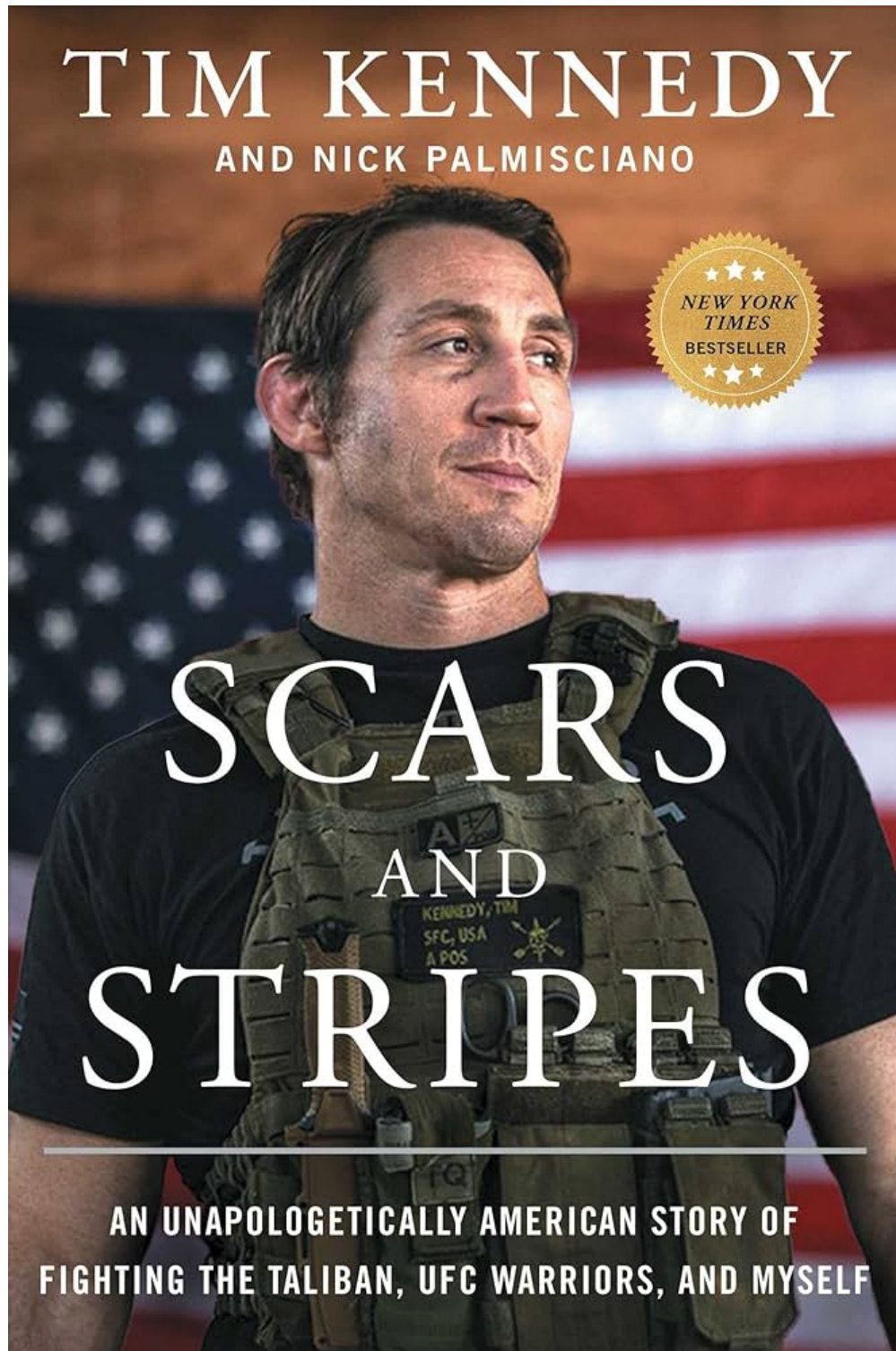


**Scars And Stripes: An Unapologetically American Story  
Of Fighting The Taliban, UFC Warriors, And Myself  
(2022) - Tim Kennedy**



**About Tim Kennedy**

Green Beret, sniper, and former MMA fighter. He's starred on the History Channel's 'Hunting Hitler' and Discovery's 'Hard to Kill'. Tim owns Apogee Cedar Park, a private school in Texas, and Sheepdog Response, a tactical

training company.

