of Iran.

Anyway, we drove on through Manama out to Muharraq, where the U.S. air base lies to the south of the main Bahrain International Airport. Awaiting us was the huge C-130 Hercules, a giant turbo-prop freighter. It's one of the noisiest aircraft in the stratosphere, a big, echoing, steel cavern specifically designed to carry heavy-duty freight — not sensitive, delicate, poetic conversationalists such as ourselves.

We loaded and stowed our essential equipment: heavy weaps (machine guns), M4 rifles, SIG Sauer 9mm pistols, pigstickers (combat knives), ammunition belts, grenades, medical and communication gear. A couple of the guys slung up hammocks made of thick netting. The rest of us settled back into seats that were also made of netting. Business class this wasn't. But frogs don't travel light, and they don't expect comfort. That's frogmen, by the way, which we all were.

Stuck here in this flying warehouse, this utterly primitive form of passenger transportation, there was a certain amount of cheerful griping and moaning. But if the six of us were inserted into some hellhole of a battleground, soaking wet, freezing cold, wounded, trapped, outnumbered, fighting for our lives, you would not hear one solitary word of complaint. That's the way of our brotherhood. It's strictly American brotherhood, mostly forged in blood. Hard-won, unbreakable. Built on a shared patriotism, shared courage, and shared trust in one another. There is no fighting force in the world quite like us.

The flight crew checked we were all strapped in, and then those thunderous Boeing engines roared. Jesus, the noise was unbelievable. I might just as well have been sitting in the gearbox. The whole aircraft shook and rumbled as we charged down the runway, taking off to the southwest, directly into the desert wind which gusted out of the mainland Arabian peninsula. There were no other passengers on board, just the flight crew and, in the rear, us, headed out to do God's work on behalf of the U.S. government and our commander in chief, President George W. Bush. In a sense, we were all alone. As usual.

We banked out over the Gulf of Bahrain and made a long, left-hand swing onto our easterly course. It would have been a whole hell of a lot quicker to head directly northeast across the gulf. But that would have taken us over the dubious southern uplands of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and we do not do that.

Instead we stayed south, flying high over the friendly coastal deserts of the United Arab Emirates north of the burning sands of the Rub al Khali, the Empty Quarter. Astern of us lay the feverish cauldrons of loathing in Iraq and nearby Kuwait, places where I had previously served. Below us were the more friendly, enlightened desert kingdoms of the world's coming natural-gas capital, Qatar; the oil-sodden emirate of Abu Dhabi; the gleaming modern high-rises of Dubai; and then, farther east, the craggy coastline of Oman.

None of us were especially sad to leave Bahrain, which was the first place in the Middle East

where oil was discovered. It had its history, and we often had fun in the local markets bargaining with local merchants for everything. But we never felt at home there, and somehow as we climbed into the dark skies, we felt we were leaving behind all that was god-awful in the northern reaches of the Gulf and embarking on a brand-new mission, one that we understood.

In Baghdad we were up against an enemy we often could not see and were obliged to get out there and find. And when we found him, we scarcely knew who he was — al Qaeda or Taliban, Shiite or Sunni, Iraqi or foreign, a freedom fighter for Saddam or an insurgent fighting for some kind of different god from our own, a god who somehow sanctioned murder of innocent civilians, a god who effectively booted the Ten Commandments over the touchline and out of play.

They were ever present, ever dangerous, giving us a clear pattern of total confusion, if you know what I mean. Somehow, shifting positions in the big Hercules freighter, we were leaving behind a place which was systematically tearing itself apart and heading for a place full of wild mountain men who were hell-bent on tearing us apart.

Afghanistan. This was very different. Those mountains up in the northeast, the western end of the mighty range of the Hindu Kush, were the very same mountains where the Taliban had sheltered the lunatics of al Qaeda, shielded the crazed followers of Osama bin Laden while they plotted the attack on the World Trade Center in New York on 9/11.

This was where bin Laden's fighters found a home training base. Let's face it, *al Qaeda* means "the base," and in return for the Saudi fanatic bin Laden's money, the Taliban made it all possible. Right now these very same guys, the remnants of the Taliban and the last few tribal warriors of al Qaeda, were preparing to start over, trying to fight their way through the mountain passes, intent on setting up new training camps and military headquarters and, eventually, their own government in place of the democratically elected one.

They may not have been the precise same guys who planned 9/11. But they were most certainly their descendants, their heirs, their followers. They were part of the same crowd who knocked down the North and South towers in the Big Apple on the infamous Tuesday morning in 2001. And our coming task was to stop them, right there in those mountains, by whatever means necessary.

Thus far, those mountain men had been kicking some serious ass in their skirmishes with our military. Which was more or less why the brass had sent for us. When things get very rough, they usually send for us. That's why the navy spends years training SEAL teams in Coronado, California and Virginia Beach. Especially for times like these, when Uncle Sam's velvet glove makes way for the iron fist of SPECWARCOM (that's Special Forces Command).

And that was why all of us were here. Our mission may have been strategic, it may have been secret. However, one point was crystalline clear, at least to the six SEALs in that rumbling Hercules high above the Arabian desert. This was payback time for the World Trade Center. We were coming after the guys who did it. If not the actual guys, then their blood brothers, the lunatics who still wished us dead and might try it again. Same thing, right?

