

BASED ON A TRUE STORY



SIX DAYS TO ZEUS

A L I V E D A Y



SAMUEL HILL

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DEDICATION

This book is a fictional account of a real soldier's life. Although every day was filled with highly classified missions and sub-compartmented special access intelligence, the heart of this story has nothing to do with classified information. This book is not a kiss and tell, but rather a book about the lessons in life we all must learn and about the often times expensive tuition we must pay. Life lessons about success, failure, betrayal, heartache, pain, suffering, dedication, persistence, survival and ultimately, learning to forgive but to never forget because in the end, *life is about what you do to other people.*

Every effort has been made to sanitize classified information out of this book. Non-disclosure agreements signed by Intelligence Professionals are there for a reason. A very good reason I support wholeheartedly. There are mission tactics, technology and methodology that U.S. Intelligence Professionals use on a daily basis, that if disclosed, would cause severe damage to the American people, the U.S. Government and give an unfair advantage to the enemy, subverting the hard earned successes that have made America the greatest nation on the planet. With that said, the reader should know that every effort has been made to ensure those tactics and mission essentials have been changed to ensure nothing is given away to enemies set on destroying us.

This book encompasses the sacrifice, trauma and the bad things that happened to "Chief", a Chief Warrant Officer in the United States Military, and the group of "Quiet Professionals", that work tirelessly behind the scenes. These are the men and women who make America strong by guiding decision makers, providing sound moral compass headings and impeccable service through

Intelligence and other specialties. But this book also demonstrates and emphasizes the good things that transpire when Chief recovers and learns from what life has thrown at him.

At times in his life, there seemed to be no end in sight and no sane reason to continue fighting. But through perseverance, faith and primal instinct he learned that only those who tolerate the pain and get through the storm become better persons in the end for having lived through it all.

This book is dedicated to the concepts of Peace, Strength, Humility, Loyalty, Integrity and Selfless Service. This book is dedicated to those men and woman who work in the shadows who have made those concepts a lifestyle choice. There are men and woman who work daily in a thankless, often times hazardous environment performing the most difficult job known to man. They dedicate their lives to this work in an effort to predict the future, keep the peace and save innocent civilians from the death and destruction caused by evil men. They help prosecute United States Foreign Policy and provide, time sensitive, real time intelligence to decision makers at the highest level of the United States Government.

While the world went into a panic after September 11, 2001, pointing fingers and assigning blame, many of the "Quiet Intelligence Professionals" never skipped a beat and went to work. Quietly. Silently. In the shadows. They proceeded to pick out "critical node" intelligence in order to prosecute foreign policy with a ferocity and professionalism never before seen in the history of mankind. All the while balancing their actions with humility, self restraint, integrity, loyalty and selfless service. These *are not* the men and women who lowered their standards because it was easier. *Not* the ones who degraded themselves by resorting to despicable physical violence at Abu Gahrab prison simply because they could. These men and women worked tirelessly in pursuit of Actionable Intelligence. These are the men and women who stuck to the plan,

did the hard work and can look in the mirror knowing they never once tarnished the honor of their profession by taking the path of least resistance. Not once.

The resulting personal sacrifices these men and women endured are incalculable, elevating their status among the warrior population to that of "Tier One". What most American's will never understand is that the sacrifices don't end when these men and woman retire from, or are released from Active Federal Service. That is when the consequences of their service and the adverse impact on their lives usually begins. The lifetime of consequences and sacrifice goes on until they themselves leave this earth.

To those "Quiet Professionals", the Silent Warriors of the United States Intelligence Services, I say, " Thank You, Cheers, Semper Fi, Airborne and God Speed". In a single word, "Whooh!"

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Introduction

Chief and his Team were running on empty as usual, completely unaware that another 72 hours transpired. Time was a strange beast. Although everything in a normal soldier's life revolved around what time it was, when it came to the missions of Joint Task Force Arc Angel, the days just flowed into each other. Time seemed to be inconsequential.

Barely 30 minutes after mission success, "Zeus" as it was known in Tier One inner circles, Chief and his six man Team entered the air conditioned aircraft hangar at Sanctuary Base being briefed en-route, on yet *another* mission that required their expertise and attention. Mission tempo increased in the Middle East, leading Chief and his men to execute up to 25 missions a day, when just a few short years earlier everyone complained they'd still never done ONE real world mission.

Special Ops was considered the "Ferrari in the barn" that everyone was afraid to use because it was expensive and cost so much to run. But now, that "Ferrari" was running flat out, with barely any down time for maintenance. These were heady times. Egos ran enormously high with such great mission successes. But Chief learned from his earlier days conducting missions all over the planet, that life didn't always throw roses your way. He was careful to keep his Team both highly motivated, but grounded in reality as well.

No one died yet. The egos among Special Operators was running high, simply because they were kicking ass and taking names. No one was dead yet, but the golden BB moment was waiting. Until Marc Lee died, the first Navy SEAL to die in combat in Iraq, there was a surreal aura amongst Special Operators. Detrimental to combat operations, Spec Ops was just too used to

winning without paying a price. That would come to a screeching halt very shortly. It was time to get serious and understand that life changes in thirty seconds.

There were only two types of mission in the world of Joint Task Force that Chief concerned himself and his Team with. Hostage rescue and High Value Target (HVT) take down. Sometimes the missions Chief was involved with were both. Intelligence collection was just a part of standard procedure when his Team got on the ground. This job was all about selfless service, dedication, loyalty and persistence. Only here, within the Inner Circle of Tier One Warriors, the mission was a lifestyle, a conscious choice, not just words.

“Zeus” was called on the mission they just finished, a huge Intelligence and Operational success that no one in the free world would ever hear about. The mission particulars were a “Need To Know” only basis and very few people had that “Need to Know”. Even fewer knew the mission had ever taken place. Only those hostages whose lives were saved knew and appreciated the real impact of his Team’s professionalism and expertise in execution. The certain and imminent death of these American civilians was suddenly averted when Chief and his Team showed up in the middle of the night to snatch the American Hostages from the jaws of death. All of the unsuspecting hostages were brought back to Sanctuary Base instead of having their heads removed for propaganda value on social media.