*[What follows are quotes from the book above. These quotes stood out to psychotherapist Emil Barna in his reading of the book. They are not meant to be exhaustive nor representative of the entire book. All quotes are to be read in this context and must not replace medical and/or other professional advice. Note: Any typographical errors occurred through the transcription process and do not reflect what may be found in the book.]*

## **Blurb**

Tim Kennedy has a problem; he feels alive only right before he's about to die. Kennedy, Green Beret, decorated Army sniper, and UFC headliner, has tackled a bull with his bare hands, jumped out of airplanes, dived to the depths of the ocean, and traveled the world hunting poachers, human traffickers, and the Taliban. But he's also the same man who got kicked out of the police department, fire department, and as an EMT, before getting two women pregnant four days apart, and finally, been beaten up by his Special Forces colleagues for, quite simply, "being a selfish asshole." In *Scars and Stripes*, Kennedy describes how these failures shaped him into the successful businessman and devoted husband and father he is today. Through unbelievably vivid, wild anecdotes Kennedy reveals all the dumb, violent, embarrassing, and undeniably heroic things he's done in his life, including multiple combat missions in Afghanistan, building a school in Texas for elementary kids, and creating two multimillion-dollar businesses. You will learn that failure isn't the end—rather it's the first step toward unearthing the best version of oneself and finding success, no matter how overwhelming the setbacks may feel.

## **Introduction**

***[Describes who Kennedy is and some of the principles he lives his life by. Notice the bravado that bleeds through. Love or hate him, he owns his story in the pages that follow.]***

"I've killed evil men on multiple continents, fought in main-event bouts in the UFC, served as a Green Beret, an EMT, a firefighter, and a cop. I've hunted Nazis, drug runners, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, human traffickers, rhino poachers, Al Qaeda, the Taliban, wildebeests, elk, bears, and have the recipe for the perfect soufflé. I fly helicopters, jump out of airplanes, dive mixed gas to the ocean depths, wrestle bulls with my bare hands, lift heavy weights, blow things up, and am proficient in just about every weapon under the sun. I train warriors, own companies, serve my country—and I'm just getting warmed up."

### ***[Kennedy's Principles]***

1. Take accountability for it. It's your fault.
2. Failure is going to happen. [...]

3. An ounce of prevention prevents a pound of cure. The best time to start preparing is right now.
4. You cannot mass-produce elite people. They need to be forged from hard experiences. If you want to be one of them, you need to seek these challenges consistently.
5. Take care of yourself physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. For some people that means therapy. For some people that means yoga and a cup of tea or fishing with the family. For me that means embracing a constant struggle. Rejecting comfort makes me... well... comfortable.
6. Surround yourself with good people striving to also improve themselves.
7. Build goals and pursue them to the end of the earth.

### ***[Why he's writing this book]***

"To let you know there is always a path forward. There were many times in my life that if you just took a snapshot and read the bullet points of who I was and what was happening to me, you would have said, "What a loser!" And I was. But everyone is straight trash on their worst days. Life is about digging yourself out of those holes and doing something worthwhile, and serving something bigger than yourself. I wasn't born getting that. I had to suffer, and have it beat into my head over and over again, and even then, I had to almost die to finally understand. And I want people who are reading this thing, who feel like total losers with no way out, to see a path forward and get the fuck after it. I want them to start LIVING."

## **Chapter 1 - The Creek Gang**

### ***[On remembering pretend play when he was a kid]***

"I hear a twig break in front of me. The hair on the back of my neck stands up. I give the hand signal to the team to freeze. My hands are clammy as I double-check the grip on my weapon. I hear another snap. Then another. Now I can see some movement twenty meters away in the field of weed. I can feel my adrenaline spiking. That fight-or-flight response is starting to set in. It washes over me as it has so many times before. I motion to the team to follow me to the target and begin to cover the last twenty meters as quietly as possible. My heart is beating so hard I can see it moving through my shirt. I worry he will hear it and it will give away our position."

