

THE EXPLOSIVE NEW NOVEL IN THE SPECIAL WARFARE SERIES!



SEAL TEAM SEVEN

PACIFIC SIEGE

KEITH DOUGLASS

Author of the Carrier Naval Aviation series



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Biography

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SEAL TEAM SEVEN PACIFIC SIEGE by Keith Douglass

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ISBN 0-425-16941-3

A Berkley Book, published by arrangement with the author

PRINTING HISTORY Berkley edition / June 1999

SEAL TEAM SEVEN logo illustration by Michael Racz.

Berkley Books are published by The Berkley Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Putnam Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014.

The Penguin Putnam Inc. World Wide Web site address is <http://www.penguinputnam.com>

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Special thanks and acknowledgment to Chet Cunningham for his contribution to this book.

SEAL TEAM SEVEN THIRD PLATOON CORONADO, CALIFORNIA

Lieutenant Commander Blake Murdock. Platoon Leader. 32, 6'2 , 210 pounds. Annapolis graduate. Six years in SEALs. Father important Congressman from Virginia. Murdock recently promoted. Apartment in Coronado. Has a motorcycle, loves to fish. WEAPON HK MP-5SD submachine gun.

FIRST SQUAD

David Jaybird Sterling. Machinist Mate Second Class. Platoon Chief. 24, 5'11 , 170 pounds. Quick mind, fine tactician. Good with men in platoon. Single. Drinks too much sometimes. Crack shot with all

arms. WEAPON HK MP-5SD submachine gun. Administrator for the platoon.

Ron Holt. Radioman First Class. 22, 6'1 , 170 pounds. Plays guitar, had a small band. Likes redheaded girls. Rabid baseball fan, Loves deep-sea fishing, is good at it. Platoon radio operator. WEAPON HK MP-5SD submachine gun.

Bill Bradford. Quartermaster First Class. 24, 6'2 , 215 pounds. An artist in spare time. Paints oils. He sells his marine paintings. Single. Quiet. Reads a lot. Has two years of college. Squad sniper. WEAPON HK PSG1 7.62 NATO sniper rifle or McMillan M-87R . 50-caliber sniper rifle.

Joe Ricochet Lampedusa. Operations Specialist Third Class. 21, 5'11 , 115 pounds. Good tracker, quick thinker. Had a year of college. Loves motorcycles. Wants a Hog. Pot smoker on the sly. Picks up plain girls. Platoon scout. WEAPON Colt M-4A1 with grenade launcher.

Kenneth Ching. Quartermaster's Mate First Class. Full-blooded Chinese. 25, 6'0 , 180 pounds. Platoon translator. Speaks Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Spanish. Bicycling nut. Paid 1,200 for off-road bike. Is trying for OfficerCandidateSchool. WEAPON Colt M-4A1 rifle with grenade launcher.

Harry Horse Ronson. Electrician's Mate Second Class. 24, 6'4 , 240 pounds. Played football two years at college. Wants a ranch where he can raise horses. Good man in a brawl. Has broken his nose twice. Squad machine gunner. WEAPON HK 21-E 7.62 NATO round machine gun.

James Doc Ellsworth. Hospital Corpsman First Class. 25, 5'10 , 160 pounds. One year pre-med, then he ran out of money. Prefers small dark-eyed girls. Single. Competition shooter with pistol. Platoon corpsman. WEAPON HK MP-5SD/no-stock, 5-round Mossburg pump shotgun.

SECOND SQUAD

Lieutenant (j.g.) Ed DeWitt. Leader Second Squad. Second in Command of the platoon. From Seattle. 30, 6'1 , 175 pounds. Wiry. Has serious live-in woman. Annapolis grad. A career man. Plays a good game of chess on traveling board. WEAPON The new HK G-11 submachine gun.

Al Adams. Gunner's Mate Third Class. 20, 5'11 , 180 pounds. Surfer and triathlete. Finished twice. A golfing nut. Binge drinker or tee-totaler. Loves the ladies if they play golf. Runs local marathons for training. WEAPON Colt M-4A1 with grenade launcher.

Miguel Fernandez. Gunner's Mate First Class. 26, 6'1 , 180 pounds. Has a child with a woman in Coronado. Spends his off time with them. Highly family-oriented. He has family in San Diego. Speaks Spanish, Portuguese. Squad sniper. WEAPON HK PSG1 7.62 NATO sniper rifle.

Colt Guns Franklin. Yeoman Second Class. 24, 5'10 , 175 pounds. A former gymnast. Powerful arms and shoulders. Expert mountain climber. Has a motorcycle, and does hang gliding. Speaks Farsi and Arabic. WEAPON Colt M-4A1 with grenade launcher.

Les Quinley. Torpedoman Third Class. 22, 5'9 , 160 pounds. A computer and Internet fan. Has his own Web page. Always reading computer magazines. Explosives specialist with extra training. WEAPON

HK G-11 with caseless rounds, 4.7 mm submachine gun with 50-round magazine.

Rodolfo RG Gonzalez. Damage Controlman First Class. 26, 5'10 , 180 pounds. Loves to surf, prays for a storm for better waves. Is Second Squad's tracker. Speaks Spanish, Italian, and Russian. WEAPON Colt M-4A1 with grenade launcher.

Jack Mahanani. Hospital Corpsman First Class. 25, 6'4 , 240 pounds. Tahitian/Hawaiian. Expert swimmer. Bench-press 400 pounds. Once married, divorced. Top surfer. Wants the .50 sniper rifle. WEAPON Colt M-4A1 with grenade launcher. Replacement for Gonzalez after he's shot up in Iraq on the first phase of this mission.