These Evangelical Christian American civilians took it upon themselves to believe they were “Anointed by God”, and decided it was their mission in life to convert Muslims to Christianity, never realizing they were not just putting their own lives in jeopardy, but the lives of Tier One Warriors as well.

Like spoiled children, they never looked in the mirror long enough to understand that what they were doing was sacrilegious and against Allah in the minds of fanatical Jihadis, just as much so

as the fanatical Muslims were violating Christian beliefs by trying to install Sharia Law worldwide. The tit for tat struggle between Islam and Christianity was centuries old, going as far back in history as the Crusades.

The concept was completely lost on the Christians that they themselves were off the reservation in a Muslim land, feeding the flames of radical Islam. It always surprised Chief to learn that these people never understood that their actions would put the lives of good soldiers in jeopardy. The very lives of those soldiers who vowed to give their lives for others. "So Others May Live" was one motto they lived by. And they came to rescue anyone in harms way. In this case, simply because the Evangelical Christians made some very stupid, very naive, very selfish decisions based on their own religious fanaticism.

Judgment of such people who got themselves into this kind of trouble came too easily. To the men of Joint Task Force Arc Angel, successful mission completion was all that mattered. The medals, awards and recognition were nothing more than trinkets without any real value. The grateful look and tears in the eyes of those they'd spared was all the "thanks" any of the men needed.

The seven-man team was barely awake, running on pure adrenaline and looking forward to some much deserved sleep, food and down time. They dropped their gear in the secure fenced compound surrounding the air field hangar, slung their weapons and sensitive items on their backs and trudged into the air conditioned aircraft hangar completely unaware that another 72 hours was gone. After so many repetitions of the same operation set, "where they were" really didn't matter anymore.

To the uninitiated, the sight of these well muscled men walking around in their underwear and combat boots with weapons slung across their backs, night vision dangling from their necks and web gear dragging from their tired and aching forearms, these men looked more like a band of undisciplined, uncaring beach junkies

than a well oiled terrorist take down machine. Looks can often be deceiving! These were Tier One warriors assigned to ISA, the "Intelligence Support Activity" otherwise known around the world as "The Activity" or "Those guys".

No words were shared as they walked. Words had to wait until they were inside the secure walls of the Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility (SCIF). Cautiously they let out a sigh of relief, allowing their unconscious to relax if only for the few moments it took to walk from the Blackhawk to the SCIF that awaited inside the hangar.

Subconsciously they were taking inventory of what hurt, what was numb, what mattered and what didn't matter anymore. In a remote region of their minds, each man took inventory of his own personal priorities. Some thought of their wives, children, girlfriends or parents. Others about their dog or where they intended to go when they got a break in the action. But each and every one of the men kept track of where their minds were, taking care not to allow things to teeter too close to that emotional danger zone that every man cordoned off. The boundaries were different for each man, but they all respected the unspoken code of never trespassing into another man's "Zone" unless invited.

As the Team walked towards the SCIF, something told them it was too soon to celebrate. There was always that chance something would get screwed up this close to going home. Every time they'd planned down time, or celebrated, thinking they were out of the shit and could spend time at home, something would flop right in the middle of it all and change everything in an instant.

Inside the hangar, the Team dropped their sweat encrusted, stinking uniforms on the concrete floor and sprayed their bodies with a garden hose hooked to a bathroom sink faucet. Instinctively they choked down the remainder of the MREs they'd humped up and down the mountains of Afghanistan and Pakistan over the past three days as they made their way into the SCIF. Food was now

scientifically received. No one liked the MREs or how they tasted. It was more about the nutritional value and keeping energy levels up, completely ignoring the taste whenever possible. With the exception of "Tabasco" of course, the only thing that had any real flavor that could cut through the paste that perpetually developed on their tongues and roof of their mouths. A mix of dried saliva, desert dirt and dehydrated goat shit dust constantly cycled from re-hydration in their mouths, to desert dry, leaving their tongues feeling like an old shoe and tasting even worse. Tabasco was the only relief. Yet even that was reserved for special occasions.

The SCIF was a "need to know" access area where Sensitive Intelligence (SI) information was discussed. SI was information deemed above Top Secret that needed special processing, special handling through special communications with the utmost urgency and secrecy. Every wire had special filters on the incoming voice and data lines. The electricity was monitored and filtered for inadvertent bleed over of sensitive data and everything inside this specially manufactured "box", was highly sensitive equipment used for Top Secret Compartmented and above intelligence conversations, communications and data transfer. TS/SCI, or Top Secret Special Compartmented Intelligence was the Tier One level of Intelligence. And not many people were allowed access at those levels.

The SCIF was basically a metal meat locker type of enclosure, flown anywhere in the world and erected inside of any other building, or simply dropped on the tarmac at Sanctuary Base, surrounded by razor wire and armed guards. It looked like a walk in freezer and had it's own cipher locks, computer systems and communications connected to all the higher echelon commands including the White House Situation Room, the Pentagon War Room, the CIA Operations Center, along with a number of other "Classified" consumers who were allowed to know what the Intelligence Support Activity was all about.

Along with all the high tech stuff inside the SCIF, there was one thing that remained constant no matter where the “meat locker” was deployed. Chief’s desk. The simple metal desk was bolted to the floor in the same place every time it was deployed. The difference between that desk and every other military metal desk was the small 4 by 6 inch photos taped to the desktop. Photos of the only thing that mattered in Chief’s quiet, secretive life. His two sons.

