

Excerpt from Chapter 6

It was about one o'clock in the morning and we were conducting another mission in the far western part of Iraq in search of the senior terrorist in the region. Intelligence placed the high value target at one of three neighboring houses in a rural farming village. Swooping in by helicopters, we landed as close as we could to the front doors of the homes. We rapidly breached them in our initial assault, clearing them within minutes.

After thoroughly searching the buildings and consolidating the bad guys into the largest of the homes, we learned through questioning that we did not capture the high value target we were after. *Sbit. This guy is savvy*, I thought. One of our detainees had identified some secondary structures in the local area that might be of interest to us. I decided to move to assault and clear them looking for our HVT. I coordinated this with my boss, Carnivore.

I decided to split our element in half. I left a part of our force to maintain control of the bad guys we detained while the rest of us made quick work of the secondary structures. Once we exhausted the list of potential locations, unfortunately still not finding our high HVT, we made our way back to the primary target buildings to link up with Dan and the rest of the guys.

The team leaders, Dan, and I gathered to discuss our options. There was no more intelligence to lead us to another target in the area, so we made the decision to leave. As a small element it was critical for us to be out of the area before sunrise to avoid being located by the enemy and providing them with an opportunity to mass their forces against us. Speed also equated to security for us. Get in, get busy, and get out. No time for lollygagging. Functioning as a tactically surgical force, we never worked with the large numbers that the conventional military utilized. Coordinating a small element was much easier and better for the types of missions we conducted. After being on the ground for over two hours conducting our mission, it was obvious to everyone in the neighborhood that the Americans were in town, it was time to go.

Dan mentioned that he had seen some "peek-a-boos" - someone peeking from behind a curtain in a window of a house located approximately one hundred meters away. This was odd behavior in Iraq, as most Iraqis paid little attention to our actions and rarely, if ever, looked out of their windows to watch us. Maybe they were hiding. Perhaps they just didn't care as long as we weren't bothering them. As the helicopter landing zone was just outside the back door of the peek-a-boo house, Dan was a bit concerned and wanted to err on the side of safety. He made the decision that we should clear the structure before requesting the helicopters for extraction. We all understood and agreed with his decision.

It was my responsibility to clear the two story house and I decided to take two teams and my medic, Mike Rayes, to move to the structure and assault it. I quickly briefed the two team leaders and they went to work orienting themselves and their teams. Because of the experience and extremely high level of training of each and every operator on our teams, we could quickly react to any given situation and conduct assaults on a moment's notice and without detailed planning sessions. We operated from clear tactical principles which helped streamline our actions. Within minutes we were in our order of movement and headed to the target building.

We approached the house from the rear and realized that there was no back door into the home, so the teams made their way around to the front. Our medic and I held positions in the rear and pulled security on the back of the house just in case the occupants tried to escape through the rear windows. I watched as

the lead team navigated the corner at the front of the house, preparing to make entry through a doorway. The second team bypassed the first and looked for an alternative entrance.

As Mike and I scanned the rear windows and bushes looking for any movement through our night vision goggles, the silence of the night was broken by machine gun fire from the front of the building. I jumped up and ran to the front of the structure. As I made my way around the corner, I could see two team members taking covered positions by and around the front door of the house. I could see one of my guys laying on the ground outside the doorway, wounded, not moving. Instantly I knew who it was, Dirty Shawn, and my heart sank. The rest of the team members were in the house, engaged in an intense gun fight with the heavily armed enemies inside. The second team was split by the cone of enemy machine gun fire coming out of the house focused at the doorway. They were occupying positions on both sides of the door where the lead team entered. They held their positions, looking through windows trying to get the drop on enemy fighters inside.

As I moved forward, the machine gun fire became so intense that Mike and I became pinned down behind some cover near our teammates. I could see the team inside the house retrograding out and taking up covered positions near the entry point. Several mates were injured. Once outside they moved to the windows near the doorway and tried to kill the enemies inside. They didn't have enough manpower to move the injured and engage the enemy so they focused on the fight first, casualties second, as we are trained to do.

Mike and I fought our way forward as best we could, trying to get to our fallen and injured comrades. During a lull in the enemy fire we were finally able to put hands on Dirty Shawn and quickly tried to pull him out of the doorway. It was a relief to finally get to him but that feeling would be short-lived. The terrorists in the house began throwing grenades out the door and windows at us.