Joe Douglas. Quartermaster First Class. 24, 6'1 , 185 pounds. Expert hand-to-hand and unarmed combat. He's an auto nut. Rebuilds classic cars. Working on a 1931 Model A Ford Roadster. Platoon's top driver, mechanic. WEAPON HK 21E 7.62 NATO round machine gun. Second radio operator.

Fred Washington. Engineman Second Class. A black man. 24, 6'0 , 180 pounds. Is driven to succeed. Taking Computer College Courses. Doesn't carouse much. is writing a novel about the SEALs. WEAPON HK MP-5SD submachine gun.

Third Platoon assigned exclusively to the Central Intelligence Agency to perform any needed tasks on a covert basis anywhere in the world. A Top Secret classified assignment.

1.

Tuesday, 9 January

33,000 Feet Altitude

Near Kuwait Border

Newly promoted Lieutenant Commander Blake Murdock watched his fifteen men in the murky gloom of the interior of the special C-130 Hercules. They were flying at night near the northern Kuwaiti border next to Iraq, too high for anyone on the ground to see or hear the plane. This area was outside the Iraq radar envelope.

The Hercules was the one they had used before, painted totally black with no insignia, armed and equipped specifically for covert night flights over hostile territory.

Murdock patted the side of the big plane. He knew it was the most versatile and widely used military transport in the post-World War II era. The four big turboprop engines growled away outside. He'd heard that a C-130 had even been flown off a Navy carrier without the use of a catapult or arresting wires. The plane had a 133-foot wingspan, which made Murdock wonder how they did it. Right now they were flying at the plane's ceiling of 33,000 feet.

The big plane lumbered through the thin air at 350 mph as the sixteen SEALs rattled around in the big cargo compartment. The Third Platoon of SEAL Team Seven, based in Coronado, California, under command of NAVSPECWARCOM, Naval Special Warfare Command, was now assigned to and under the direct orders of the CIA. Murdock began

inspecting each of his first squad's seven men. They had checked the rigging, gear, weapons, and combat vests of each other. Now Murdock went over it all again, then had two men look over his latch-up. When he was satisfied, he saw that Lieutenant (j. g.) Ed Dewitt had given his seven-man Second Squad a similar routine.

When the fuck we going to get there? Engineman Second Class Fred Washington asked. He was the only black man in the group, and confessed he sometimes felt like the platoon's Nominal Nigger.

Hell, I can say that, but you shitheads better not, he had said during late-night drinking binges.

We get there when we get there, Slowfoot, Les Quinley cracked.

He was a Torpedoman Third Class, from Maine, and the platoon's computer expert.

Even though they had made jumps like this dozens of times, each one was new and different, and presented the ever-present dangers of any jump.

Murdock looked at his watch, and punched the light button. In the glow he saw that they had fourteen minutes to their drop point. They had been sucking oxygen from masks provided in the plane ever since they passed fifteen thousand feet. He motioned the men around him, talking loudly so they could hear.

Nothing new from the top. We go in as we planned. Let's stay within fifty feet of each other on the drop, and pull up when we get down there for an easy landing. We don't want any broken legs or sprains on this jump. Any questions?

Bill Bradford, Quartermaster First Class, waved. He was a hulking six-two, and did marine oil paintings in his off time. When do we start to use our portable oxygen? He was the new man in the platoon, taking over Magic Brown's spot after the machine gunner had been knocked out of action in the Deathrace operation in Iran.

We'll turn on our personal oxygen system in about three minutes, as soon as the red jump light goes on, Murdock said. That will put us ten minutes from our jump point. We have two hours of oxygen in each bottle, which should be plenty.

How long to touchdown? Ron Holt, Radioman First Class, asked.

Holt was a rabid Dodgers fan. When baseball wasn't on, he'd rather go deep-sea fishing than eat.

We jump on this HAHO at about thirty-two thousand. We'll be on static lines to open our chutes automatically to keep us bunched as close as possible. Then we should have seventy-two to seventy-five minutes gliding down.

By then we should be about fifteen miles inside Iraq, and near the small town of Osadi. That's the objective. This High Altitude High Opening routine should put us down within half a mile of the target.

We'll use the Motorolas, and if we see we're overshooting, we'll circle so we can come down close to the target.

The red jump light came on.

Let's turn on your portable oxygen and have a radio check. Second Squad first.

Murdock listened to the earpiece as the Second Squad chimed in to Dewitt.

First Squad report, Murdock said into the lip mike. It was connected to a wire that went under his shirt collar, and down inside his cammie shirt to a waist transceiver unit clipped on his belt.

Another wire led to an ear speaker. The seven men responded with their last names, and the Platoon Leader nodded.

Murdock watched his men. He'd been with some of them for two years now as Platoon Leader. They were his guys. They had bonded together in live-or-die combat situations more than a dozen times and were closer than blood brothers. They would die for each other. He remembered three of his men who had done just that. He shook his head, not wanting to think about those three.

The loadmaster came out of the cabin into the big hold, and motioned to Murdock.

Sir, about six minutes from the drop. You better get the men hooked up and ready.

Two minutes later the squads lined up, one on each side of the big cargo hatch at the back of the plane. Thirty seconds later they felt the whoosh of air as the nine-foot-long ramp lowered from the top of the plane. The jump light still showed red.

Murdock watched the loadmaster, boss of this phase of the operation.

Three minutes later, the light turned from red to green.

Murdock nodded. Go, go, go, he barked into the lip mike. The sixteen SEALs ran forward in two closely spaced lines, out of the big hold, and off the end of the ramp into the blackness of the Iraqi night.

The time was a little after 2100.

Murdock sensed the jolt of apprehension as he always did on a jump.