ISA was a clandestine Intelligence organization that very few people ever even knew existed. It’s name changed every 30 days anyway, so most people never really knew if they were talking about the same organization or not when the conversation came up. Only those who knew the Tier One primary operators by their first names knew who the ISA really was and what they did. To the high level inner circle of the US Government, only the Commanders were known. The Team was perpetually anonymous.

The mission always remained the same. Classified, on a “need to know basis”. The only thing that anyone outside the inner circle ever really knew was that when ISA got involved, the mission was serious and those conducting it were absolutely the best at what they did. There was no room for bravado or bullshit, nor was it tolerated.

Many Presidents had come and gone whose very lives, careers and Presidential legacies depended on that small number of highly trained professional intelligence personnel assigned to the “Activity”, one name it was known by. Very few of those Presidents or their Cabinet Members ever heard the name, but were highly grateful to those few men and women whose lives were consumed with keeping continuity on the elusive targets whose sole intent was the complete destruction of America. These men and women were Warriors who owned the shadows and lived a lifestyle very few ever knew about. Some referred to this unit as “the Farm”. Others just called it “that unit” or “those guys”. Chief called it “his Team”.

The FBI and CIA were constantly pissing on each other's turf, pointing fingers, trying to make each other look bad, all the while trying to make themselves look good, and in reality, were making it easier for the bad guys to win. The Activity didn't play politics. So, if no one knew what to call them and never knew where they were, they could hardly be sucked into the drama and bickering between governmental agencies inside the D.C. Beltway. The perpetual finger pointing was unprofessional in Chief's mind, which eventually caused ineffectual performance and impotence among those who were supposed to be defending America against all enemies, foreign and domestic!

* * * * *

The entire team was walking in a zombie state, somewhere in some desert environment. After so many mission sets, "Where they were" just didn't matter anymore. The entire Team was in a sort of comfort zone right next to being primal as they left the aircraft and headed into the hangar. Food and water was the only priority they concerned themselves with at the moment. Every man acted in unison. Patient. Calm. As if a silent voice and familiar robotic routine controlled them, urged them into the perpetual, well rehearsed action of feeding the body while their brain, numb and detached from the physical pain that was always present, subconsciously absorbed the new mission particulars spewing from the mouth of the JTF J2 Intelligence briefer. In this case, the man babbling as they walked was a well rehearsed and professional briefer carrying the rank of Lt Commander. But to Chief and his team, this guy was just another "talking dog" who should be in the civilian world reading news from a teleprompter on some TV channel, not getting in their way.

Chief was on year 26 with Joint Special Operations Intelligence, (JSOC-J2). He'd been there since the inception of "joint" operations, a result of absolute catastrophe in the deserts of Iran during the

American Hostage Crisis of the early 1980s. Eight Special Operators died that day, simply because no one checked the weather to see that a monster sand storm, known to the locals as "Haboob", was on the horizon. Either they hadn't checked, or they didn't understand the devastating impact of what a real sand storm meant to rotary winged aircraft. Three meters of sand was coming straight down every half hour. The weight of that sand alone would crush any aircraft that flew in the vicinity. But in the case of Operation Eagle Claw, the C130s fixed wing propeller driven aircraft and Sea Stallion helicopters assigned to that mission flew directly into the storm and were totally consumed. A fuel tanker on the ground tried to take off and immediately met a fiery fate when a Sea Stallion helicopter flew into the side of it. The Achille Lauro was Chief's first mission. Eagle Claw was his second. At age 19, his life changed in thirty seconds. The impact of two devastating outcomes would shape his mentality and his life forever more.

Joint operations were born as a result of that aborted mission. The Special Operators of Joint Task Force Arc Angel were trying to get out of Iran to regroup when the accident occurred. Subsequent finger pointing led to some level headed senior men figuring out that it wasn't a good idea to have three different services involved in the same operation, each service using three different types of radios so that the men on the ground couldn't actually talk to anyone in real time. Operations of this type were an absolute fiasco and good men died because the Admirals, Generals and Commanders of so many different services wanted their own piece of the pie.

A new organization would need to be formed, led by men with second echelon thinking and combat experience. Rangers, Seals, Green Berets, Marine Recon and Air Force Para-rescue types with a no bullshit attitude who were fearless, professional and, above all, competent. Joint Special Operations Command, JSOC, was born. And ISA was the Intelligence asset that supported these clandestine operations.

A “Commander” assigned to this small team, routinely transferred in and out, staying six months or less on station. The short time frame these Commanders spent at the unit was not due to the fact that they couldn’t take the physical stress, or that they didn’t like the missions. Usually, the insane tempo of both training and real world operations wore them out too quickly, as well as the fact they were trying to climb the ladder of success, *not* dedicate themselves to a cause. There was a real difference in tolerance between men with leadership aspirations and operators.

Chief was the hub of the wheel. The only Chief Warrant Officer assigned to this highly specialized unit, his years in Special Ops was the only real continuity in this chaotic and high risk environment. Yet the men who did the real work also considered Chief the outrigger that kept everything steady. All the other Commanders and Officers were there for their own reasons, other agendas like a quick promotion, limited time in the driver’s seat with limited experience that gave them high visibility when it came to records review for promotions. Being dubbed “Commander of a Terrorist take down unit” meant rapidly rising within their peer group. They hoped to be quickly reassigned and move on to bigger and better things. Bigger and Better things was “Enlisted speak” for desk duty and an easy kush future climbing the ranks until they reached the top, or were forced to retire. Although there was mandatory respect of their rank, most of the soldiers saw the Officers who dashed in and out, as politicians who were out to get the patches and badges to put on their “I love ME” wall.

Chief was different. He didn’t have an “I love ME” wall. All his medals, awards and recognition were in a box somewhere in storage. Until his new wife found them, had them framed for the kids to see. Chief had been there the longest with no end in sight. Literally hundreds of missions. Over sixty men died while Chief worked there. Some died in training accidents, others on real world covert operations missions.