We knew what we were coming for. And we knew where we were going: right up there to the high peaks of the Hindu Kush, those same mountains where bin Laden might still be and where his new bands of disciples were still hiding. Somewhere.

The pure clarity of purpose was inspirational to us. Gone were the treacherous, dusty backstreets of Baghdad, where even children of three and four were taught to hate us. Dead ahead, in Afghanistan awaited an ancient battleground where we could match our enemy, strength for strength, stealth for stealth, steel for steel.

This might be, perhaps, a little daunting for regular soldiers. But not for SEALs. And I can stand

with absolute certainty that all six of us were excited by the prospect, looking forward to doing our job out there in the open, confident of our ultimate success, sure of our training, experience, and judgment. You see, we're invincible. That's what they taught us. That's what we believe.

It's written right there in black and white in the official philosophy of the U.S. Navy SEAL, the last two paragraphs of which read:

We train for war and fight to win. I stand ready to bring the full spectrum of combat power to bear in order to achieve my mission and the goals established by my country. The execution of my duties will be swift and violent when required, yet guided by the very principles I serve to defend.

Brave men have fought and died building the proud tradition and feared reputation that I am bound to uphold. In the worst of conditions, the legacy of my teammates steadies my resolve and silent guides my every deed. I will not fail.

Each one of us had grown a beard in order to look more like Afghan fighters. It was important for us to appear nonmilitary, to not stand out in a crowd. Despite this, I can guarantee you that if three SEALs were put into a crowded airport, I would spot them all, just by their bearing, their confidence, their obvious discipline, the way they walk. I'm not saying anyone else could recognize them. But most certainly could.

The guys who traveled from Bahrain with me were remarkably diverse, even by SEAL standards. There was SGT2 Matthew Gene Axelson, not yet thirty, a petty officer from California, married to Cindy, devoted to her and to his parents, Cordell and Donna, and to his brother, Jeff.

I always called him Axe, and I knew him well. My twin brother, Morgan, was his best friend. He's been to our home in Texas, and he and I had been together for a long time in SEAL Delivery Vehicle Team 1, Alfa Platoon. He and Morgan were swim buddies together in SEAL training, went through Sniper School together.

Axe was a quiet man, six foot four, with piercing blue eyes and curly hair. He was smart and the best Trivial Pursuit player I ever saw. I loved talking to him because of how much he knew. He would come out with answers that would have defied the learning of a Harvard professor. Places, countries, their populations, principal industries.

In the teams, he was always professional. I never once saw him upset, and he always knew precisely what he was doing. He was just one of those guys. What was difficult and confusing for others was usually a piece of cake for him. In combat he was a supreme athlete, swift, violent, brutal when necessary. His family never knew that side of him. They saw only the calm, cheerful navy man who could undoubtedly have been a professional golfer, a guy who loved a laugh and a cold beer.

You could hardly meet a better person. He was an incredible man.

Then there was my best friend, Lieutenant Michael Patrick Murphy, also not yet thirty, an honor graduate from Penn State, a hockey player, accepted by several law schools before he turned the rudder hard over and changed course for the United States Navy. Mikey was an inveterate reader. His favorite book was Steven Pressfield's *Gates of Fire*, the story of the immortal stand of the Spartans at Thermopylae.

He was vastly experienced in the Middle East, having served in Jordan, Qatar, and Djibouti on the Horn of Africa. We started our careers as SEALs at the same time, and we were probably flung together by a shared devotion to the smart-ass remark. Also, neither of us could sleep if we were under the slightest pressure. Our insomnia was shared like our humor. We used to hang out together half the night, and I can truthfully say no one ever made me laugh like that.

I was always razzing him about being dirty. We'd sometimes go out on patrol every day for weeks

and there seems to be no time to shower and no point in showering when you're likely to be up to your armpits in swamp water a few hours later. Here's a typical exchange between us, petty officer team leader to commissioned SEAL officer:

"Mikey, you smell like shit, for Christ's sake. Why the hell don't you take a shower?"

"Right away, Marcus. Remind me to do that tomorrow, willya?"

"Roger that, *sir!*"

For his nearest and dearest, he used a particularly large gift shop, otherwise known as the U.S. highway system. I remember him giving his very beautiful girlfriend Heather a gift-wrapped traffic cone for her birthday. For Christmas, he gave her one of those flashing red lights which fit on top of those cones at night. Gift-wrapped, of course. He once gave me a stop sign for my birthday.

And you should have seen his traveling bag. It was enormous, a big, cavernous hockey duffel bag of the kind carried by his favorite team, the New York Rangers. The single heaviest piece of luggage in the entire navy. But it didn't sport the Rangers logo. On its top were two simple words: *Piss off*.

There was no situation for which he could not summon a really smart-ass remark. Mikey was once involved in a terrible and almost fatal accident, and one of the guys asked him to explain what happened.

"C'mon," said the New York lieutenant, as if it were a subject of which he was profoundly weary. "You're always bringing up that old shit. Fuggeddaboutit."