Then he took the last running step off the ramp, and surged into the darkness. The freezing cold hit him like ice-water in the face, jolting past the ski mask protection, icing his nose in an instant even under the oxygen device.

The moment he was free of the craft he went into an arch move, his arms and legs spread out like a bird so he wouldn't tumble. After only six seconds he felt the drag chute pull from his main chute, then the gradual slowing as the rectangular, steerable chute deployed.

The air was so thin at 32,000 feet that the chute came out gradually and took some seconds to fill with the thin air. The steerable chutes lowered a man's free-fall speed much more gently than a big round chute would do.

There was no disemboweling jerk on the parachute straps as a falling body slowed suddenly from free fall to fully supported.

Murdock had experienced that quick stop on other jumps halfway upside down. The straps around his legs and shoulders would slam him upwards, bringing a groan; then the chute over him would take up the load, and the pain would ease into a slow throbbing. He always worried that he had crushed his balls in those regular jumps.

He grabbed the straps and looked around. He saw the bobbing glow lights. Each man had one and held it so it could be seen by the others.

This was one way to help them stay somewhere near each other. Murdock swallowed and tried the lip mike. He hoped it hadn't frozen up.

Platoon, use your compasses. We're on a bearing of three-forty degrees. Let's hit it dead in the chops. Radio net report First Squad. Murdock listened as seven men responded. He heard Dewitt check in his men. Sixteen SEALs primed and ready to go. His fingers screeched in pain even through the special gloves as the cold bit into them. At thirty thousand feet it must be well below zero. More than an hour more of gliding, but it would get warmer.

The Platoon Leader looked at his altimeter, and punched up the small light. It showed 30,100 feet. He wasn't sure what the ground-level height was here, but it couldn't be more than five or six hundred feet. A long ride down.

He looked around, and spotted six of the glow lights. Ingenious little devices. A plastic tube with two compartments each containing a separate chemical or element. Bend them and break the seal inside, and the two substances combined to give off a healthy glow. Most of the six-inch-long tubes were good for six to eight hours.

As they glided toward the Iraqi village, Murdock went over the briefing. Their objective was a modest house in the small village of Osadi. It was controlled by a local war chieftain who was a renegade from the Iraqi Army. He was known as El Raza. Saddam Hussein hadn't tried to catch him, probably deciding it was too much trouble. El Raza ruled like a bandit lord over the locals. His house was heavily defended, according to the latest reports. He had troops, machine guns, maybe even land mines. The house would be a fort.

Two days ago, El Raza had slipped into Kuwait at night with a dozen men, and captured a well-known Kuwait leader in a small town only five miles from the Iraqi border. The kidnapped man was highly placed in the Kuwait government. He had come to his relative's home at this border town for a holiday.

Kuwait was powerless to get him back. They couldn't afford to invade Iraq. They had no special forces who could rush in and break him free. El Raza had demanded two million American dollars as a ransom for the man, Fayd Salwa. He said if the ransom wasn't paid within forty-eight hours, Salwa would be sent home a body part at a time in a basket.

Don Stroh, the SEALs contact with the CIA and main order-giver,

had been clear.

You go in HAHO as silent as a SEAL. You take down this El Raza and rescue Salwa and we'll pick you up outside the town with a chopper.

Maybe a six-hour mission from drop to pickup. All done at night and the Iraqis won't know who hit them, especially El Raza.

When the SEALs received the orders, they had hung up their close-quarters shoot-out weapons, and left from North Island Naval Air Station four hours later.

A gust of wind rocked Murdock's steerable chute, and he felt the drift, but quickly pulled the glide chute back on course. He saw the glow lights of the other men making the same correction.

Halfway down, he heard Dewitt say in the Motorola earpiece.

Yeah and warmer, David

Jaybird Sterling, Machinist Mate Second Class, said. Jaybird was the platoon noncom administrator and boss.

Why the fuck does it stay so cold out here?

It was clear and cool. Murdock was always surprised how cold it could get in a desert 110 during the day and down into the forties at night.

Far ahead, he saw a faint glow. It had to be the town of Osadi.

According to their best maps, this was the only town in the whole territory for fifty miles around. It was why El Raza had chosen it as a haven from the Iraqi Army. He felt isolated and safe. When he'd deserted, he'd taken a company of his men, and all the arms they could pile on armored personnel carriers.

Twenty minutes later, the soft glow ahead had turned into fuzzy lights. They were low enough that Murdock could see some of the terrain below. Desert, a few ravines, a scattering of low brush and weeds, lots of sand and rocks. Good old desert.

Looks like we're dead-on on the old cracker barrel on this one, people, Murdock said. My skyhook shows that we're at just under five thousand feet. We could come in a tad short, so don't waste any altitude maneuvering. Ed, can you see all of your men?

All but one. I think his glowworm died. He was close in last I saw him.

Yeah, Commander. Franklin here. My light died like a stiff prick at a church service. I got glowworms on both sides of me.

Roger that, Franklin, Murdock said.

They came to ground a half mile short of the village. Everyone made it down without any injuries. They had practiced this landing enough that they should know how by now.

They didn't bother to bury the chutes.

They'll know we've been here tomorrow, so why bother? Murdock said. They checked equipment and got their issue weapons in their hands, and Murdock moved them out.

The scout, Joe

Ricochet Lampedusa, Operations Specialist Third Class, led the troops, with Murdock right behind him and Ron Holt, with his SATCOM, right behind Murdock in case he was needed in a rush. First Squad scattered out behind at ten-yard intervals. The ten yards was standard for most combat situations. One lucky explosive round or one hand grenade wouldn't put down more than one man at a time.