Chief was a walking legend that carried things deeply and quietly, especially the scars, torn ligaments and hardware that kept his spine in one column. Those who died that were “worth a shit” held a special place in Chief’s heart. The rest who died were just part of nature’s inevitable herd thinning process. They were assholes when they were alive, now they were just dead assholes.

If a person had their head on straight and spent enough time with Chief in a room they could come away with a treasure trove of wisdom and knowledge about life in general. A younger soldier could tell there was a lot more than met the eye when it came to this big scary guy with the hard heart they called Chief. He was a man of few words most of the time and even less words during mission prep or when a Real World Operation was on the horizon. The warriors around the compound always knew when something was up. But as with all things, a person had to be perceptive enough and present to find out. Chief didn’t offer his experience, wisdom and life lessons for free and not to just anyone.

This team of seven men had only been together for a little more than a year. Their combined Special Operations experience was considerable and contributed immensely to the fluid mechanics and un-canny ability to predict what Chief was thinking. More times than not, someone would say, “I’m on it Chief” without any other words being spoken. Just a look, a twitch in body language and everyone knew not only what needed to be done, but whose responsibility it was to get it done. Everyone was connected on a different plain. The unspoken communications plain of the Special Operations Warrior.

The selection process that Department of Defense used to find these Elite Warriors ensured they were highly motivated self-starters, pulled together from every branch of US Military Service. Thousands applied every year to get onto the Special Teams that America used to fight the War on Terror. But of those thousands, less than one percent would actually make it to training, and most of

them would be weeded out. "Wannabes" was the name they were given. The ones who "Wanted to be" but just didn't have the heart and soul required to become part of the inner circle. Many excellent warriors from all the services, applicants with a minimum of ten years time in service, were dropped from the rolls simply because they did not have what it took for the long haul. The endurance required for a lifetime. Special Operations was not about the "sprint" from one mission to the next. It was a lifestyle intended for those men and woman who had the long haul in their genes and the long strand muscle texture of a marathon runner, not the big bulky short fiber muscle of a weight lifter or boxer.

Once a man was selected, it was a given that any task received would be executed with the same immediacy and professional calm that any other task mandated. Taking out a terrorist, or taking out the garbage resulted in the same physiologic elements being present - a moderated heart rate, controlled slow breathing, attention to the smallest detail and execution with satisfactory result in the most efficient manner possible without drawing any attention to themselves. The only aspect that changed from one task to the next was the level of ferocity and ruthlessness required.

The current mission they were being briefed on would be double. Double everything. Double the length. Double the danger. The standard mission set was three days. Some nerd, with all their medical and scientific studies had determined that the limit of human endurance was just more than 72 hours without pharmaceutical enhancements. But they had not taken into account the determination, the heart and sheer perseverance of the Elite Warriors within the Special Operations world who were assigned to the ISA. Without chemical or pharmaceutical assistance, these guys were literally head and shoulders above the rest of the Green Berets, Navy Seals and Marine Recon men. They were the best of the best, with no bravado, no flash, just silent efficiency and perfection with just the right touch of humility. They were all brawn with the requisite brains included. Anyone could be trained to have the

strength and stamina. But not everyone could be taught the brain part. That had to be there at birth. The number of men with both was an extreme limiting factor. There just were not that many who also had the patriotism and loyalty required by this elite organization.

This mission could take up to six days from wheels up to *ZEUS*, the code word often used for mission completion. Staying on the air too long usually meant someone with radio direction finding techniques would rain mortars down on your head. The less one said on the radio, the better. “*ZEUS*” was simply spoken to say, “Mission Success” on the designated operations frequency.

Chief and his team had already been up for over 72 hours and it was someone else’s turn, some other team’s time to take a crack at it. However, there was no one else. Twenty eight Special Operators were killed with one RPG strike less than three months earlier, the result of poor planning and a total lack of attention to Security Protocol. Millions of dollars in equipment was lost, but many more millions in training time and money were wasted just as well. The death of these highly trained Operators who fell victim to “the Golden BB moment” was devastating to the Special Operations Community. Direct-Action Insertions into hostile territory almost ALWAYS had preparatory fire by artillery, A-10 close air support cover fire, Spectre Gunship or Apache Helicopter cover for security on the drop zone. But in this case, there was no air cover, no preparatory fire, no surveillance and no advanced planning for the QRF mission to extract the Team. As a result, an RPG went up the tailgate of a CH-47 flying into a hot drop zone without killing everyone on board. The mission was a disaster from the planning stages, with no satellite communications, no air cover and no Plan B. Too many good men died that day over stupidity, emotion and complete lack of professional leadership. The Ferrari in the barn was due for a total and complete overhaul.

It would take years to fill those slots and decades more to fill the shoes of those men lost. Because even after the replacement men were trained, they still needed combat experience. Those who died would be remembered forever more within the Special Operations Community. America had all but forgotten the incident, never knowing their names, nor ever really understanding what went wrong, or why they died.

As Chief and his Team were tapped for yet another mission, Chief knew it was now time to find some more “suck it up” and go out again. There was no relief Team. There were no additional personnel so Chief and his men could take a break. Mission creep and operational tempo was at a staggering pitch. Chief and his men could sleep on the bird and the clock would reset to zero when they lifted off.

Someone in the Chain of Command estimated this mission would require six days. That set off internal radars in Chief’s head. His internal compass, the personal “gut check” that saved his life and that of his men on more than one occasion was telling him that something was wrong. For the longest time during his storied career, Chief hadn’t listened to that inner voice because he couldn’t explain it. But years of real world experience had since taught him to listen to that quiet voice from within and to listen well. This time, that mysterious inner voice of his was telling him that something was seriously wrong. He’d been on longer missions. Some missions were as long as a year in duration, others more than that. But most of them were the standard 72 hours for Special Operations. After that, conventional military units came in to mop up and conduct extended mission tasks. But this time, as Chief listened to the mission particulars coming from the JTF/JSOC briefer, there was an un-easy glitch that made Chief repeatedly shake his head, look at the floor and try to keep his stomach under control. He couldn’t put his finger on what exactly bothered him. But in the near future he would learn that “glitch” would change his life and that of his men,

forever. Simply because the missions statement said, "Six Days to Zeus!"