Enemy fire erupted again, the rounds slapping the metal door near me like an automated hammer hitting tin. Without thought, Mike and I dropped and rolled out of the way, landing on top of each other. This was one of a handful of times where I thought for sure my ticket would get punched. To this day I don't know how Mike and I didn't take at least one round.

We laid there, making ourselves as small as physically possible near the front door, in hopes of avoiding the enemy's bullets. There was another lull in the fire. *The enemy must be reloading*, I thought. So we sprang to our feet and pulled Dirty Shawn behind solid cover where Mike could address his injuries. I knew it, but I didn't want to accept it...our teammate and friend was dead. Mike was working on his wounds and looking for signs of life, doing anything he could, trying to will him back to life. I know how helpless and sad I felt at that moment and cannot even begin to fathom what a capable and experienced medic like Mike was feeling. Try as he might, I knew the fight was over for our brother.

We were in a dangerous situation and I had other injured mates, so I forced myself to clear my mind and think about the fight. We needed to get the remaining teammates out of the building and bring something a little bigger to the fight, like our forty millimeter grenade launchers. From their covered positions outside the windows and doorway, the guys were able to keep the enemies at bay while Mike and I moved casualties and the rest of the teammates got out of the building. The enemy was heavily armed and not holding back - they were not going to let us leave easily.

We continued to dodge intense gunfire and grenades as we moved the injured and quickly prepared for movement away from the building. A few seconds of complete silence broke the chaos when I was told something that nearly stopped my heart: "Mitch is still inside!" The team leader of the lead team was still inside, fighting the enemy, by himself. He didn't make it out of the house with his team, enemy gunfire kept

him from reaching the doorway and getting out with his guys. Luckily for me, I was next to his assistant team leader who was the first to realize that Mitch was not with them and then told me. Our mission immediately changed to a rescue, we needed to get inside and get him out.

I shifted mental and physical gears, deciding to press the fight and take it to the enemy. All of us fighting there that night would have loved to back off and use something a little heavier than our M4 rifles on the enemies inside, but this would have to be done a bit more delicately and with the equipment and guys immediately available. Several mates were too severely injured to walk or fight. Time was of the essence.

I gave the order to make entry into the structure. We identified a secondary entryway, breached it and immediately moved into and through the house. We encountered a series of gunfights in small rooms, and killed every enemy we met. We found Mitch lying on the ground in a room near the front of the house, he was severely injured but still alive. A few team members took security positions around him and started medical treatment as the fight went on. We continued to work until we had cleared the entire first floor of the structure and killed all the bad guys we could find. I made the decision not to clear the second floor. Our small force had sustained too many casualties and I didn't want to get decisively engaged in the stairwell and sustain more. For all I knew there were ten more heavily armed terrorists upstairs, or perhaps there were none. I chose not to chance it. The second floor had no windows facing the landing zone.

We cleared the area outside of the building to ensure a safe landing zone for helicopters as Dan radioed headquarters for a medevac. Those of us that were lucky enough to avoid enemy bullets and shrapnel carried our mates out to the medical evacuation helicopters as they landed.

This location was clearly an enemy safe house - each individual we found was heavily armed and willing to die fighting for their cause. After loading our wounded comrades onto the helicopters the remainder of the force and I waited for the exfil helicopters to extract us from the battlefield. The situation was somber for those on other teams that could only watch what was happening from a distance, unable to join the fight because of the dangerous approach to the house, which would have been over open terrain with no cover. They would have happily moved to assist us, but I felt it was too risky because the second floor of the building wasn't cleared. Any guys moving to help us would have been easy pickings for bad guys on the second floor with a machine gun - my guys wouldn't have been able to return fire without risking fratricide.

I could hear the chop of rotor blades in the distance. We waited until the helicopters were very close before moving from our covered positions to the landing zone. Loading quickly was a necessity. As the helicopters were touching down we prepared for the gusty blast of sand, dirt, and pebbles caused by the windy force of the rotor blades. Once the helicopter tires contacted the ground we quickly loaded our detainees first and then we loaded.

"Echo 56. This is Hawk 11, up. Over." The radio calls were received from the team leaders informing me that they were all accounted for and on board their birds. "Hawk 11. Echo 56, Roger. Out." I responded to the team leaders and then reported to Dan, advising him that all were aboard and ready to roll. I could hear the helicopter engines whine and the sudden rush of movement as the bird lifted its weighty load off the ground. The pilots were monitoring our radio frequency and the crew chiefs always tracked our numbers; they knew we were ready to skedaddle.