Second Squad, with (j. g.) Dewitt in the lead, followed the First Squad. They both were in a modified diamond formation, and hiked along at a pace of fifteen minutes to the mile.

A half-moon cast a suggestion of light over the desert. Here there were occasional tufts of grass, a few cacti, and now and then a low growth that must hug runoff gullies formed when sudden downpours bathed the desert.

Still a quarter of a mile from the first lights, Lampedusa went down, and the rest of the SEALs dropped into the dirt as well. Murdock met the motorcycle enthusiast halfway. Some kind of a truck, no lights, Lam said. Parked out there about a hundred yards from that last building.

A roving mounted patrol? Murdock asked.

Doubt it. The rig hasn't moved for five minutes. I've been watching it.

Let's pay your truck a visit. Murdock turned, and motioned for the rest of the men to stay where they were. In the darkness, the signal went from one man back to the next, until it worked all the way through Second Squad.

Murdock and Lam bent over, and ran silently toward the truck.

Murdock saw that it was some type of Russian personnel carrier. It had a machine gun mounted facing forward. The rig was parked so it nosed away from the settlement.

Without warning, the truck's headlights blazed a path through the desert night. Murdock and Lam were well out of the beam, but they went to ground and didn't move. Murdock figured it was two minutes later before the lights snapped off. He had kept his eyes tightly closed during the light show. When he opened his eyes, he found his night vision not affected. He snapped up the NVGs, Night Vision Goggles, and checked the truck.

He could see a man at the steering wheel, but he wasn't sure if there was another man in the cab. Murdock motioned, and he and Lam moved to the left to come up more on the side of the rig. Murdock carried his standard-issue weapon, an HK MP-5SD submachine gun with the stock extension closed. It had been customized for the SEALs with a special stock, handgrip, and safety. It had tritium dots on the sights for night shooting. It could spit out one 9mm round at a time, bursts of three, or full-auto fire.

The scout carried his usual Colt M-4A 1, a .223-caliber that fired single shots or full automatic at seven hundred rounds per minute. Like all SEAL M-4AI's, his also had an M203 40mm grenade

launcher under the barrel.

They moved forward in a crouch until they were forty yards from the rig, then went down to a crawl. Cradling weapons across their arms, they went by elbows and knees another fifteen yards. Both weapons carried sound suppressors. Murdock used the NVGs again, nodded, and brought up his HK. He sighted in and put a three-round burst through the open side window.

After the silenced burst, the two SEALs came to their feet and charged the small truck. They found two uniformed men in the front seat, both dead. There were no troops in the back.

Murdock stood and waved the SEALs forward. He had silhouetted himself against the town's lights. The men came up in formation, and the platoon moved forward.

Lampedusa knew where the fortified house should be. He checked the buildings, then swung around to the right.

Murdock figured there couldn't be more than two hundred inhabitants in the place. The house they wanted was in the second row from the outside. They weren't blocks exactly, more like cow paths or maybe goat trails.

Lam went down again to the dirt fifty yards off the first row of buildings, and Murdock crawled up to him.

Figure it should be right in there, between these closest two buildings. Looks the same as the satellite pictures we got.

Murdock put his NVGs on the slice of territory they could see between buildings. As he watched, he saw an armed guard walking across the area.

Must be it, they have sentries out. He touched his lip mike.

Dewitt, up here. They hadn't worked out the final assault on the place because there wasn't enough intel. Now they would parcel out the assignments.

Murdock and Dewitt talked for three minutes; then Murdock moved ahead with the First Squad. There were no people on the streets. There were streetlights only every two hundred yards. None shone on this area.

First Squad slid between the buildings, which looked like commercial enterprises, and spread out along a narrow street that fronted the target house. It sat twenty yards in back of the avenue, and had a stone wall around it that was only three feet high. The house itself had two stories, was made of stone and mortar, and looked sturdy.

Ed Dewitt brought his men up, and sent half of them to each side of the house between buildings, and wherever they could find an open field of fire against the house.

The guard Murdock had seen before came again, evidently walking a circuit around the house. He carried a rifle over his shoulder, and walked at a leisurely pace as if thinking about what he would do when he got off duty.

They waited. Another guard came out of the shadows, and talked with the rover, then went back where he had been. Now, with the NVGs, Murdock could see him. Murdock searched other shaded areas, and found another front guard.

Dewitt. Check for fixed guards on the sides. We've found two out here.

Roger that.

Murdock pointed to Bill Bradford, the new sniper for the First Squad with his HK PSG 1. It fired a 7.62 NATO round from the high-precision sniping rifle. He had a 20-round magazine, a long, heavy barrel, and a pistol grip at the trigger. It had a fully adjustable stock, a 6 x 24 telescope, and a sound suppressor.

Bradford lifted the rifle, and looked through the scope. The light-gathering properties brought the target into clear focus. He checked the first hidden sentry, then zeroed in on him and fired. He shot just once, then moved to the other sentry and cut him down with one round.

Take ' down if you got ', Ed, Murdock whispered into his mike. He heard two muffled rounds from the side, then silence.

Ready to go, Ed said on the Motorola.

Before Murdock could move, three floodlights snapped on, bathing the whole front of the house and the yard with light.

Do them, Murdock said. Ten silenced shots whispered into the night. All the floodlights died from hot lead.

Move it, First Squad, Murdock said into his mike, and the eight men lifted up and stormed the front of the house. They took gunfire from firing ports and out the windows.

Seven of the SEALs blasted through the twenty yards, and slammed against the house. One man was down. Murdock ran back and grabbed him, and then ran forward, half dragging Ron Holt to the wall.

Caught one in the left arm, Commander. Sorry.