Chihuahua Child

“Just because you don’t understand something, does not mean it’s false!”

Life Lesson Nr. 1

A dark alleyway awaited the seven man Quick Reaction Force (QRF) Team as the distance closed rapidly between Sanctuary Base, somewhere in the desert of Iraq, and the location of a elusive bomb maker. Chief and his Team, now designated Joint Task Force Arc Angel, supported by the Night Stalkers helicopter squadron of Task Force 160, had already spent nearly three years of research, interviews, Intelligence collection and processing trying to mitigate the seemingly perpetual bombings in downtown Baghdad, all without success. This specific bomb maker had a signature, as did most bomb makers. Only instead of some sort of wiring sequence, or repetitive type structure or chemical explosive composition. The signature this one use was children.

The initial assault team consisted of three seasoned Operators. Chief, the Team Leader and Officer in Charge, a U.S. Navy Special Warfare enlisted man, (SEAL) with expertise in Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) and over sixty classified missions, and a U.S. Army Special Operations, Green Beret, Medic. Anticipation among the Team was at it’s peak as the highly modified Blackhawk helicopter followed a sharp turn off on the main road leading out of the city and into a small, walled in enclave in North Eastern Baghdad. Barely 30 meters to the rear in flight, a second Blackhawk followed loaded with four additional Operators, every man U.S. Army Ranger qualified and experts in perimeter security for High Value Target (HVT) take down missions.

Over the past six months inside the secure sanctuary circle called “The Green Zone” of Central Baghdad, a bomb maker contributed immensely to the chaos, terror and complete lack of peace and security by supplying dynamite vests to the Insurgency resulting in the death of eight suicide bombers and over four hundred innocent civilians. The tactics used were as sinister and deadly as was the result of their home made suicide vests.

Security forces, suspecting nothing from innocent four and five year old children, allowed them to walk unhindered through checkpoints into the town square, a local open-air farmer’s market. At the busiest time of the day when civilians performed the mundane task of buying produce, these children walked past security and under the threat radar completely un-noticed. Under the guise of innocence, these children walked among their victims. The people had no suspicion that these small children were walking death incarnate, their tiny bodies strapped with high intensity explosives with several pounds of metal debris attached to the vests, intended to inflict maximum injuries and casualties to every human within the blast radius. With absolutely no warning and with no real understanding for the consequences of their actions, these small children from the age of 4 years old would robotically stroll into the crowd, and scream to the top of their lungs the Islamic rhetoric which they had rehearsed for months every day at the Madrassa under threat of whipping: “Allahu Akbar” (Allah is supreme).

With all the fervor and boldness of a much older, warrior Jihadist, they pushed the ignition button concealed within their clothes, detonating the dynamite vest which vaporized their bodies sending ball bearings and shards of cast iron shrapnel into the crowd. The death and destruction was enormous, caught on video cameras emplaced before hand throughout the city and around the farmer’s market by Jihadi handlers. The physical injuries alone would devastate the population. But the realization that a young child caused the carnage was something so psychologically

paralyzing it affected everyone in the country and indeed, around the world.

Civilian Liaison Group (CLG) provided real time, time sensitive intelligence information about a bomb maker's lab. Intensive Intelligence efforts had finally supplied information about the person, or persons responsible for thirty bombs that had gone off inside the "Green Zone" over the past thirty days, nearly one every single day, but often times, more than one a day further heightening the resolve to find this maniac and stop the slaughter.

Fragile relations between Coalition Forces and the Iraqi people depended on such things as electricity and running water. But peace and security were also at the top of everyone's list. After all, the Americans were being held personally responsible for the current state of anarchy that persisted within the country, which *was not* present during the last forty years under Saddam Hussein. Everyone knew Saddam was a butcher who murdered scores of people simply because he could. But his behavior was tolerated simply because everyday life was more tolerable with electricity, running water and fuel while Saddam was still in power. Now, since the Americans had come in and destroyed most of the city's infrastructure during the Shock and Awe campaign, the never ending issues that made daily life miserable were causing enormous political pressures on a very unstable new government. After all, Baghdad was in the middle of the desert. And most of the inhabitants were accustomed to having running water, electricity and even air conditioning.

The culture of the Middle East was to over exaggerate their misery, especially in front of video cameras, or when they had an audience. Complaining loudly, using small children to accentuate their agony and discomfort, often worked to enhance their position when they were considered by the local government for redress of their grievances. Acting mortally wounded usually meant more money, more food, or more attention. Any way around it, the result of their Oscar Winning theatrics meant more of something. For government officials, it was bad enough dealing with the mass

complaints over power outages, lack of running water, no sewage or trash pickup, and food shortages. The constant bombings however, were just unacceptable and had to stop.

After months of sensitive intelligence collection, Chief and his team were sent in without any prior notice, to verify and to eliminate the problem. To say that no one inside Iraq could be trusted was an understatement. Everyone had their own agenda. Finding real, actionable intelligence brought back memories of the Cold War when Chief was stationed in Berlin a long time before the Wall ever came down. Things were the same in Iraq now as it had been in the East Bloc during the Soviet Occupation of East Germany and Berlin. The local population had broken into factions. And plenty of them. They were split into geographic location by century old tribal boundaries and religious beliefs. The problem was knowing who was on what side, what their agenda was and if they were telling you the truth or not. If you picked the wrong side, you very well could end up dead. Saddam was gone, but the in-fighting among factions and tribes was rampant now. All the control mechanisms that had kept the peace under Saddam were gone. Death was inevitable, but in this day and age in Iraq, it could come without any warning simply by going to the open air market to get food.