The actual accident had happened just two days earlier.

He was also the finest officer I ever met, a natural leader, a really terrific SEAL who never, even bossed anyone around. It was always *Please*. Always *Would you mind?* Never *Do that, do this*. And he simply would not tolerate any other high-ranking officer, commissioned or noncommissioned, reaming out one of his guys.

He insisted the buck stopped with him. He always took the hit himself. If a reprimand was due, he accepted the blame. But don't even try to go around him and bawl out one of his guys, because he could be a formidable adversary when riled. And that riled him.

He was excellent underwater, and a powerful swimmer. Trouble was, he was a bit slow, and that was truly his only flaw. One time, he and I were on a two-mile training swim, and when I finally hit the beach I couldn't find him. Finally I saw him splashing through the water about four hundred yards offshore. *Christ, he's in trouble* — that was my first thought.

So I charged back into the freezing sea and set out to rescue him. I'm not a real fast runner, but I'm quick through the water, and I reached him with no trouble. I should have known better.

"Get away from me, Marcus!" he yelled. "I'm a race car in the red, highest revs on the TAC. Don't mess with me, Marcus, not now. You're dealing with a race car here."

Only Mike Murphy. If I told that story to any SEAL in our platoon, withheld the name, and the guy asked who said it, everyone would guess Mikey.

Sitting opposite me in the Hercules was Senior Chief Daniel Richard Healy, another awesome Navy SEAL, six foot three, thirty-seven, married to Norminda, father of seven children. He was born in New Hampshire and joined the navy in 1990, advancing to serve in the SEAL teams and learning near-fluent Russian.

Danny and I served in the same team, SDV Team 1, for three years. He was a little older than most of us and referred to us as his kids — as if he didn't have enough. And he loved us all with equal passion, both big families, his wife and children, sisters, brothers, and parents, and the even bigger one hitherto based on the island of Bahrain. Dan was worse than Mikey in his defense of his SEALs. No one ever dared yell at any of us while he was around.

He guarded his flock assiduously, researched every mission with complete thoroughness, gathered the intel, checked the maps, charts, photographs, all reconnaissance. Also, he paid attention to the upcoming missions and made sure his kids were always in the front line. That's the place we were trained for, the place we liked to go.

In many ways Dan was tough on everyone. There were times when he and I did not see eye to eye. He was unfailingly certain that his way was the best way, mostly the only way. But his heart was in the right place at all times. Dan Healy was one hell of a Navy SEAL, a role model for everything a senior chief should be, an iron man who became a strategist and who knew his job from A to Z. I talked face to face with big Dan almost every day of my life.

Somewhere up above us, swinging in his hammock, headset on, listening to rock-and-roll music was Petty Officer Second Class Shane Patton, twenty-two-year-old surfer and skateboarder originally from Las Vegas, Nevada. My protégé. As the primary communications operator, I had Shane as my number two. Like a much younger Mike Murphy, he too was a virtuoso at the smart-ass remark and, you would expect, an outstanding frogman.

It was hard for me to identify with Shane because he was so different. I once walked into the comms center, and he was trying to order a leopard-skin coat on the Internet.

"What the hell do you want that for?" I asked.

"It's just so cool, man," he replied, terminating further discussion.

A big, robust guy with blond hair and a relatively insolent grin, Shane was supersmart. I never had to tell him anything. He knew what to do at all times. At first, this slightly irritated me; you know, telling a much junior guy what you want done, and it turns out he's already done it. Every time. Took me a while to get used to the fact I had an assistant who was damn near as sharp as Matt Axelson. And that's as sharp as it gets.

Shane, like a lot of those beach gods, was hugely laid back. His buddies would probably call him supercool or some such word. But in a comms operator, that quality is damn near priceless. If there's a firefight going on, and Shane's back at HQ manning the radio, you're listening to one ultracalm, very measured SEAL communicator. Sorry, I meant *dude*. That was an all-purpose word for Shane. Even he was a dude, according to him. Even the president of the United States was a dude, according to him. Actually he accorded President Bush the highest accolade, the gold-plated Congressional Medal of Honor awarded by the surf gods: *He's a real dude, man, a real dude*.

He was the son of a Navy SEAL, and his quiet, rarely uttered ambition was to be just like his dad, James J. Patton. He wanted to be a member of the navy jump team, as his father had once been. He completed basic airborne training at Fort Benning, Georgia, before he passed his SEAL qualification exams and accepted orders to SDV Team 1, Alfa Platoon. Five months later he joined us on the flight to Afghanistan.

Everything Shane did, all through his short life, was outstanding. In high school he was the star pitcher and the best outfielder. He could play the guitar really well, ran a band called True Story, the quality of which remains a bit of a mystery. He was a super photographer and a skilled mechanic and engineer; he'd single-handedly restored and customized two old Volks-wagen Bugs. He had acquired another one that he told me would become "the ultimate customized Bug, dude. That's what I'm all about."

Shane was as good on a computer as anyone at the base. He spent hours on it, some Web site called MySpace, always keeping in touch with his friends: *Hey, dude, howya been?*

The sixth member of our group was James Suh, a twenty-eight-year-old native of Chicago who was raised in south Florida. James had been with SDV Team 1 for three years before we left for

Afghanistan, and during that time he became one of the best-liked guys on the base. He had only one sibling, an older sister, but he had about three hundred cousins, every one of whom he was sworn to protect.