As they talked, Kenneth Ching, Quartermaster's Mate First Class, had pasted two globs of TNAZ plastic explosive on the house's front-door hinges. He set timers and looked at Murdock, who gave him a thumbs-up.

Ching pulled out the activating switches. Then he ducked under a window, and rushed away fifteen yards along the house.

The twin explosions came almost on top of each other. Doc Ellsworth, Hospital Corpsman First Class, got to the blown-in door first, and tossed in a flash-bang grenade. He dodged to the wall beside the door, shielded his eyes, and held his hands over his ears. The series of sharp, powerful, but non-lethal explosions erupted inside the room coupled with six brilliant strobe lights. Both light and sound blasted out the open doorway.

When the last strobe faded, Murdock and Doc Ellsworth pulled down their NVGs and jolted through the door. Murdock took the right side, and Doc the left part of the room.

Doc blasted his MP-5 twice. The two bursts of three rounds cut down two Iraqis on his side of the room. Murdock had no targets.

Clear one, Murdock said as he and Doc charged to a door at the other side of the room. They hit the wall next to the door, and Murdock threw a flash-bang grenade inside. The screeching, pulsating sound roared through the room as the series of brilliant strobe lights flashed through the doorway. The two SEALs waited flat against the wall on both sides of the open door.

As soon as the last strobe faded, the two charged into the room.

No one was inside. The third room was to the left. They hit it with one more flash-bang grenade, then jolted through the door, their MP-5's ready. Murdock cut one kidnapper in half with a fully automatic burst from his weapon. The man's face showed surprise as he dropped the knife he was about to throw, and he crumpled to the floor dead.

Doc put a burst of three 9mm rounds into the second Iraqi, who still held his hands over his ears. The kidnapper took the rounds in his chest, slammed backwards against the wall, and slid down slowly, leaving a wide red smear.

There were no more Iraqis in the room. There also was no hostage. Where the hell is he? Murdock asked.

Doc shook his head. They had cleared all the rooms in the house.

There was no kidnap victim.

Pull back, Second Squad, pull back to the desert. We need some recon. We're right behind you.

2.

Tuesday, 9 January

El Raza's House

Osadi, Iraq

Murdock motioned to Doc, and they eased out of the house. The explosions that had ripped open the door evidently had attracted no attention. They saw no one, no lights or vehicles.

As silent as sixteen wisps of smoke, the SEALs exfiltrated from the area back into the desert, and hit the dirt facing the small town.

He wasn't there, Murdock told Dewitt. No fucking hostage, just some Arabs who looked surprised as hell that they were dying. Jaybird, get up here. Jaybird slid in beside the two officers. Any other intel on this town?

Not much. The house was our target. They said something about a military HQ El Raza uses. It's at the other end of the town, maybe six hundred yards north.

Best bet we have, Dewitt said. Hope to hell we don't have to search every building in this little place.

The HQ sounds good, Murdock said. Let's get on our horses and move up there. We know nothing about the building?

Afraid so, Commander. Be a good time for a guided tour.

This is turning out tougher than they told us, Murdock said. So what's new. Jaybird. Find Douglas, and tell him to take Gonzales with

him and go back and see if that truck we passed will run. If it will, have them drive it into the desert and come up beside us here about a quarter of a mile out. We might need it fast. Have them keep pace with us as we move. Go.

Ed, let's go up the hill here and find that HQ. It should be the biggest building in the town. At least we hope it is. You keep your squad outside ours as we go north. When we get there we'll recon the building, and see what we need to do. If that kidnapped guy isn't there, I don't know what the hell comes next.

Guns Franklin, Dewitt said. He speaks Arabic and Farsi. We grab ourselves a prisoner and let him talk to live.

Good. Let's move.

First Squad walked silently north along the outskirts of the small town. The road in back of the houses outlined the community and kept everyone inside. They walked a half mile, then hit the dirt and checked the area. Murdock and Lampedusa went past the buildings inside the town to see if they could find a large building.

They moved silently from shadow to shadow. Past the first row of houses, the area changed. Here there was a central open area, as if it could have been a market at one time. At the far end stood a building larger than the others, but of the same stone and mortar construction.

Murdock and Lampedusa studied the area for five minutes. They saw no one move. There were no guards around the building. They could see none on the roof or in what looked like a small guardhouse near what appeared to be the front double doors.

A church, a mosque? Lampedusa asked.

Murdock shook his head. No minaret, no tower with small balconies, which is always attached to a mosque.

So, maybe it's the HQ.

Let's go and see.

They darted from one bit of cover to the next, keeping near the smaller buildings to the side of the open area. When they came to the front of the large building, they found a Russian-built weapons carrier parked and facing outward. A heavy machine gun, maybe a .50-caliber, perched on a mount.

The two SEALs nodded, faded to the side, and went around the place.

Two windows near the back showed lights. At the back of the building they found six armored personnel carriers that had to be Russian-made.

They also spotted a fuel dump of 55-gallon barrels, and a concrete-block building that could hold ammunition and weapons.

Make a nice bonfire, Lampedusa said.

If it comes to that. Easy in, easy out. But that doesn't look like it's going to happen. Let's bring up the platoon and take a look inside. Might be troops in there, and officers and maybe a kidnapped hostage.

Five minutes later, they found the platoon lurking fifty yards outside the perimeter road. The truck they had liberated growled along in the desert beyond them.

Murdock told the men the situation.

We know about three doors. Front, back, and side. There may be another door on the far side. We'll go in the back door, since the lights are in that area. I'll go in with two men from Second Squad.

First Squad and the rest of Second will back us up covering the side doors and the front.