Preferred tactic for Chief and his Team would have been to wait till oh-dark-thirty to strike, a time when most of the local civilians were either asleep or at least inside their homes, limiting the exposure of Chief and the Team to hostiles in the area. Things could get messy in these parts. No matter where they went, U.S. Soldiers were constantly on the razor's edge knowing full well that they were either loved by the people or hated with a passion. Sorting out who was who never was an easy task. The job of showing up on someone's doorstep unannounced with the intention of stopping them from blowing people up had an inherent risk. Conducting this type of mission at night was intended to mitigate

some of that risk. U.S. Special Operations had an enormous tactical advantage via night vision devices. An advantage they put to good use on many successful missions! But on this night, the Intelligence report indicated the bomb maker would be gone by morning. So the window of opportunity now dictated when Chief and the Team would strike instead of Standard Operating Procedures, which historically proved to be the key to not only mission success, but also the extremely low casualty rate Tier One teams enjoyed. To everyone on standby, going in without prior surveillance, in the daylight, without backup, was a classic case of the tail wagging the dog. Totally ass backwards.

* * * * *

In less than 30 minutes flight time by Blackhawk insertion, Chief and his men had boots on the ground. As they exited the aircraft, Chief had the Team Explosive Ordinance expert on his left, the Team Medic on his right. Too soon for night vision equipment, all three heads were on a swivel as they proceeded into the fading light of the alleyway. Lacking the luxury of pre-mission surveillance, time and darkness, Chief and his men hustled to get into the shadows and the relative protection of mud walls and concrete block buildings the local people called “home”.

The second bird touched down meters away and the remaining Team members dispersed into the shadows setting up perimeter security and surveillance points surrounding the target grid square, a small cement block house near the center of the town. With a perimeter established by the remaining four men on the team, Chief plus two were inbound to investigate the situation. The element of surprise was even more important now since the cover of darkness was already sacrificed. They were moving at a full run into the darkness of the alleyway when everything suddenly changed for the worst.

With all the ferocity of a sledgehammer at full swing, a 7.62 mm round struck Chief in the back. His body lurched forward as if carried by an invisible linebacker, smashing his face into the mud brick wall in front of him. The shock and surprise of the situation was not unfamiliar to Chief. Training and experience took over as his body and mind absorbed the adrenaline, felt the heat in his face dissipate, responding by transitioning into survival mode. In an instant, the Ordinance man was slumped in a lifeless pile on his left, brain matter and blood speckling the dirt wall in front of him. A split second later, the Team Medic was down on his right, balled up writhing on the ground in agony, pulling his legs to his chest, screaming at the top of his lungs. Chief watched through a pain induced fog as blood spewed from the man's lower back and legs and a sudden sick feeling hit Chief in the guts telling him that maybe he'd just made a really bad decision by taking this QRF mission. An AK-47 machine gun round had torn off half of the man's buttocks. In a few more seconds, both the screaming and motion ceased.

Chief scrambled to stay conscious using the fighter pilot technique of grunting, holding his breath, contracting muscles and forcing blood to his brain. He fought hard to remain conscious between rapid, intermittent inhalations, straining to focus his eyes. His body and brain were in full warrior survival mode now and nothing responded to his will. Ears ringing, Chief strained to hear anything audible. Training took over as he keyed his headset and spoke calmly into the microphone.

"Contact rear. Three friendlies down. I need backup and Medics ASAP. Scramble DUSTOFF. One man is dead. I repeat, ONE KIA. The other needs some serious medical assistance!"

As he released the mic, Chief noticed the faint scent of blood in his nostrils. Licking his lips and tasting the combination of mud and blood made him realize the blood was his own. The salty taste made his jaw hurt as dry saliva glands spasmed in his mouth. His upper

lip, cut cleanly in the middle, flowed heavily with blood where he'd pushed his front teeth through it. Instinct took over and Chief scrambled to his feet. He was fully inside his head now. Adrenaline insulated his brain, made him painless and super human as he forced himself to focus and recover from the ground. A violent growl grew within his chest.

The slow motion video footage he experienced as he struggled to his feet was familiar territory, a result of trauma conditions he'd experienced so many times before. The time warp in his brain slowed everything way down and allowed Chief to record unbelievable details that would later play out in his nightmares and dreams. Only the weirdest and most out of place things, smells, thoughts and observations stood out in time with seemingly endless minutes allotted for analysis and recall.

In this extreme trauma state, Chief's retinal focus was intensified. His vision was suddenly capable of supreme clarity, enabling him to watch slow motion bullets zip by. Chief could literally watch the dust in the air being pushed aside by an enormous pressure wave preceding the metal encased, lead projectile. His hearing was superhuman as well, as his mind recorded the unbelievably clear sounds of the metal on metal, automatic firing mechanism of the Kalashnikov as it reverberated off the mud walls with every round jacked into the firing chamber. Thirty rounds seemed to erupt in perpetuity as time stood still.

As Chief tried to recover, he got to one knee and caught a glimpse in his peripheral vision of a white cotton robe fleeing past. Bare feet and the brief but unmistakable aroma of goat manure struck Chief's consciousness. Was this the bastard that had just shot him in the back? It was payback time!

The robe and bare feet were fully on his radar as Chief blocked everything else from his mind. For some reason, the feet seemed to be out of place. Chief struggled to focus, fighting off pain, breathing through the bloody mud in his nostrils. He caught himself fighting

for more air as he tried to prevent the inevitable inhale of mud and blood into his lungs, causing him to cough and lose valuable strength. He found himself trying so hard to keep his legs from folding under the weight of his body and the extra 80 lbs of Kevlar and ceramic trauma prevention vest plates that had just saved his life.