It was a short flight back to the forward operating base that we were using as a staging point for the mission. The med shed (field hospital) was also located on the base. Once the helicopters touched down they informed Dan and I that they needed to refuel before we could move to extract our sniper team from the battlefield. The snipers had inserted two days prior to the mission and were supporting us as we conducted

our assault. Dan told me that he was going to walk to the med shed to check on our guys and instructed me to take the rest of the force to extract the sniper team.

The guys were quiet as we waited. Just the slight sounds of people on the airfield milling around, working to keep the war machine moving along. No one said a word for almost five minutes until John broke the silence, asking a fellow teammate to check his side for blood. A quick check with a flashlight confirmed that he sustained some type of injury, so I told him to go to the med shed to get checked out. As John walked to the med shed, the rest of us waited for the helicopters to return and when they did, we boarded them and flew to extract the sniper team.

Upon our return to the base, we dismounted the Blackhawks with the sniper team and proceeded to our staging area. I walked directly to the medical facility to check on our casualties. I was greeted by Dan and Mike. Mike immediately took me to see Mitch, the team leader that was severely wounded. He was conscious and alert, which was surprising to me, especially after seeing him on the battlefield and the extent of his injuries. When we extracted him from the battlefield I wasn't sure if I was going to see him alive again. Words cannot adequately describe the pure and absolute relief and elation I felt when I saw him alive.

"I'm sorry, I fucked up. I shouldn't have moved into the house. How is everyone?" These were the first words out of Mitch's mouth to me, and a testament to the type of people I had the honor of working with. Mitch, literally on death's doorstep, is thinking about his actions and how they affected his people and not himself. I reassured Mitch that he did absolutely nothing wrong and deliberately avoided answering his question about his guys. We talked for several minutes and I left him to rest. He was severely injured and needed to conserve his energy. I did not discuss the topic of his teammates as I felt it would have affected his condition at the time. He was definitely in bad shape. I briefly checked on my other wounded guys, and they were all stable.

As I left, Mike, our medic followed me until we were out of ear shot from Mitch. He leaned over and whispered into my ear, "I'll show you where Shawn is." I followed him out of the medical facility and over to a large walk-in refrigerated cooler. Mike said nothing to me as he pointed to the door indicating that Shawn was inside. He turned and left me alone. I entered and said goodbye to Sergeant First Class Shawn Langston, knowing my words were falling upon ears that could no longer hear. I was not going to walk in, look at him, and leave, as I felt the need to honor and respect Shawn, not just as a teammate, but as a friend. That June morning a brave man fell while under my leadership, and saying goodbye was one of the hardest things I have ever done. It was an untimely end for a great man.

I often thought of how I would feel, act, or what I would do when I lost a friend. Nothing that I imagined prior to losing Shawn was close to the reality of that experience. That doesn't mean one shouldn't think about worst-case situations and try to prepare for them. Everybody must come to terms with the reality of their chosen profession, and in the military, especially during wartime, you have to accept that death is a possibility. We did everything right that night. Mitch did his job correctly. The team executed their mission correctly and most importantly, we were there for the right reasons. We lost Shawn, but I didn't lose my resolve for our overall mission. His sacrifice solidified my determination to chase our enemy to the ends of the earth.

Excerpt from Chapter 5

I woke up early on January 1st and I was tired; sleep had been difficult with thoughts of the new mission swirling. We performed our final checks and began the day's preparations for the mission. We would be inserting into Khowst by helicopter, so we thought a lot about insertion, as well as coordination efforts with the warlord and his people. As the day progressed into the evening you could see the excitement building in each of us, as this is what we had trained for most of our careers. We loaded our gear onto a jingle truck for transport to the airfield. Jingle Truck was our nickname for some of the cargo trucks in Afghanistan because of the decorative metal chains that hung from their sides which made a jingling sound. My thoughts were focused on what lay ahead for us. We were on our way to finding the enemy, and I couldn't help hoping we might locate Osama Bin Laden himself.