We'll use silencers and knives whenever possible. We don't want to roust out El Raza's whole army. Our only objective is to find this hostage and get him out of here. Bring in Franklin and his helper from the truck. We need all the guns we have. Let's move.

Murdock chose Quinley and Washington for his assault team, and moved up on the rear door, past the silent weapons and personnel carriers and the fuel dump. Murdock held up for five minutes watching for a guard, but none showed. He and Fred Washington darted to the rear door and tried it. Unlocked. He turned the knob, and opened the panel an inch. No lights showed inside.

Murdock, and two men, slid into the room. It was a storage area, holding various goods. He had on his NVGs, and found a door across the ten-foot-wide room. Unlocked.

He opened it two inches. Faint light showed beyond.

Murdock switched his MP-5 to three-round burst, and stepped inside.

It was a supply room loaded with uniforms, rations, ammunition, and other goods. A single work light burned overhead.

The men found two doors. Lights showed under both of them.

Murdock opened one and stepped inside. Three uniformed men worked over a radio panel. Murdock's three-round burst put down two of them.

Another three rounds from Les Quinley's silenced HK G-11 nailed the other one.

Another door showed ahead. Murdock moved to it. Washington opened it, and they both looked in. It was a barracks, with twenty men sleeping on double-decker bunks. The silenced shots had not awakened them. Washington eased the door closed, and they moved to the next one.

Beyond this door, opened a long hallway. There were six doors leading off it. At the far end, sat a sentry at a desk. He was either sleeping or reading. Murdock switched his subgun to single-shot, and fired twice. The guard jolted back against the wall, and then slumped off the chair to the floor.

Murdock and Quinley ran to the guard as Washington covered their backs. The guard was dead. They checked the first door. An office.

The second showed a storeroom. The third door opened onto a pair of cells. Two men were in one, three in the other.

Any of you speak English? Murdock asked. One man looked up

quickly. I do. Who are you?

Are you Fayd Salwa? Murdock asked.

Yes. Are you Americans?

Right, we're taking you home, Quinley said. He looked at the lock on the door. A small key chain hung on a nail near the door. He grabbed it, tried two keys. The third one unlocked the cell. He opened the other cell as well, and ushered all the prisoners out. They saw the open door and ran.

Tears brimmed Salwa's eyes as he grabbed Murdock in a bear hug. I have prayed to Allah to rescue me, but I never thought it would happen.

Murdock touched his lip mike. I have the package. We're coming out. Just as he said it they heard automatic-rifle fire in the hallway. Murdock peered around the door frame from floor level, and saw three men in military uniforms moving down the hall, checking rooms as they came.

He pushed his MP-5 around the door frame, jolted out so he could see, and sprayed the advancing guards with three triple-round bursts.

All the soldiers went down. One crawled toward his dropped rifle. A burst of rounds from Quinley's G-11 put him down and dead.

Which way out? Murdock asked Salwa.

I don't know. They only brought me here tonight. I'd like to have a weapon. I was in the army, I can use one.

Murdock gave him the Mark 230 pistol off his belt. Salwa chambered a round and pushed on the safety.

Let's try to the left, past where the guard used to be, Quinley said.

Murdock agreed. Those sleeping men back the other way must be awake now after that rifle fire.

Murdock talked to his Motorola again. Ed, we've got some bad guys shooting in here. Create a diversion outside, the side entrance, and the back. Keep them busy. We'll try to get out.

Roger that. How about a nice gasoline fire back here?

Murdock took the lead. Salwa was in the middle with Washington, and Quinley bringing up the rear. They ran past the three bodies, and to the end of the hall where the guard lay dead.

A connecting hall went both ways. Murdock chose the right-hand one, and had gone only a dozen steps when two soldiers came around a bend in the hall. Murdock brought up his MP-5 and got off three rounds.

Salwa right behind him fired four times, and the two soldiers went down.

The three SEALs and Salwa ran toward them. One of the soldiers lifted up with his AK-47. Before he could fire, Salwa put a .45 round in his head. The man slammed backwards as brains and blood splattered against the wall.

Murdock waved his thanks at Salwa, and they ran on. The corridor

dead-ended at a double door. Salwa shrugged. Murdock tried the door.

Locked.

Someone behind in the hall fired at them. Quinley turned, and chattered off six rounds down the hall at two uniformed men. They ducked out of danger. Murdock looked at the door. It was their only way out. He stepped back, waved Salwa and the two SEALs back, and put a three-round burst of the 9mm slugs into the area of the door lock. The panel shook on impact, then swung open a foot.

They darted through the opening, just as the men behind them fired again.

The room was a total surprise. Two naked men with military blouses draped over chairs were in two beds, each of them with two naked women.

Murdock and Salwa grabbed the men's clothes, and backed toward a far door. Quinley and Washington kept their weapons aimed at naked bodies.

The far door was unlocked.

Salwa peered through the open door with Murdock. Murdock nodded, and the four men hurried through into the next room, a small kitchen.

Beyond that they found another corridor with a door at the far end.

This door opened to the outside. Murdock had no idea which side of the building they were on. He checked outside.

No troops were visible. He looked both ways again through the darkness, and to the right saw a growing light. He frowned, then realized it came from the flickering of flames. The men darted out the door, and ran twenty yards to a parking lot where a number of civilian cars and three military rigs stood.

Murdock hit the Motorola. Ed, where the hell are you?

We're near the back door where you entered. The fire's burning nicely, and we have about twenty troops who don't like us too well.

They keep shooting at us.

Then Murdock could hear the rifle fire.

Use the rest of the Second Squad back there to cover you, then start leapfrogging back into the desert. We still have the package.