Instantaneous reaction to the passing feet cleared Chief's mind and fueled an almost cat-like strike as he reached out to grab a human form by the neck as it tried to flee. The vicious growl building in his chest released in such violence that it fueled every second to come. In one smooth and practiced martial arts, muscle memory move, Chief rose to his feet holding a human's throat in one hand, while pulling a well used K-Bar knife from it's leg holster with the other hand. In one more second, the blade would cross over his left wrist and sever all the vital tendons, wind pipe and arteries encased inside the human flesh that he now held in his grip. Neurons fired split second calculations in Chief's brain. A weird sense of calm and comfort came over him as he relaxed and let his primal instinct take control and go through the motions of a well practiced Kata he worked on for so many decades. A dance of Warriors that had saved his life on numerous occasions comprised of part Krav Magaw martial arts moves and part Ninja. He anticipated the coming adrenaline spike that accompanied hand to hand combat, yearning for the huge endorphin release that normally accompanied the rage! There was nothing more pure, nothing more addictive. One of them was not going home.

The more his brain relaxed, the more Chief knew there was a problem. There was little or no weight to the body he'd lifted so deftly from the ground.

"Could my own adrenaline mask the weight of a grown man?" Chief wondered in anxious anticipation that something might be out of whack!

Chief wasn't perfect by any means, but mistakes really sucked. Especially those errors when human life was terminated prematurely. Those were the mistakes a man never got over. Life lessons had to be paid for, just like college tuition had to be paid. But the life lessons a soldier learned while in combat were lessons that cost way too much tuition, especially if they got it wrong.

Chief's peripheral vision showed him that what he thought were a man's feet, were somehow dangling in mid-air, frozen in space without so much as a toe touching the dirt below. A fraction of a second later in the inventory process of Chief's mind, yet another warning signal flashed! *No beard!* Then came a sick feeling in his gut and a painfully burning question.

"Did he have the right guy?"

His muscles burned deeply as he hauled on the internal brakes attempting to stop himself from completing the terminal cut across the human's throat. As painful and disappointing as this turn of events was, Chief had to make sure he had the right guy.

Finishing his ascension from the ground, overcoming the smell of blood, cordite and brain matter, fighting off unconsciousness as he held this human figure by the neck, Chief felt the strength come back to his legs as his heels landed on solid ground beneath him. He shook his head from side to side like a dog coming out of the water, trying to clear his brain. As the fog slowly lifted, pain replaced adrenaline, tears cleansed dirt and goat manure from his eyes and Chief came face to face with what he had gripped so tightly in his fist. It was a five year old little boy, eyes as big as dinner plates. Words of some sort were coming from his mouth, his lips moving a mile a minute. But still all Chief could hear over the ringing in his ears was the barking sound of a scared Chihuahua dog.

Later he would reflect and comprehend the lip reading taking place, currently muffled by the persistent ringing in his ears from a close proximity AK-47 muzzle blast.

“Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar” in rapid succession was all the child could manage, “Allah is supreme!” over and over again, the pitch of his frightened voice heightened by Chief’s grip squeezing his throat and tightening his larynx. The only noise emanating was that of a frantic and petrified, Chihuahua dog, fighting to stay alive!

“FUCK!” Chief yelled at the top of his lungs, releasing the primal growl, breathing hard to expel dirt and blood from his injured face and packed nostrils. His brain was back in charge now and just in the nick of time. He’d damned near cut the throat of a child. A child who still gripped an AK-47 with a hot barrel and an empty 30 round magazine that had just killed two of his men and severely injured Chief’s spine in the process.

“What the hell is going on?” Chief thought. His brain tried to process the situation. Without warning, there was another set of hands on top of Chief’s, prying to release his fingers, allowing the neck to go free.

“It’s OK Chief. I got this!” came a familiar voice barely audible over the ringing in his ears and the slow calculated heartbeat he knew to be his own. A few more seconds would go by before Chief’s muscles complied with the command from his brain and he finally released his grip. The child dropped to the ground and collapsed in a ball, holding his throat, coughing and gasping for air. Anger seeped in and Chief’s body morphed from a super-human door-kicking warrior into that of a mere mortal. His body was suddenly that of a stinging, painful, earthbound weakling. By the time he’d taken two more breaths, another surge of adrenaline filled his blood stream and Chief was pissed off beyond words. He fought off yet another wave of adrenaline as he grappled for control, searching in vain for his Team-Leader military bearing.

“God Dammit!” Chief yelled grabbing the boy by the scruff of the neck, kicking down a simple wooden planked door in the alleyway. Visions of his own son, barely six years old now, swarmed

into Chief's head and heart. What the hell was this child, this poor young Chihuahua Child doing out here in this god forsaken alley, shooting at him and his men? Where were his parents? Why did he have a fully loaded AK-47 with a 30 round clip and why wasn't he just being a kid somewhere playing? The fact that Chief damn near killed this kid resonated to his soul and made him angrier. The impact from his combat boots rendered the door into splinters. As he threw the young boy through the open doorway into the inner sanctum of the mud building, Chief suddenly found himself in the dark indoor living quarters, standing next to the boy again as he lay slumped in a pile on the floor. Chief's eyes were still adjusting to the darkness of being inside the building when a shocking realization struck him deep inside his brain. Chief somehow was standing in the middle of the bomb maker's lab. Mission planning brought him to the correct grid square, but Karma brought him to the exact bomb maker's location.

Seven dynamite vests, prefabricated and ready to go lined the floor next to the inner mud wall as if on display, each bearing a name tag much like backpacks intended for grade school attendance. A single wire connection to a battery was all that separated Chief, his team and everyone else in a city block radius from a certain trip to the afterlife. Through the mental fog of trauma, Chief realized that the boy's mother was the bomb maker. She had sent her five year old son into the alleyway with a fully loaded AK-47 to stand guard. He'd done his duty as a Chihuahua with the determination of a pit bull.