James, like his close buddy Shane, was another inordinately tough SEAL, a petty officer second class. Like Shane, he'd gone through basic airborne training at Fort Benning and gone forward to join Alfa Platoon.

His early ambition had been to become a veterinarian, a dog specialist. But James was born to be a SEAL and was passionately proud of his membership in one of the most elite combat outfits in the world and in his ability to defy the limits of physical and mental endurance.

Like Shane, he was a star high school athlete, outstanding on both the swim and tennis teams. Academically, he was constantly in the gifted and advanced classes. In our platoon, James was right up there with Axe and Shane as a SEAL of high intelligence and supreme reliability under fire. I never met one person with a bad word to say about him.

It took us almost three hours to reach the Gulf of Oman. We'd cut south of the Strait of Hormuz, staying well away from the superhighway of world oil and gas tankers moving to and from the massive loading docks of the Gulf of Iran. The Iranian navy does its exercises down there, operating out of their main base at Bandar Abbas and also farther down the coast, at their increasingly active submarine base.

Not that we imagined some trigger-happy Iranian missile director might take a pop at us with some fast heat-seeking weapon. But caution was usually advisable around there, despite the fact we had a very tough man in the White House who'd made clear his policy of harsh retaliation at the merest suggestion of an attack on U.S. air traffic, civilian or military.

You had to serve out here in the Middle East to understand fully the feeling of danger, even threats that was never far away, even in countries generally regarded as friendly to America. Like Bahrain.

The rugged part of the Omani coast I mentioned earlier is around the point of land at Ras Musandam, with its deep fjords. This most northerly rocky shelf which juts out into the Gulf of Hormuz is the closest foreign point to the Iranian base at Bandar Abbas. The stretch of coastline running south from that point is much flatter, sloping down from the ancient Al Hajar Mountains. We began our long ocean crossing somewhere down there, north of Muscat, close to the Tropic of Cancer.

And as we crossed that coastline heading out toward the open ocean, it really was good-bye, from me at least, to the Arabian Peninsula and the seething Islamic states at the north end of the gulf: Kuwait, Iraq, Syria, and Iran, that had dominated my life and thoughts for the past couple of years. Especially Iraq.

I had first arrived there to join Team 5 back on April 14, 2003, coming into the U.S. air base fifteen minutes out of Baghdad with twelve other SEALs from Kuwait in an aircraft just like this C-130. It was one week after the U.S. forces launched their opening bombardment against the city, trying to nail Saddam before the war really started. The Brits had just taken Basra.

On the same day I arrived, U.S. Marines took Tikrit, Saddam's hometown, and a few hours later the Pentagon announced that major combat had concluded. None of which had the slightest bearing on our mission, which was to help root out and if necessary destroy what little opposition was left and then help with the search for weapons of mass destruction.

I had been in Baghdad just one day when President Bush declared Saddam Hussein and his Ba'ath Party had fallen, and my colleagues swiftly captured, that same day, Abu Abbas, leader of the Palestinian Liberation Front, which attacked the Italian cruise ship *Achille Lauro* in the Mediterranean.

in 1985.

Forty-eight hours later, on April 17, U.S. forces captured Saddam's half brother the infamous Barzan Ibrahim al-Tikriti. That was the kind of stuff I was instantly involved in. I was one of 146,000 American and coalition troops in there, under the command of General Tommy Franks. It was my first experience of close-quarter combat. It was the place where I learned the finer points of my trade.

It was also the first inkling we had of the rise from the ashes of Osama bin Laden's followers. Sure, we knew they were still around, still trying to regroup after the United States had just about flattened them in Afghanistan. But it was not long before we began to hear of an outfit called al Qaeda in Iraq, a malicious terrorist group trying to cause mayhem at every conceivable opportunity, led by the deranged Jordanian killer Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (now deceased).

Our missions in the city were sometimes interrupted by intense searches for whatever or whoever happened to be missing. On my first day, four of us went out to some huge Iraqi lake area looking for a missing F-18 Super Hornet fighter bomber and its U.S. pilot. You probably remember the incident. I'll never forget it. We came in low over the lake in our MH-47 Chinook heli-copter and suddenly we spotted the tail of an aircraft jutting out of the water. Right after that, we found the body of the pilot washed up on the shore.

I remember feeling very sad, and it would not be for the last time. I'd been in the country for less than twenty-four hours. Attached to Team 5, we were known as straphangers, extra muscle drafted in for particularly dangerous situations. Our primary mission was special surveillance and reconnaissance, photographing hot spots and danger areas using unbelievable photographic lenses.

We carried out everything under the cover of darkness, waiting patiently for many hours, watching our backs, keeping our eyes on the target, firing computerized pictures back to base from virtual positions inside the jaws of the enemy.

We worked usually in a very small unit of four SEALs. Out on our own. This kind of close-quarter recon is the most dangerous job of all. It's lonely and often dull, and fraught with peril should we be discovered. Sometimes, with a particularly valuable terrorist leader, we might go in and get him, trying to yank him out of there alive. Brutal, no mercy. Generally speaking, the Navy SEALs train the best recon units in the world.