We'll try to meet you at that truck we borrowed.

As Murdock said it, someone from the door they had just left opened up with automatic-rifle fire. Quinley went down beside the front of a car, and peppered the door with his 4.7mm caseless rounds.

Salwa, can you get one of these personnel carriers started?

Give it a try. You have a knife?

Murdock gave him his K-bar, and the Arab man vanished into the nearest half-track. More fire came from the side door, and now a new threat showed at the front of the building.

The damn rig with the Big Fifty has swung around on us, Washington whispered. A dozen rounds slammed overhead.

Don't think they want to shoot up their half-tracks, Murdock

said.

A moment later a line of men from the front of the building came running at them with assault fire. The nearest civilian car was riddled. The three SEALs returned fire, and half the shooters went down. Fewer rounds came then, and Quinley put in a new 50-round magazine and fired again.

Another line of gunmen ran forward from behind the first.

Murdock heard the rumble of an engine start.

Ready, Salwa shouted. Quinley, Washington, and Murdock jumped in the half-track, and it rolled away from the front of the building, then did a ninety-degree turn, and headed straight for the desert. Two hundred yards into the sand and rocks, the rig slowed, and pivoted around so its .50-caliber machine gun on the front could work the rear of the building.

For the first time, Murdock looked at the fire. It seemed that half the gasoline drums had blown up, splattering burning gasoline over the rest of the stored goods.

Murdock got to the Fifty, loaded in a belt of ammo from a box, and charged in a round. He leveled the weapon at the rear of the complex, and jolted off five rounds.

He was surprised at the force the rounds going off made on the gun itself and the mount.

Murdock touched his mike. Ed, that's me on the Fifty. Get your men the hell out of there.

Pleased to oblige there, good buddy. We're on our way. Leapfrog it is.

We're moving out too. We'll keep their heads down for a while.

As he spoke, they took machine-gun fire from near the front of the building. The other rig with the .50-caliber whammer had changed targets. Murdock swung his weapon around, and sent two bursts of six rounds at the flashes he could see. The other gun didn't return fire.

He put six more rounds into the same area, then hit the back of the building again.

Murdock, Dewitt said. I sent Douglas out to get the truck and bring it in to meet us. We should have a hookup in about five.

We'll move north to find you. If you see a half-track coming, it's probably us. Don't fire.

That's a Roger. We've got one wounded, not serious, but will take some looking at.

First we've got to figure out how the hell to get away from here without a bunch of El Raza's men tailing us. Our chopper guys don't like to get shot at. This bunch could even have some Stinger ground-to-air missiles.

Those shoulder-fired kind? Ed asked.

Yeah, the kind the terrs use sometimes. We're coming to find you.

3.

Tuesday, 9 January

Desert

near Osadi, Iraq

Murdock settled back in the half-track and watched behind him.

Within three minutes he saw lights coming toward him. They must be some of the other half-tracks of El Raza. He had a choice try to outshoot them, and give away his position, or continue to roll along without lights, and stay lost in the desert.

Ed, no lights on your rig. I've got lights behind me, but no return fire so they don't know where we are.

That's a Roger. We've met the truck. I've got six men inside, and eight hanging on the outside. Where to?

We've been heading east--that should put us far enough away from the town so now we can cut due south. The border is closest to the south.

Will the chopper care?

Less Iraq airspace they have to cover, the better they'll like it.

Can't tell what good old Saddam might have sitting around here with wings on it, and air-to-ground missiles on the wings.

Due south it is. How do we join up?

I'll stop our rig and listen, Murdock said. Should be able to hear that grinder of yours out here.

That's a Roger. We're turning south.

In the half-track, Salwa had heard the transmission from Murdock.

He looked at the American. Shut it down now?

Murdock nodded. The rig stopped and Murdock stepped away as the engine died. He turned slowly trying to pick up some sound. Quinley was beside him.

He touched Murdock's shoulder and pointed. Murdock turned that way.

There are four half-tracks chasing us, Quinley said. Sounds like more than one engine.

Murdock thought he heard it, but it faded. It was to the left.

Salwa started the engine, and they moved over the dark desert at ten miles an hour.

Sometimes there are little wadis out here fifteen feet deep from the runoff, Salwa said. Murdock nodded. They drove south for ten minutes; then Murdock had the engine turned off and they listened again.

Nothing.

Far off they saw headlights.

Looks like they're still going east, Murdock said. Let's hope we lost them.

Then he saw more lights, two pair that were heading in much the same direction as he was. He hit the mike.

Ed, you have two rigs chasing you? Headlights to the rear?

Yeah. Figured something was back there--they just turned on their lights.

Keep on the same bearing. We'll see if we can come up to the side of those two half-tracks and give them a good SEAL hot-lead welcome.

They drove faster then. A half-moon gave some help. Salwa had grown up in the desert, and knew even with the lights off how to tell a shadow from a gully, at least now that it was vital. The rigs with lights on were going faster, but Murdock had the angle on them. He figured in another two miles he'd have them at a two-hundred-yard range.

All he had to do was blow their tracks off or kill the engine with the half-track's mounted Fifty.

Ten minutes later, Murdock could see the lights, and the faint shadows of the rigs themselves. He was at four hundred yards. He closed to two hundred, and used the rig's mounted machine gun to shoot at the first half-track.

The fifty-caliber spoke loudly in the desert silence. He missed with the first rounds, corrected, and slammed six, then twelve rounds into the side and front of the moving rig. It sputtered and died. The headlights went out.

He saw the second rig stop and turn to bring its gun to bear on Murdock's muzzle flashes. Murdock got off a ten-round burst, then two more five-round bursts before the other gunner could get in action. He saw the front of the rig dissolve in steam; then the fuel tank blew in a gushing explosion fed by the diesel fuel, and the fight was over.