Raymond and I were looking out of the helicopter's windows as it circled the landing zone. As we began our descent, I could see approximately one hundred armed men waiting in the tree line. My heart was beating like a drum as I radioed the information to Raymond. "Switchblade, this is Rat, I have about 100 armed people, some with RPGs (rocket propelled grenades) on my side, over." I thought, *Holy shit! They have to be friendly soldiers or we'd be taking fire already.* He responded with, "Roger. I've got about the same number of guys on my side." His voice sounded much calmer than mine.

When the helicopter touched down, Raymond and I jumped out and posted ourselves on both sides to provide security as the rest of the team unloaded the helicopter. We all monitored the same radio frequency so we were able to communicate with one another and pass vital information. The other team leader made contact with our Afghan host, and that was when we learned that all the armed men were under his control. I was rather relieved to hear that.

There were about half a dozen small pickup trucks waiting to transport us to our host's home. We all moved to the trail of vehicles and began loading the gear. I was at the rear of the vehicles, making sure we didn't leave any gear on the landing zone when over the radio I heard a single word, "**Grenade!!**"

I hit the ground, anticipating an explosion. I could see other team members in the beds of the trucks loading gear, throwing themselves onto the gear, trying to find some type of cover to block the expected shrapnel. Our Afghan hosts were clueless to our actions as we lay on the ground or jumped on top of gear, waiting for a grenade to detonate. They must have thought we were out of our minds. A few seconds later another transmission came across the radio. "All clear. All Clear. Team leaders to the lead vehicle, over."

I made my way forward to the lead truck where I saw a lot more armed men. My sixth sense was telling me something was not right, I could feel tension in the air. I linked up with the rest of the leadership and learned that a rival warlord had arrived and surprised everyone with his soldiers. This was something of a Mexican stand-off between the two warlords, neither one backing down. Through our interpreter we tried to settle things down. Later we learned that the two warlords were fighting over who was going to host us. The team made arrangements with one warlord, and now the rival was trying to force his way onto the invitation list. Eventually the situation calmed, the rival warlord agreed to a meeting with us, the Americans, at his home after we were on the ground a few days. After the excitement we got on our way to a compound in the village.

As we departed, I could see that each warlord brought approximately two hundred fighters with him. It would have been an absolute disaster if the two groups had resorted to gunfire, we would have been right in the middle of it all. Once we cleared the landing zone and got on the bumpy road to the village, I was

surprised to see that the road was lined with armed men. Apparently they were there for our protection. What was odd to me was the fact that these armed individuals were facing and pointing their guns at our vehicles as we passed. I'm guessing they wanted to catch a glimpse of the Americans as we went by.

We arrived around midnight at what appeared to be an abandoned school and were immediately led to the second floor, which was designated as our living area. The compound was dark but there was a faint light emitting from a room in one of the other buildings, which I assumed was our host's quarters. There was no electricity in the building, so we wore our headlamps to navigate while we carried our equipment in. After that, the leaders were summoned to a room for tea. The room was partially lined with blankets on the floor and a single kerosene lantern provided light. The first thing I learned about Pashtu culture was the importance of hospitality. Because we were guests, our host was responsible for our well-being. This included keeping us from harm.

The second thing I learned, and probably more important for us to realize, was the fact that nothing got done quickly in Afghanistan. We spent the first part of the meeting exchanging pleasantries over tea and cookies. It took a while before we discussed the particulars of our stay and what we wanted to do the following morning. As the meeting continued, the warlord estimated his army at approximately two hundred, and quickly added that he was able to summon hundreds more, if necessary. We weren't sure of his estimates, but we gave him the benefit of the doubt. The meeting was several hours long, and continued into the early morning. Then we finally hit the rack for some much needed sleep.

I was startled when Raymond woke me for my turn to pull guard duty, waking up in a strange new environment, immediately aware and uneasy. We were living out of our rucksacks, which meant we operated with minimal supplies. We carried mostly ammunition and communications equipment, with about a two weeks' supply of batteries and some warm clothes. Our host gave us some heavy quilt-type blankets to keep the January cold off of our backs. How I wished I had a steaming cup of coffee to help me stay awake. It was about four in the morning, and after about ten seconds I threw the blanket off and got up. I knew if I stayed under the blanket it would only get harder to get up. It is pretty typical for the guy on guard to wake up the relief about five minutes early so the new guard can be fully awake once he assumes his post. Afghan guards were assigned to us, but my team and I felt it would be in our best interest to pull our own guard, just in case.