"when the rubber hit the road, we learned the threat of real violence is a whole lot different than our imagined violence. [...] as Mike Tyson says, "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.""

"An airplane needs air resistance to gain lift. A sword needs to be beaten and

shaped to be made sharp and hard. I needed to be held back in order to move forward."

***[Kennedy's father is a member of a interagency counternarcotics team bringing down Pablo Escobar]***

"Sitting there, watching my dad gear up for this massive sting operation across the entire West Coast, I am so proud of how chill he is. *My dad fights with drug dealers the way most dads deal with paperwork. It doesn't even seem like a big deal. Danger and the possibility of violence are just... natural.*"

"Grandpa treats me like an adult. He treats me like a man and trusts me to look at examples of good and flawed men and decide for myself what right looks like. He's giving me the road map to success, one movie at a time. *I can be like these men.*"

***[On losing a close friend in a car accident]***

"My parents did what they always did in a crisis. They helped. People always told us that the Kennedys were good at death. And I guess they were right. When everyone else was mourning, or didn't know what to do, we took action. It's not that we didn't hurt. It was just better to be useful. So I learned from my mom and dad to always be useful. [cf. Arnold Schwarzenegger's lesson, learned from his father, *Be useful*. Compare, also, with the popular lesson in crisis: When you see something bad happening, look for the helpers. Or better yet, *be the helper* (something often lost in this cell phone age or capturing for clicks rather than lending a hand.)]"

## **Chapter 2 - Deviance**

***[Violence of action]***

""Hey! Get the fuck away from that car!" I scream as I take off at a dead sprint toward them. I'm just a skinny teenager, so there isn't really a reason for them to be afraid, but for the first time I learned that violence of action has a profound effect on the spirit of the enemy. The two dickheads startle, with one hitting his head on the roof of Mike's car, and run back to the Blazer. [cf. *Voices From D-Day* account of lone allied soldier rushing the German enemy at night as they were holed up in a building. The enemy, hearing the soldier's screams and advance freak out and bail not knowing it was just one man running. Violence of action persists.]"

***[Reflecting on his first ever gang fight—so far, Kennedy portrays himself as quite the trouble maker ... seems to revel in it, actually. A kind of antihero, with redeemable traits of a man, a kid, who stands up for what he believes in, doesn't let others walk all over him, and protects those who are weaker.]***

"For the first time, I had to fight for my life. It's a fight most people will never understand. We all think we will rise to the challenge when the moment comes, but most of us go our whole lives without that belief being tested. I tested it today. I learned to fight through fear, to stay calm in a sea of chaos, and that I will not quit, even when the odds are against me. For all my cuts and bruises and breaks, I am happy it happened. I am different because it happened."

## **Chapter 3 - I Didn't Choose The Fight Life**

### ***[The humbling of a young Kennedy]***

"'Fuck!' I scream out. After beating five guys in a row with ease, a dude that has never submitted me catches me in an armbar. I am not mad at him at all. I am absolutely furious with myself for being careless. I am so consumed by my rage. I don't realize the dojo has suddenly gone quiet. Barry, one of our head black belts and an active police officer, walks toward and behind me with purpose, unsheathes a wooden sword, and whacks me on the head as everyone—including my dad—watches. It hurt like a motherfucker! I look up at my father, incredulous, waiting for him to say something to my instructor in his youngest son's defense. He smirks and leans back, placing his hands over his head. He said nothing, but his face said, *"You deal with it."* I suppose after the firing, the river fight, the car theft, and my generally bad attitude, my dad had had just about enough of sixteen-year-old Tim's shenanigans. He knew, if left unchecked, I was going to end up dead or in jail given the reckless and self-destructive pace I was keeping. [...] At the end of practice, Terry lines all of us up, placing me at the very end of the line. He calmly walks up to each person and asks, "What is respect and what is disrespect?" I listen as each person responds in turn, my face redder and redder with each answer. When he gets to me, he doesn't ask me for a long while. He just stares at me... long and hard so that I feel the weight of it. By the time the sound of his voice rings in my ears, I am completely consumed with shame. I have nothing to say for myself that has any meaning, so I offer him and the class an apology. He continues to stare, then slowly walks back to his place at the front of the class. [...] I think that was the first time I cared what someone other than my family really thought about me."