Oh, yeah, beautiful, Ed Dewitt said on the Motorola. I'd say the two are about a half mile behind us, and they were gaining on us like crazy. Can we use lights now?

Hell, no. There are still three or four half-tracks out here hunting us. We join up, get another five miles south, then call for our chopper pickup, and in an hour or two a big dinner. What time is it?

Just past twenty-three hundred, Dewitt said. Come and find us.

I can loan you about six men.

Turn off your engine. Let us know when you can hear us, then guide us in. We can't be more than a mile or two apart.

Murdock found the rest of his platoon ten minutes later. They overshot them, and had to come back.

Got you, Dewitt said on the radio.

Then Murdock saw the truck with men hanging all over it. Salwa pulled the half-track up beside it, and they redistributed the men for better mobility.

Let's have a casualty report, Murdock said to the men.

Holt came up and showed Murdock his arm. The slug went on through, no big deal. Doc put some gunk on it and wrapped it up proper-like. I'm fit for duty.

But no hundred-foot rope climbs, right?

Yeah, that would be tough.

The second squad wound was only a bullet graze. Doc wrapped it and they moved.

Let's keep it quiet now, and listen for engines. Somebody get on top of the truck and look for headlights. Be nice if we had a thousand-foot hill to use for a lookout.

They watched and listened for ten minutes. Murdock was satisfied they didn't have any of the hunter half-tracks close to them.

We'll motor another twenty minutes due south, then put in our call for the chopper. Everyone watch for headlights out here.

Twenty minutes later, they had covered several miles to the south, and hadn't run into any sign of the Iraqi hunters. Murdock called a halt, and they listened again. Then he waved at Ron Holt.

Fire up the SATCOM. Let's get out of here.

Holt took the fifteen-pound radio off his back, and opened the flap with the antenna. He set up the small dish, and aimed it somewhere near where the Milstar satellite should be in a synchronous orbit 23,300 miles over the equator. The radio gave instant communications by the satellite with anyone, anywhere in the world. They could call the President, or their families back in Coronado.

It was fifteen inches high, three inches square, and had power from ten watts all the way down to one tenth of a watt for short-distance clandestine operations. It had the capability of voice, data, or video transmission and receiving, and encrypted each message automatically.

It could send out a lengthy message in a burst of energy less than a tenth of a second long to make it almost impossible for an enemy to find the transmitter.

Murdock took the pad, and typed in his message Have package, waiting pickup. Murdock. He used the MUGR, the Miniature Underwater Geographic locator. It usually worked underwater with an antenna that drifted to the surface, where it contacted the three closest positioning satellites for triangulation to pin down the location anywhere on the globe to within ten feet. He took the reading off the dry-land model, and entered the coordinates in his message.

Murdock reviewed the words, then punched the button to encrypt it, and it was sent a moment later in a quick burst of power.

Now we sit down and wait for our bird to come, Murdock said. Fayd Salwa had been following the procedure with interest.

This is fascinating to me, he said. When I was in the army we had nothing like this. We had a weapon, and sometimes bullets, and if extremely lucky a truck so we didn't have to march so far. It wasn't a good army.

These gadgets are fine as long as they work, Murdock said. Once we had a SATCOM that took a pair of slugs right in the middle, and it was just fifteen pounds of worthless junk.

A moment later, a message came back on the SATCOM.

Help on the way. ETA ten minutes.

Murdock nodded, and told the troops. How long did it take a chopper to fly ten miles? Only he didn't know where it was coming from.

The border with Kuwait might be more than ten miles away to the southeast, he knew.

Murdock checked each man. Nobody else had been wounded, no other physical problems. They had been lucky to get in and out with so little damage. It was always a deadly chance going into these blind situations. Sometimes they simply didn't have enough intel.

Five minutes later, they heard a noise to the southeast. They let the sound grow until they knew it was a chopper. Murdock let it fly directly over them at a hundred feet until he was sure it was a U.S. machine. Then he popped a red flare, and the bird circled around and landed a hundred yards from them.

Let's get the hell out of Dodge, Murdock said. The men had been standing waiting; now they started to run across the sand to their air bus out of Iraq.

They were still fifty yards away, when Murdock heard the whooshing sound he had nightmares about, an incoming Rocket Propelled Grenade.

These lethal rockets were deadly, easy to use, and to conceal.

Before he could yell at his men to take cover, one rocket hit the chopper, and then another, and a third. The bird, with its big rotor chugging around, burst into flames; then the fuel exploded, and there was nothing left but fiercely burning bits and pieces of machine and the dead crewmen.

Hold! Murdock shouted. We can't help the poor bastards! Let's find the shooters!

They all hit the sand, and listened. Over the roaring fire of the chopper they managed to hear some high-pitched chatter and a fired round or two. Murdock pointed to the left, where there was a small gully.

Murdock whispered into his mike. Ed. Take your squad fifty yards south. We'll move north, then we move up on that gully. A surprise party.

It took them only a few minutes to get in position, and then move forward. At the edge of the small arroyo, they stopped and peered over the side. It was an armored personnel carrier with a dozen men around it. They were celebrating the destroyed chopper.

Murdock gave his men time to set up; then he aimed his subgun at the closest troops below and kicked off a twelve-round burst. At his signal, the rest of the weapons opened up.

There was no immediate response, as the men below dove for any cover they could find, mostly behind the armored rig. Then gunfire answered the SEALs.

Murdock ducked back a minute, and rolled to the left to establish a new firing position. Half of the men along the lip of the gully did

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