I pulled my duty, a thirty minute shift, which in my experience is a perfect amount of time for one to remain alert and aware. We were lucky; there were nearly a dozen of us total, though Raymond and I were the only ones who consistently worked together. The rest of the element were individuals from other organizations. As I pulled my guard duty, I thought of the day to come and the tasks that lay ahead of us. I realized we had a full plate and would be busy. The first major task was to drive to the local airfield in order to do an airfield survey; we wanted to see what type of fixed wing aircraft, if any, we could land. We also needed to determine routes in and out of the village and to get a feel for the area. We promised to visit the warlord's security outposts to assess his troops, equipment, and capabilities. The biggest event was a meeting that was to take place mid-morning with our host and his junior leaders to discuss how they would assist us in locating terrorists in the area.

The next morning, the entire team was greeted with hot tea and cookies. I learned to love morning tea, and the green tea was my favorite. We were assigned an Afghan guard that spent most of his time with us, and that morning I tried to talk with him but found it difficult to communicate. Apparently, I was pronouncing the few words I thought I knew incorrectly. I resorted to hand gestures. With all the tasks needing to get done, we figured it best to first deploy a small team to check on the warlord's security outposts

in the village. This would give us an idea of the number of fighters he controlled in the village. Plus, it also afforded us the opportunity to check some of their equipment, such as their tanks and technical trucks.

A small group with a handful of team members headed out at approximately 9 am. Raymond, Bruce, and I stayed at the compound. We planned to be part of the next team out, going to check the airfield because Bruce would be conducting the airfield survey and I needed to attend the meeting with our host.

Around 10 am I was summoned to the meeting with the warlord and his senior leaders. We sat around a small table outside and started our meet and greet over tea. I was sitting with my back to the main vehicle gate of the compound when I heard a ruckus and men yelling as a vehicle approached. The local guards at the gate were excited and agitated. A senior team member stood, rapidly grasping his weapon. I stood up and turned around, weapon in hand, and realized that the first team was returning and something was wrong. Very wrong.

The first team out was ambushed. Several people were shot and wounded. As the vehicle stopped in front of me, I realized a team member was severely wounded and was barely conscious sitting on top of some gear in the back of a truck. I called for the team medics, but quickly realized they were way ahead of me and already working on other wounded mates. I assisted the medics in moving the casualties to suitable locations for treatment. There seemed to be more wounded than medics available so they triaged them and got to work on those that needed attention first. I needed to separate myself from the hands-on treatment and figure out the situation.

Once the medics had a handle on the casualties, I grabbed my radio and set up a satellite antenna to make a radio call to our headquarters. I immediately dispatched a message requesting a helicopter medical evacuation to my boss. My radio call consisted of a grid coordinate for the landing zone, number and type of casualties, and then ended with, "Brick 50, be advised this is an immediate request. Over." He responded by informing me that the medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) helicopter would arrive in approximately one hour. The flight time was fifty minutes, and they still needed time to prep and move to the airfield.

I asked a teammate to man the radio for the next fifteen minutes while I moved to determine if all the injured were being helped. They were. There were two of our team members shot, as well as two Afghan soldiers. One team member was severely wounded and had lost a lot of blood. The medics were working on him as I tried to get a grasp on the overall situation. The other team member suffered a gunshot wound in the chest, but luckily he was wearing soft body armor, which slowed the bullet enough to prevent a through-and-through chest wound. I could see that the entry wound was large and oblong, meaning that the bullet tumbled after penetrating the soft body armor. Raymond immediately applied an Asherman's chest dressing. After this, we intentionally separated ourselves from tending to casualties and moved to work on our security perimeter. The real possibility that whoever ambushed the team would be headed to our compound next weighed heavily on our minds. We knew, based on our earlier assessment of the personnel within the village, that we could easily be greatly outnumbered and outgunned. If they came in a large group, we were fucked. We shifted gears and focused on preparing for a significant gunfight and securing a landing zone so we could get our wounded evacuated.

Raymond, several team members, and I gathered quickly to discuss the security of our compound. We really didn't know what to expect, so we addressed worst-case scenarios. The most pressing issue was that the enemy could be there any second. First and foremost was to ensure the enemy couldn't get a vehicle through the gate and inside the compound. We didn't have enough personnel to man a solid perimeter, so I moved with another team member to see how we could utilize the Afghan soldiers. We posted them in key

security positions around the compound. Some we physically moved in order to show them where we wanted them because we were unable to communicate with them.