"I always want to be the best guy in the room doing the hardest stuff, so I am unwilling to put the blinders on and ignore that a greater power than my dojo exists. In his *Allegory of the Cave* (thanks for the classical education, Mom!), Plato describes men who were perfectly happy their entire lives living in a cave and looking at the occasional shadows of the outside world reflected on the cave wall, believing that the shadows are all there is in life. When they are finally released from the cave, the blinding light of the sun hurts them, but in time they grow accustomed to the brightness and the fullness of the real world. When they are brought back to the cave, where they were once happy, they are now sad and depressed, because they now know their world is incomplete."

"fighting is so interlaced with masculinity that for one to admit one cannot fight demeans a man's ego too drastically to bear. Moreover, unless you're in the fighting family, if you have gotten into a fight or two you have only fought other nonfighters, giving you a false sense of security and capability about fighting in general."

## **Chapter 4 - Red, White, And Blue**

"In the late '90s and early 2000s, no one is "just a fighter." We all have grown-up jobs. The guys fighting now, in the late '90s and early 2000s—the Chuck Liddells, the Jorge Riveras, the Diaz brothers, the Nate Quarrys, the Randy Coutures, and yes, little old me too—are not trying to be famous or make money. We simply want to be the best. We love fighting. It's impossible to even compare our crew to the crop of professional fighters who will follow; we are meaner, tougher, and dumber. Our path to success is harder and we have no expectation of making real money or achieving great fame, although both would definitely be welcome. We do it purely for the love of martial arts. At this point, MMA is not a sport. It is not a place for athletes. It is a place for people who want to test themselves to the limit—to know who would win if life and death were on the line. But when someone asked what any of us did for a living, no one was answering, "I'm a fighter." So during this time period, while fighting consumes a huge portion of my life, it is not my professional goal. I want to be a cop. My dad is a cop. My brother is a cop. My sensei is a cop. They are my heroes. That's what I am going to do."

"As I step off the truck and my boots hit the ground, I can already taste the dust. Continuing the horror movie motif, the things that immediately catch my eyes are hymnals being gently blown toward me across the ground. I can smell the burning fuel of the vehicle interlaced with the dust. I also smell the burning weeds near the van, and the acrid smells of blood, urine, and feces. I now hear the wailing of people in pain, seemingly coming from everywhere. I realize quickly several people have been thrown from the vehicle. The wails are not screams. When people are screaming, they have their faculties and are generally aware of acute pain and injury. Wails are worse. They come from a deeper place inside a person. They happen when one's body is so broken that it cannot muster a scream, or even a full breath. And those wails and moans flood my senses, freezing me where I stand. [...] I am just nineteen."

"The smell of that oil mixed with gas, bile, blood, urine, and feces is another scar I carry that will never heal. Twenty years later, all I have to do is think about his day and that smell fills my mind again with a vengeance, even if I am halfway around the world. It's forever part of me."

"I didn't realize I was crying. I didn't know I could. Now it makes sense why it was so hard to see through the windshield when I was driving home. That week, every one of the hundred guys that worked that van wreck is forced to take

convalescent leave and attend counseling. I don't think I need the counseling, but as I sit next to Tom, Anthony, and others in group therapy and they recount what happened, it is shocking that what they remember is nothing like what I remember, nor do their stories match each other. When trauma hits, you remain laser-focused on what's in front of you. You lose peripheral vision and a sense of the bigger picture. Memory, a thing I have always viewed as ironclad, becomes very malleable."

"the system rewarded the weak and punished grit and ingenuity. I know what policing is supposed to look like. My dad and his peers are extraordinary, and they do extraordinary things. These guys are pencil-pushing nerds. They don't have the mental agility to fight crime. They're bureaucrats, and they're churning out more bureaucrats."