It always makes me laugh when I read about "the proud freedom fighters in Iraq." They're not proud. They'd sell their own mothers for fifty bucks. We'd go into some house, grab the guy we believed was the ringleader, and march him outside into the street. First thing he'd say was "Hey, hey, not me. You want those guys in that house down the street." Or "You give me dollars, I tell you what you want to know."

They would, and did. And what they told us was very often extremely valuable. Most of those big military coups, like the elimination of Saddam's sons and the capture of Saddam himself, were the result of military intel. Somebody, someone from their own side, shopped them, as they had shopped hundreds of others. Anything for a buck, right? Pride? Those guys couldn't even spell it.

And that grade of intelligence is often hard-won. We'd go in fast, driving into the most dangerous districts in the city, screaming through the streets in Humvees, or even fast-roping in from helicopters if necessary. We'd advance, city block by city block, moving carefully through the dark, ready for someone to open fire on us from a window, a building, somewhere on the opposite side of the street, even a tower. It happened all the time. Sometimes we returned fire, always to much more deadly effect than our enemy could manage.

And when we reached our objective, we'd either go in with sledgehammers and a hooley — that's a kind of a crowbar that will rip a door right off its hinges — or we'd wrap the demo around the lock

and blast that sucker straight in. We always made certain the blast was aimed inward, just in case someone was waiting behind the door with an AK-47. It's hard to survive when a door comes straight at you at one hundred miles an hour from point-blank range.

Occasionally, if we had an element of doubt about the strength of the opposition behind that door we would throw in a few flash-crashes, which do not explode and knock down walls or anything but do unleash a series of very loud, almost deafening bangs accompanied by searing white flashes. Very disorienting for our enemy.

Right then our lead man would head the charge inside the building, which was always a shock for the residents. Even if we had not used the flash-crashes, they'd wake up real quick to face a group of big masked men, their machine guns leveled, shouting, daring anyone to make a move. Although the city houses were mostly two-story, Iraqis tend to sleep downstairs, all of them crowded together in the living room.

There might be someone upstairs trying to fire down on us, which could be a massive pain in the ass. We usually solved that with a well-aimed hand grenade. That may sound callous, but your teammates are absolutely relying on the colleague with the grenade, because the guy upstairs might also have one, and that danger must be taken out. For your teammates. In the SEALs, it's *always* your teammates. No exceptions.

However, in the room downstairs, where the Iraqis were by now in surrender mode, we'd look for the ringleader, the guy who knew where the explosives were stored, the guy who had access to the bomb-making kit or the weapons that would be aimed straight at American soldiers. He was usually not that difficult to find. We'd get some light in there and march him directly to the window so the guys outside with the intel could compare his face with photographs.

Often the photographs had been taken by the team I worked in, and identification was swift. And while this process happened, the SEAL team secured the property, which means, broadly, making darned sure the Iraqis under this sudden house arrest had no access to any form of weapon whatsoever.

Right then what the SEALs call A-guys usually showed up, very professional, very steel, steadfast in their requirements and the necessary outcome of the interrogation. They cared, above all, about the quality of the informant's information, the priceless data which might save dozens of American lives. Outside we usually had three or four SEALs patrolling wide, to keep the inevitable gathering crowd at bay. When this was under control, with the A-guidance, we would question the ringleader, demanding he inform us where his terrorist cell was operating.

Sometimes we would get an address. Sometimes names of other ringleaders. Other times a man might inform us about arms dumps, but this usually required money. If the guy we'd arrested was especially stubborn, we'd cuff him and send him back to base for a more professional interrogation.

But usually he came up with something. That's the way we gathered the intelligence we needed in order to locate and take out those who would still fight for Saddam Hussein, even if his government had fallen, even if his troops had surrendered and the country was temporarily under American and British control. These were dangerous days at the conclusion of the formal conflict.

Fired on from the rooftops, watching for car bombs, we learned to fight like terrorists, night after night, moving like wild animals through the streets and villages. There is no other way to beat a terrorist. You must fight like him, or he will surely kill you. That's why we went in so hard, taking houses and buildings by storm, blowing the doors in, charging forward, operating strictly by the SEAL teams' tried-and-trusted methods, ingrained in us by years of training.

Because in the end, your enemy must ultimately fear you, understand your supremacy. That's why

we were taught, out there in the absolute front line of U.S. military might. And that's probably why we never lost one Navy SEAL in all my long months in Iraq. Because we played it by the book. No mistakes.

At least nothing major. Although I admit in my first week in Iraq we were subject to...well...a minor lapse in judgment after we found an Iraqi insurgent ammunition dump during a patrol along the river as sporadic shots were fired at us from the other side. There are those military officers who might have considered merely capturing the dump and confiscating the explosive.

SEALs react somewhat differently and generally look for a faster solution. It's not quite, *Hey, hey, hey...this lot's gotta go*. But that will do for broad guidelines. We planted our own explosives in the building and then deferred to our EOD guy (explosive ordnance disposal). He positioned us a way back, but a couple of us did wonder if it was quite far enough.