We knew we needed to have a vantage point for observation that afforded us the ability to see the enemy at distance. Unfortunately, the height of the walls around the compound made it difficult to easily see the surrounding area - they were too tall. Raymond volunteered to post himself on the second floor of the main building and manage security from a perch that overlooked the only vehicle gate into the compound. Bruce positioned himself on the roof of the building and was making radio calls to aircraft overhead. He prepared and provided the aircraft with a situation update and gave them preliminary target locations in case we found ourselves in a serious gunfight, which is what we all expected. To say that I was glad that Bruce was present would be an understatement. Once we established our security perimeter, we waited for whatever was going to happen.

After nearly forty-five minutes passed, the expectation of an immediate attack began to subside. That's when I learned that one of our team members died. The team medics worked hard to save him, but he lost too much blood. I couldn't believe the medics kept him alive as long as they did, which was a testament to their skills. Approximately one hour from my initial MEDEVAC call we heard the sound of rotor blades in the distance. They flew low to the ground to avoid taking enemy gunfire, which meant they would have to fly right over the landing zone to see it. As the noise got louder I caught sight of the helicopter and the ground team signaled the helicopter into the landing zone. The casualties were loaded, and the aircraft departed.

When the sound of the rotor blades disappeared, the medics focused their attention on the Afghan casualties, which were not as life-threatening as the American casualties. The more seriously injured man was shot in both legs, one bullet entering just above the ankle, shattering the bone, with another injury to his other calf. He also had a through and through gunshot wound to his upper right leg, luckily it didn't hit the artery or the femur. I asked their leader if he needed any assistance transporting his men to the local medical facility. He explained that they would be taken to Pakistan for treatment, as there were no medical facilities in the village capable of treating them. *Holy shit!* I thought. *Why didn't I get them on the aircraft so they could be treated in Kabul?*

From that point forward, I made sure to have a plan for all the casualties on the ground, both American and Afghan fighters. My justification for this was simple. If the Afghans were willing to fight alongside us, with the understanding that their lives could be lost, then I wanted them to have the best medical treatment available, just the same as our guys. Later that evening, the warlord transported his casualties to Pakistan. This was the norm, since the border was close and not protected by either side. It was especially easy to cross for those with strong ties to the tribes that live along the border.

Dusk fell upon those of us who stayed behind, and it weighed heavily on me that our small team had just gotten smaller. We lost a teammate. That loss was profound and is impossible to adequately describe here, words like sadness and responsibility aren't enough. I wondered how my injured teammate was doing. I thought about these things as we mounted our night vision goggles and waited for the fight that never came that night. Bruce stayed up all night communicating with the support aircraft, which he kept overhead the entire time. For a while my thoughts focused on my earlier decisions, and I wondered if I could have done anything different or better. In the end I realized that the war just hit me in the face, and now it was time for me to see if I had the internal resolve to stay the course. My focus shifted and I concentrated on what needed to get done next.

As one of the leaders on the ground, I was faced with the decision to stay or pull my team out of the area. Our command was waiting for our input and my final recommendation. This particular fight just got personal. With the loss of our teammate (who was the first soldier officially killed in action during the War on Terror) nobody on the team wanted to dishonor him or his level of commitment by quitting and retreating. We all wanted to stay. Ultimately, that decision would not be ours.

As night came, so did all the questions about the events of the day from those in pay grades way above ours. We passed the information along, with the recommendation to remain at our location. I requested additional forces to bolster our numbers since the current element was so small. Headquarters quickly went to work and within twenty-four hours they informed us that we would be getting a squad of Army Rangers to help us out. This was good news. More guns manned by Rangers would be a welcome addition to our team.

“Brick 53...you are cleared to remain on the ground and continue your mission, anticipate receiving your Ranger support within 48 hours, over.” After receiving the approval, we were busy making arrangements to move our base location to the nearby airfield. As a leader I knew it was my responsibility to figure out how to guide these guys in the right direction. I learned firsthand that we were in a true war and our leaders displayed their resolve by allowing us to stay. I questioned my readiness, especially in light of the ambush, casualties, and the loss of a teammate. Was I the right soldier for the job? Initially, my confidence was a bit off kilter, but I was determined to stay the course. I had the distinct honor of not only being part of but leading an elite group of fighting men in the War on Terror. Some of the best in the world. This is what I wanted. It was time to get to work.