The Team Interpreter translated everything into English as the mother of eight babbled something in a dialect that Chief could not understand. His entire head rang now and the sudden realization he'd been shot in the back at close range registered in his brain as well as his back muscles. The "chicken plates" in his vest saved his life. There was no bullet penetration, but the impact gelled his scapular muscles, tore tendons and made his left lung bleed. Two vertebrae were fractured, a career ending injury for certain, if

anyone found out. The kinetic energy from the impact of a bullet traveling at over 2,400 feet per second was enormous. But all that paled in comparison to Chief's knowing two of his men lay dead just outside the doorway. The doctors would never hear of Chief's injuries. His men came first and he was intent on making sure his own non-fatal wounds would not diminish their honor.

What could possibly make this woman sacrifice her own children? When Chief got the final translation, the answers did little to clarify neither the situation nor the mentality so foreign to Americans who believed in life and prosperity. It was obvious now just how opposite this Islamic culture really was. Their entire goal in life was to die for Allah and this Islamic woman was extremely upset that Chief had not killed her son. Her Muslim faith required her to sacrifice her sons in the name of Jihad, but she also stood to acquire \$10,000.00 U.S. for every child she martyred and she had seven of them left. She would earn an additional reward for every U.S. Soldier she or her offspring killed and this child's face, that innocent Chihuahua, would be painted in a wall mural on the side of a building in the town square. She stood to gain a lot and was willing to martyr her seven remaining children for whom she'd already made fully functional dynamite vests. She already murdered at least eight children from the surrounding families in the past six months alone, sending them into the market in downtown Baghdad to detonate themselves all in the name of Allah.

As the CLG team arrived to claim the glory, collect the vests and whatever other Intelligence was available at the house, Chief walked away in utter disbelief and total silence as he headed for the Blackhawk. The mission was over and it was time to return to Sanctuary Base. Only now, he had two more dead men. He winced, swallowed hard, and held his breath as he gathered his gear, knowing full well the adrenaline was wearing off fast and he only had a few more minutes before the pain would be too obvious to

hide. As Chief climbed into the Blackhawk, he keyed the mic and spoke softly.

“Sanctuary Base, this is Arc Angel Six. Zeus. I say again, Zeus.” Then he reached over, turned off the radio and slumped back against a rucksack for the ride home. The intended recipients at the White House situation room, the Pentagon War Room and the CIA’s Tactical Liaison Office erupted in celebration at the news. Maybe now, the Iraqi agenda would gain some traction. At a minimum, the U.S. could claim the high ground once again. Back at the Tarmac in the Iraqi desert, the sun was down, the stars were bright in the night sky, and Chief had a lot to think about. But for the moment, all he could remember was the familiar rant that always came into his head when missions went badly.

“I should have been a cook!”

* * * * *

The cool night air was a welcome relief as Chief sat in the back of the Blackhawk for a very long time after the rotors ceased rotation on the tarmac at Sanctuary Base. The 30-minute return flight was made in total silence. The team was out of harm’s way now, back inside the wire and the somber task of respectfully unloading the bodies of his dead soldiers was at hand. It was never easy when the mission was over and casualties had to be reckoned with. These were the times he had to bury emotion, put on his “Team Leader” face and keep the men focused on recovery operations from this mission, and incoming parameters for the next one. There was no time to grieve. Not now. Maybe later, but for the moment, there were so many more things that required his full attention. Besides mourning just meant he would lose precious strength. Mourning those who did not survive this mission would have to wait like all the other deaths. Years, indeed decades later, Chief still hadn’t mourned any of his lost men and women. He didn’t know when he would have time to do that. What he knew for certain was, it wasn’t

going to happen tonight. All of that was shoved in a box, locked in a closet and pushed aside for some other time.

Chief sat in quiet solitude listening to the high pitched sound of the Emergency Broadcast tone in his ears he remembered hearing as a child on the television every so often. Only now the persistent, high pitched ringing was inside his head, a permanent result of an AK-47 muzzle blast so close to his ears. As he tried to ignore the noise and fight off exhaustion, he was trying to think of what he would say in the letters he needed to write. Letters home to the loved ones and families of his fallen men. How would he explain to these people that their soldiers, their husbands, their sons, died on a mission trying to take out a very religious woman hell bent on blowing up as many American soldiers as she could by sending her own children to their death with a dynamite vest!

How could he explain the Muslim belief that dying by suicide was an act of heroism! That killing Infidels and dying while doing so, was preferable to living a full, happy and productive life! How could he explain to them how contrary this woman, this mother of eight children was to Western woman who would give their own lives to protect their children. Everywhere else on the planet, innocent lives were precious and protected by any means necessary. There was no explaining that this woman loved Allah enough to martyr her own children for Jihad. After all, isn't that what Christianity preached? That God loved mankind so much that he gave his only son to be crucified? How could he console the survivors and explain to these families that which he had yet to wrap his own brain around.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Samuel Hill is a pen name. The Author's true identity is by law, and subject to non-disclosure agreements, classified until 2085.

The author served from March 1976 to July 2006 including both enlisted and officer time and was awarded, in ascending order:

((all classified awards have been redacted))

Southwest Asia Service Medal

Kuwait Liberation Medal

National Defense Medal

Achievement Medal for Heroism

1 Army of Occupation Medal (Berlin)

4 Good Conduct Medals

Army Commendation Medal with 6 oak leaf clusters (seven awards)

(one with Combat "V" device for Valor)

3 Meritorious Service Medals

2 Legion of Merit Medals (One for civilian operations)

Additionally, "Chief" was cited as the Intelligence and Security Command, Commander's Trophy for Operational Intelligence Achievement (1st Runner Up) after only three years in service, for operational Intelligence 110 miles behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War.

He is now 100% Permanent and Totally disabled, currently writing the series, “Six Days to Zeus” which has been optioned by Phoenix Pictures to become a Hollywood movie.

He founded “Tier One Tranquility Base” in 2010, a non-profit for PTSD and the Moral Wounds of War.