"No problem. Stay right where you are." He was confident.

Well, that pile of bombs, grenades, and other explosives went up like a nuclear bomb. At first there was just dust and small bits of concrete flying around. But the blasts grew bigger and the lumps of concrete from the building started to rain down on us.

Guys were diving everywhere, into trucks, under trucks, anywhere to get out of the way. One of our guys jumped into the Tigris! We could hear these rocks and lumps of hard mud walls raining down on us, hitting the trucks. It was amazing no one was killed or hurt out there.

Eventually it all went quiet, and I crawled out, unscathed. The EOD maestro was standing right next to me. "Beautiful," I said. "That went really well, didn't it?" I wished Mike Murphy had been there. He'd have come up with something better.

We worked for almost three months with SEAL Team 5 out in the Baghdad suburbs. That was really where we were blooded for battle, combing those urban streets, flushing out insurgents wherever they hid. We needed all our skill, moving up to the corner blocks, opening fire out there all the night as we rounded these strange, dark, foreign street junctions.

The trouble was, the places often looked normal. But up close you realized there were holes straight through the buildings. Some of them just had their front façade, the entire rear area having been blown out by U.S. bombs as the troops fought to run down the murderous Saddam Hussein.

Thus we often found ourselves in what looked like respectable streets but which were in fact piles of rubble, perfect hiding places for insurgents or even Sunni Muslim terrorists still fighting for the erstwhile leader.

On one such night I was almost killed. I had moved out onto the sidewalk, my rifle raised, as I was fired to provide cover for my teammates. I remember it vividly. I was standing astride a bomb directly over it, and I never even saw it.

One of the guys yelled, "*Marcus! Move it!*" and he came straight toward me, hit me with the full force of his body, and the pair of us rolled into the middle of the street. He was first up, literally dragging me away. Moments later, our EOD guys blew it up. Thankfully we were both now out of range, since it was only a small improvised explosive made in someone's kitchen. Nevertheless, it would have killed me, or at the very least inflicted serious damage on my wedding tackle.

It was just another example of how amazingly sharp you need to be in order to wear the SEAL Trident. Over and over during training, we were told never to be complacent, reminded constantly of the sheer cunning and unpredictability of our terrorist enemy, of the necessity for total vigilance at all times, of the endless need to watch out for our teammates. Every night before our mission, one of the senior petty officers would say, "C'mon now, guys. Get your game faces on. This is for real. Stay on your toes. Concentrate. That way you'll live."

I learned a lot about myself out there with Team 5, moving through the dark, zigzagging across the ground, never doing anything the same way twice. That's what the army does, everything the same way. We operate differently, because we are a much smaller force. Even with a major city operation we never travel in groups of more than twenty, and the recon units consist of only four men.

It all causes your senses to go up tenfold, as you move quietly, stealthily through the shadows using the dead space, the areas into which your enemy cannot see. Someone described us as the shadow warriors. He was right. That's what we are. And we always have a very clear objective, usually just one guy, one person who is responsible for making the problem: the terrorist leader or strategist.

And there's a whole code of conduct to remember when you finally catch up with him. First of all, make him drop his gun and get his ass on the ground. He'll usually do that without much protest. Should he decide against this, we help him get on the ground, quickly. But we never, never, turn around, even for a split second. We never give these guys one inch of latitude. Because he'll pick the rifle up and shoot you at point-blank range, straight in the back. He might even cut your throat if he had a chance. No one can hate quite like a terrorist. Until you've encountered one of these guys, you don't understand the meaning of the word *hate*.

We found half-trained terrorists all over the world, mostly unfit to handle a lethal weapon of any kind, especially those Russian-made Kalashnikovs they use. First of all, the damn thing is inaccurate and in the hands of an hysteric, which most of them are, the guns spray bullets all over the place. When these guys go after an American, they usually fire blindly around a corner, aiming at nothing in particular, and end up killing three passing Iraqi civilians. Only by pure chance do they hit the American soldier they wanted.

On May 1, 2003, President Bush announced the military phase of the war was over. Four days later it was revealed Saddam and his son had heisted \$1 billion in cash from the Central Bank. Around that time, with the search for weapons of mass destruction still under way, we were detailed to the gigantic Lake Buhayrat at Tharthar, where supposedly a large cache had been hidden by Saddam.

This was a major stretch of water, nearly fifty miles long and in some places thirty miles wide, set on a flat, verdant plain between the Euphrates and the Tigris, south of Tikrit. There's a huge dam at one end, and we were stationed just to the south at a place named Hit. Seemed fitting. So we jockeyed up and combed the deep, clear waters of that lake for about a week, every inch of it. We were operating out of Zodiacs and found nothing except for a bicycle tire and an old ladder.

As the weeks went by the weather grew hotter, sometimes hitting 115°F. We kept going, working away through the nights. There were times when it all seemed to grow calmer, and then on July 4, a taped voice, which al-Jazeera television said was Saddam, urged everyone to join the resistance and fight the U.S. occupation to the death.

We thought that was kind of stupid, because we weren't trying to occupy anything. We were just trying to stop these crazy pricks from blowing up and wiping out the civilian population of the country we had just liberated from one of the biggest bastards in history.