## **Chapter 5 - The Fall**

### ***[On the brink of suicide...]***

"The fog has closed in on me. My body is shivering. I look back to where I think the shore is and cannot see it. Even worse, I can't hear it. I probably won't be able to find my way back. *Who gives a shit?* I keep swimming deeper into the ocean. I have two babies with two different women, neither of which is my bride. My parents think I'm a fuckup. I've blown my dream of becoming a cop, and none of these things probably matters all that much, because I'm pretty damn sure I am going to die from fucking AIDS anyway. [...] Eventually, on being reviewed and sitting in his car:] I turn the heat all the way up and I sit there for hours, warming myself up and thinking. The warmth feels good at first but then hurts like hell as life comes back to my fingers and toes. Eventually, my whole body begins tingling and I almost feel like I did when I was fighting fires. It's a good hurt, though. It is a reminder that I'm still in the game. [...] I tell myself that I am lucky. But then I think some more. I'm not alive because I am lucky. I'm alive for three reasons. First, a woman paid attention to her surroundings and, when things did not feel right, called the Coast Guard without hesitation. Second, the Coast Guard immediately began a search that they carried on for over an hour. Third, and perhaps most important, *I never stopped swimming.*"

***[Kennedy gets a call from the Army recruiters. It's 18 months after he first signed up, just after 9/11; but because so many people applied, there's been a massive backlog. On speaking with them he finds that there's a fast-tracked program to get into the Special Forces. He's offered it. He enlists.]***

## **Chapter 6 - The Book Of Truth**

### ***[On their alcoholic veteran Drill Sergeant...]***

"It's up to him to *teach* and *train* them and then it's up to each man to succeed

or not. Even at the age of twenty-four, I know you can't judge a man from his appearance or size. I've seen it through fighting, firefight-ing, and policing: Some badasses simply don't look the part. But that's only about 7 percent of the reason I'm mad. The other 93 percent comes from the fact that he called out Special Forces and said they were weaker than Rangers. This offends me because I now think of myself as part of the Special Forces family. Of course, this is pure ego since I have nothing to base it on. I have never served with or seen Rangers in action and I have never served with or seen Special Forces in action either. But my frontal lobe is also not completely developed, and as a wannabe SF guy, I am willing to stand up against any wannabe Ranger that dares disparage my regiment! (I'll find out later that I love Rangers; they're amazing, fearless, and indispensable in combat, but right now that's not my concern.)"

"Get the fuck out of his face and leave him alone," I order. The room goes silent. "What the fuck did you just say, Kennedy?" the Drill Sergeant snarls. "I told them to leave him the fuck alone, Drill Sergeant," I calmly reply as I feel my adrenaline rising in that sweet way only fighters and veterans understand. He assesses me and cleverly changes tactics, "He's either going to get strong now or get people killed later. How does that sit with you?" "Well, he'll figure those things out between now and then, Drill Sergeant," I reply firmly. [...] our leader is a bully who is dealing with his own post-traumatic stress, having seen it in the firefighting world, and the alcohol didn't help him in that regard. But in the back of my head, I know that even though he's an asshole, some of what he said and did wasn't wrong. We are going to war and some of the guys in this bay are a liability."

"Everyone my age or older has a 9/11 story. For me, the "Falling Man" is the thing that changed me. I remember watching the news and these things falling from the buildings. At first, no one knew what was hap-pening. Not the news crews. Not the civilians. But the first responders did. As the camera panned the area, I could see it on their faces. The anguish. The inability to make a difference for those people. The utter helplessness. Then the news reporters picked up on what was happening, and in their horror, the world finally understood."

"Every afternoon they bang a gong. Every afternoon Will Summers gets up and reads a Medal of Honor citation or a Silver Star citation. He tells stories of valor. He tells his own stories or asks other cadre members to tell theirs. Then he closes with something like, "My old team right now is knee-deep in grenade pins killing the enemy, and you're bitching about your boots, or this mud, or how you never get to sleep. Quit! It's never going to get easier. This is only *pre-selection*. You think Selection will be easier? It won't be. You think missions will be easier? Hell no. They're doing what you're doing with a hundred pounds on their backs, plus carrying their own food and water. And people are trying to kill them! You're just getting dirty. Quit! You don't want to be here. All of those gentlemen behind you would love to have you join them. You can go and be part



of those perfectly fine units and live a good and civilized life. You won't get that here. Quit!" Every single day, people quit. I honestly didn't understand it. *Didn't they realize this is the game?* But they did realize. They just couldn't take it anymore."