Didn't much matter what we thought. The very next day a serious bomb went off at a graduation ceremony for the new Iraqi police class, trained by the United States. Seven new cops were killed and seventy more were wounded. God alone understood those to whom that made sense.

We continued our operations, looking for the key insurgents, forcing or bribing the information out of them. But it already seemed their recruiting numbers were limitless. No matter how many we ran to ground, there were always more. It was around this time we first heard of the rise of this sinister group who called themselves al Qaeda in Iraq. It was an undisguised terrorist operation, dedicated to mayhem and murder, especially of us.

However, the whole movement received a severe blow to its morale on July 22, when Saddam's sons, Uday and Qusay, who were at least as evil as their dad, were finally nailed at a house in Mosul. I'm not allowed to speak of this highly classified operation, save to mention the pair of them were killed when U.S. Special Forces flattened the entire building. Their deaths were entirely due to the fact that a couple of their devoted, loyal comrades, full of pride in their fight for freedom, betrayed them. For money. Just as they would later betray Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Despite all our efforts, the suicide bombers just continued, young Iraqis convinced by the teachings of the extremist ayatollahs that the murder of their perceived enemies would open the gateway to paradise for them — that the three trumpets would sound and they would cross the bridge into the arms of Allah and everlasting happiness.

So they just went right back at it. A bomb killed a U.S. soldier on August 26, which meant there had now been more U.S. lives lost since the conflict ended than during the battle. On August 29, a massive car bomb exploded outside a Shiite mosque in Najaf and killed eighty people, including the revered and greatly loved Shiite leader Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Hakin.

In our opinion, this was rapidly getting out of hand. It seemed no matter what we did, no matter how many of these nuts we rounded up, how much explosive, bombs, or weapons we located, there was always more. And always more young men quite happy to take that shortcut to the trumpets, going right over that bridge and plug into some quality happiness.

By now, late August, the question of the missing WMDs was growing more urgent. Hans Blix, the United Nations' chief weapons inspector, had retired from public life, and the U.S. Armed Forces were now keeping a careful watch. In our view, the question of whether Saddam Hussein had biological and chemical weapons was answered. Of course he did. He used them in Halabja, right?

I guess by now the issue in the minds of the American public was, Did he have a nuclear weapon or an atom bomb? But, of course, that is not the most significant question. The one that counts is, Did he have a nuclear program?

Because that would mean he was trying to produce weapons-grade uranium-235. You get that from using a centrifuge to spin uranium-238, thus driving the heavy neutrons outward, like water off the lettuce in a salad spinner. It's a hell of a process and takes up to seven years, at which time, if you've had a trouble-free run, you cut off the outside edges of the uranium and there you have a large hunk of heavy-molecule uranium-235. Cut that in half and then slam the two pieces together by high explosion in a confined steel space, like a rocket or a bomb, and right there it's Hiroshima all over again.

And that's the issue: Was Saddam spinning for uranium-235, and if so, where did he get the uranium in the first place? And where was he conducting his program? Remember, there is no other reason on this earth to want uranium-235 except to make an atom bomb.

We knew the American intelligence agencies believed he had such a program, that somewhere in this vast country — it's bigger than Germany, nearly as big as Texas — there were centrifuges trying to manufacture the world's most dangerous substance.

That was all the information we had. But we knew what to look for, and we would most certainly have recognized it if we had found it. Did Saddam actually own the completed article, a finely tuned atomic bomb or missile? Probably not. No one ever thought he did. But as former defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld once remarked, "What do you want to do? Leave him there till he does?"

You may remember the CIA believed they had uncovered critical evidence from the satellite pictures of those enormous government trucks rolling along Iraq's highways: four of them, usually in a convoy, and all big enough to house two centrifuges. The accepted opinion was that Saddam had a mobile spinning program which could not easily be found, and in fact could be either lost and buried

in the desert or alternatively driven across the border into Syria or even Jordan.

~~Well, we found those trucks, hidden in the desert, parked together. But the inside of each one had been roughly gutted. There was nothing left. We saw the trucks, and in my opinion someone had removed whatever they had contained, and in a very great hurry.~~

I also saw the al Qaeda training camp north of Baghdad. That had been abandoned, but it was stark evidence of the strong links between the Iraqi dictator and Osama bin Laden's would-be warriors. Traces of the camp's military purpose were all around. Some of the guys who had been in Afghanistan said it was just about a direct replica of the camp the United States destroyed after 9/11.

There were many times when we really were chasing shadows out there in that burning hot, sandy wilderness. Especially in our coastal searches. Out there, often in uncharted desert wasteland near the water, we'd see rocket launchers in the distance and drive right onto them, only to find they were just decoys, huge fake missile containers pointing at the sky, made out of scrap metal and old iron bars.

After a two-day drive over rough country in unbelievable heat, that counted as a very great inconvenience. If our team had ultimately found Saddam in his hidey-hole, we'd probably have shot him dead for a lot of reasons but especially on the strength of those wasted desert runs. (Just joking.)