"For four months forty-to-eighty guys show up every week. Well over 1,000 guys come through here. At the end of all of it, just ninety-one are approved to move forward to Special Forces Selection. Only six are from my original basic training platoon"

"There is no question in my mind that the SOPC [Special Operations Preparation Course] cadre saw the 18 X-Rays as a liability (and they were right, as we died at two times the rate of regular Special Forces guys), and so they decided that they would put us through so much hell the guys that made it through would at least be tough enough to make up for their lack of experience."

"We cheat here at everything [...] Literally everything. During the big Star Land Navigation test, one is not supposed to run on any roads. I ran on every single one I could find. It was so much faster. The cadre hid in the woods trying to catch people that tried to run on the roads but rather than fear it, I prepared for it. I hid my roster number and moved quickly. When one did see me, they would shout, "Hey, you, stop!" and I would take off sprinting. People are fundamentally lazy, so most of them didn't even chase me. The one that did wasn't as fast as I am, and didn't really want to fight through bramble and thorns. I saved hours by cheating on those roads, as did all my friends. They also don't tell you how much time you have to finish the Star Land Navigation test. This is true with every other Selection event. The entire military runs on the premise of Task, Condition, and Standard. You are given a task and a condition and you are expected to meet the standard. Special Forces operate on the premise of Task, Condition, No Standard. In other words, the "standard" is your best effort, every time. Then they decide if it is good enough. The whole idea is to see how hard you will push yourself without a known goal."

"We, as a heavy infantry squad, are issued M240 machine guns, Squad Automatic Weapons (SAWs), and M203 grenade launchers. I like guns a lot and I am excited. Our instructors are awesome. One is from 3rd Group and one is from 5th Group. They look like elk. Their muscles have muscles, but they are sinewy and lean and I can see all of their veins, as opposed to thick and meaty. They look like they can run of ruck or do anything forever. You can tell that all these guys have done is run through the desert for years chasing bad guys. They both kind of have a thousand-yard stare because they just came back from war. One of the many things I don't know yet is that even guys who are the life of the party in most scenarios need time to find that personality again after returning from combat."

"being good enough isn't easy. You aren't just timed on assembling or

disassembling a weapon. They'll throw parts for five weapon systems into a box, then tell you that you have ten minutes to put all of them together or you fail. Then they swarm you while you're trying to do it, bumping into your arms, shaking your table, and generally making life impossible. The question they want answered is: What will this guy do under fire? Will he fight through the stress or freeze?"

"the SF mentality is that "it's only wrong if you get caught." We need to think this way because we never operate under black-and-white rules. I've literally never had a mission that was clear-cut. There's always an element of "figure it out" or "You'll know more when you get on the ground." It is important to stress that I'm not joining a conventional force—there's no talking to any military attaché to figure out what is right or wrong. I'm going where we have to go and doing what we have to do. A lot of guys cannot handle this type of structure. If you need rules and a clear picture of right and wrong, then be a Ranger. They're total badassess but they like to have a clear picture of who and why they are fucking someone up before they leave to fuck them up. We prefer to show up and figure out who needs fucking up on the fly, using our own judgment. If you think rules are more like suggestions, come play with us."

## **Chapter 7 - Hunting Zarqawi**

### ***[On his commander...]***

"John is not a lovable guy. He is not sweet. My guess is he probably doesn't read a lot of books about emotional intelligence or empathetic leadership. More than likely, he is not going to make you feel better when you feel blue. He will not tuck you in at night. But if you're going to war, you want John Fucking McPhee."

"When I first arrived to the CIF [Commanders in-Extremis Force], Mario [another lead] refused to let me in the Team Room, because I was a cherry. He asked me why the hell I was here, and I told him I wanted to be trained. "I've got some physical training ready for you right now," he said. "I want you to go to the gym and move everything in it to the left side." I did it in two hours. When I finished, he said, "Why the hell did you move everything in the gym? It looks dumb. Move it back." I did that in ninety-eight minutes. I got a lot more efficient. I made it a point not to complain no matter what they did to me in those first few months. Because of that, over time the ribbing diminished from the original legitimate disgust for an 18 X-Ray cherry joining the CIF to friendly ribbing and insults. Works for me."

### ***[Zarqawi—more extreme than bin Laden? Apparently so.]***

"The battlefield in Iraq in 2006 is insane. Our core mission is to defeat Al Qaeda, but in particular it is to find and defeat this total piece of shit named Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. If bin Laden is the biggest piece of shit in the War on

Terror, then Zarqawi has to be the second biggest piece of shit. He also demonstrates a cruelty that puts bin Laden to shame, which is saying a lot. Zarqawi is the face of Al Qaeda in Iraq. To date, he is believed to be the mastermind of the Canal Hotel bombing that killed the special envoy from the United Nations to Iraq. He was in Iran at the same time as 9/11, and there is evidence he was there to help plan the attacks. He personally assassinated three Americans. He shot and killed Laurence Foley, a senior administrator of U.S. Agency for International Development, in Amman, Jordan, in 2002. Later, in a now famous and horrifying video, he captured and decapitated Nick Berg, and in a separate incident did the same to Olin Eugene Armstrong. He claimed responsibility for killing thousands of Shia Iraqis, proclaiming war against them, causing a rebuke from bin Laden, as he did not believe Muslims should be attacking Muslims. When bin Laden is like, "Yo, dawg, that's too far," you are not a nice man. If all that bad shit isn't enough, Zarqawi is regarded as the godfather of ISIS."

***[Kennedy's impression of the US Navy SEALs... Seems like the Special Forces, too, have their cliques, their silos, their rivalries.]***

"The sad Captain Mike Gomez episode [where one of Kennedy's leads was denied the go-ahead to lead his troops into war due to higher command, mediated by the SEALs in charge] is the moment that my judgment of all things Navy SEAL begins. I have spent the entire day preparing weapons, vehicles, and equipment for one of the most elite units on earth, and Team Blue decides that it is too dangerous for any ground assault force (GAF) missions. Meanwhile, the Marines (including my future Jackson-Winkeljohn teammate Brian Stann) are driving out the gate every goddamn hour like it's no big deal. To say this is immediately the most frustrating thing in all of our lives is a gross understatement, but the SEALs are running the show so we can't do jack shit. [...] We're not about that "hang around and wait" kind of life. We are doers with a chip on our shoulder. We need to prove ourselves. We're going to find a gunfight whether the SEALs want us to or not."

***[The famous adrenaline dump. Cf. the memorable story of Undercover FBI Bikie and White Supremacist John Payne on the JRE podcast where he tells the story of his almost being 'made' ... and the adrenaline dump that ensued. Clinically, sounds like a kind of dissociative experience.]***

"The high-pitched whine of the Black Hawk coupled with the cool breeze puts you in a pretty chill place and that's where I am heading. That coupled with the fact that when you have a huge spike of adrenaline, and you're used to doing high-adrenaline things like I am, you often get the opposite effect. Instead of getting hyped, you get more chill. It's almost a counterreaction brought on by training. I almost feel sleepy. Am I going to take a nap or go fuck up some motherfuckers? My body isn't quite sure."

***[A story of how finely tuned the brain is in picking up sounds amidst***

***intense violence ... sounds that indicate violence of action itself, a supremely protective experience, decision, 'switch' that must be flipped to keep yourself alive. Also the account of Kennedy's first kill. Reminds me of Jack Carr's account—car being a former SEAL and now-author—of James Reece's first kill: relief. No more. Relief of being alive.]***