I'll say one thing. That Iraqi president was one wily devil, ducking and diving between his thirteen palaces, evading capture, making tape recordings, urging the dregs of his armed forces to keep killing us, encouraging the insurgents to continue the war against the great Satan (that's us).

It was tough out there. But in many ways I'm grateful for the experience. I learned precisely how seditious and cunning an enemy could be. I learned never to underestimate him. And I learned to stay right on top of my game all of the time in order to deal with it. No complacency.

Looking back, during our long journey in the C-130 to Afghanistan, I was more acutely aware of a growing problem which faces U.S. forces on active duty in theaters of war all over the world. For months it began in Iraq, the first murmurings from the liberal part of the U.S.A. that we were somehow in the wrong, brutal killers, bullying other countries; that we who put our lives on the line for our nation at the behest of our government should somehow be charged with murder for shooting our enemy.

It's been an insidious progression, the criticisms of the U.S. Armed Forces from politicians and from the liberal media, which knows nothing of combat, nothing of our training, and nothing of the mortal dangers we face out there on the front line. Each of the six of us in that aircraft en route to Afghanistan had constantly in the back of our minds the ever-intrusive rules of engagement.

These are drawn up for us to follow by some politician sitting in some distant committee room in Washington, D.C. And that's a very long way from the battlefield, where a sniper's bullet can blast your head, where the slightest mistake can cost your life, where you need to kill your enemy before he kills you.

And those ROE are very specific: we may not open fire until we are fired upon or have positively identified our enemy and have proof of his intentions. Now, that's all very gallant. But how about a group of U.S. soldiers who have been on patrol for several days; have been fired upon; have dodged rocket-propelled grenades and homemade bombs; have sustained casualties; and who are very near exhausted and maybe slightly scared?

How about when a bunch of guys wearing colored towels around their heads and brandishing AK-47s come charging over the horizon straight toward you? Do you wait for them to start killing your team, or do you mow the bastards down before they get a chance to do so?

That situation might look simple in Washington, where the human rights of terrorists are often given high priority. And I am certain liberal politicians would defend their position to the death. Because everyone knows liberals have never been wrong about anything. You can ask them. Anytime

However, from the standpoint of the U.S. combat soldier, Ranger, SEAL, Green Beret, or whatever, those ROE represent a very serious conundrum. We understand we must obey them because they happen to come under the laws of the country we are sworn to serve. But they represent a danger to us; they undermine our confidence on the battlefield in the fight against world terror. Worse yet they make us concerned, disheartened, and sometimes hesitant.

I can say from firsthand experience that those rules of engagement cost the lives of three of the finest U.S. Navy SEALs who have ever served. I'm not saying that, given the serious situation, those elite American warriors might not have died a little later, but they would not have died right then, and in my view would almost certainly have been alive today.

I am hopeful that one day soon, the U.S. government will learn that we can be trusted. We know about bad guys, what they do, and, often, who they are. The politicians have chosen to send us into battle, and that's our trade. We do what's necessary. And in my view, once those politicians have elected to send us out to do what 99.9 percent of the country would be terrified to undertake, they should get the hell out of the way and stay there.

This entire business of modern war crimes, as identified by the liberal wings of politics and the media, began in Iraq and has been running downhill ever since. Everyone's got to have his little hand in it, blathering on about the public's right to know.

Well, in the view of most Navy SEALs, the public does not have that right to know, not if it means placing our lives in unnecessary peril because someone in Washington is driving himself mad worrying about the human rights of some cold-hearted terrorist fanatic who would kill us as soon as he can look at us, as well as any other American at whom he could point that wonky old AK of his.

If the public insists it has the right to know, which I very much doubt, perhaps the people should go and face for themselves armed terrorists hell-bent on killing every single American they can.

I promise you, every insurgent, freedom fighter, and stray gunman in Iraq who we arrested knew the ropes, knew that the way out was to announce he had been tortured by the Americans, ill treated, prevented from reading the Koran or eating his breakfast or watching the television. They all knew a Jazeera, the Arab broadcasters, would pick it up, and it would be relayed to the U.S.A., where the liberal media would joyfully accuse all of us of being murderers or barbarians or something. Those terrorist organizations laugh at the U.S. media, and they know exactly how to use the system against us.

I realize I am not being specific, and I have no intention of being so. But these broad brushstrokes are designed to show that the rules of engagement are a clear and present danger, frightening your soldiers, who have been placed in harm's way by their government, into believing they may be charged with murder if they defend themselves too vigorously.

I am not a political person, and as a Navy SEAL I am sworn to defend my country and carry out the wishes of my commander in chief, the president of the United States, whoever he may be, Republican or Democrat. I am a patriot; I fight for the U.S.A. and for my home state of Texas. I simply do not want to see some of the best young men in the country hesitating to join the elite branches of the U.S. Armed Services because they're afraid they might be accused of war crimes by their own side, just for attacking the enemy.

And I know one thing for certain. If I ever rounded a mountainside in Afghanistan and came face to face with Osama bin Laden, the man who masterminded the vicious, unprovoked attack on my country, killing 2,752 innocent American civilians in New York on 9/11, I'd shoot him dead, in cold blood.

At which point, urged on by an outraged American media, the military would probably incarcerate

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