"I hear Al switch his weapon from safe to semi. It's such a small sound. The tiny click of metal on metal, but all veterans know what that sound means—go time. You can always hear it, through flashbangs, through grenades, through artillery—that little click engages the mechanism in your brain that tells you this event is now real. My eyes see where this man is going, and my brain slowly passes that message to my body. He grabs an AK-47 and starts to spin it toward us. Somewhere between the time he grabs for the gun and the time he turns toward us with it, I moved my weapon to semi, as does John. By the time the man's gun gets two thirds around the half circle from where he grabbed it to where it is pointing at Al, Al squeezes off one to two rounds. Milliseconds later I double-tap the guy. John shoots at almost the same time I do, also double-tapping. The guy falls to the ground, lifeless. There are five, maybe six holes, stacked on top of each other, through his heart. To be honest, if you don't look carefully, it looks like one bullet wound. I just killed for the first time (though I think Al's rounds get the actual credit), but at that moment, I'm actually impressed with how good we are. I thought this would be a bigger moment. I thought it would have gravitas, It doesn't. He was a bad man. He tried to kill us. Now he is dead. It is that simple for me. What isn't simple is hearing his wife's screams when the shots ring out. There is no sound like the sound of a woman seeing her husband die. It rattles me and lingers. We collect intel off the entire building. We get blood samples, fingerprints, face pictures, and we take the body with us. There is a ton of valuable intelligence here, and this is a huge, unexpected win, tactically. But his wife keeps screaming at us. She is saying we murdered him. It doesn't matter to her that we gave the guy the opportunity to leave the house. It doesn't matter that he tried to kill us. We killed her husband. I look at the other men, glaring at us. I look at the kids, crying. Did we just make more terrorists? *Will these kids grow up to try to kill more Americans? I probably would if I were them.*"

***[Kennedy recalls how he was left behind on an actually mission. He approached his lead as soon as the guy walked through the door—Why wasn't I included? The guy told him to put on some boxing gloves. He then proceeds to get the entire group to beat on him, one at a time, over two rounds so that each has an opportunity to 'win' the round—Kennedy was a good fighter so he beat a few of them up at the beginning. These was no reply from his lead, just this lesson. Kennedy, however, only learns this lesson in hindsight, much later. At the time he's still pissed. Today, he'd be called a narcissist; back then he was just an arrogant asshole in need of some humbling...]***

"This moment should have left a powerful imprint on me. I should have picked

up what he was trying to tell me: that no one, regardless of talent or skill, is more important than the team. I should have realized that I am not an all-star—that quite the contrary, I am a cherry asshole with a lot to learn, and if I don't, then I will be a liability to the CIF. But I am Tim Kennedy, and my takeaway is, "It took all of those assholes two tries each to finally beat me up."

***[The following story highlights just how real alternative perspectives are. When seeing things from different vantage points (in this case, through a different light spectrum), you come away with a different view. How often do we do this ... outside of war, as civilians? How much could we 'see' were we open enough to look? I think of this often—there's more to sight than what meets the eye. More to what we experience than what we tell ourselves. More to memory than what remembered ... because even in memory we see the malleability, the possibility to misremember, or to 'process' a memory so that what you're left with is distant to what you started with.]***

"As we approach the target, we switch on our night vision, and the transition from surreal to wild magical universe is complete. The static electricity from the rotorwash combined with the dust creates a brownout effect. The air around us is covered with dust and sand and constant arcs of electricity fire through them randomly and rhythmically all at the same time. These mini lightning storms are unnoticeable under normal light, but they paint powerful kaleidoscope-esque images under night vision. Eerily, there is a green halo rising above us, created by the spinning rotor. I look away from the lightning storms and into the halo. Even looking directly at it, it seems a little evil. It's amazing how different the world looks under a different light spectrum."

"I arch my head a little over my shoulder and see the most beautiful image I have ever seen—a line of Green Berets running full bore toward the target. I look over my other shoulder and see the same thing. I smile a big wide grin as I turn back straight. I catch myself and kind of acknowledge in the back of my head that it's really fucking weird to be smiling right now, but I can't help myself. Without hesitation, every single one of us, including cherry Tim, starts running toward the gunfire. On that battlefield, with bullets flying around me, sprinting as fast as I can run, surrounded by guys that beat me up like a week ago, I know that this is now my home. I belong here. I'm a real fucking Green Beret."

"Now, no matter what is happening, I get to go. Unlike before, I do not care what I do. I'm happy to sit on top of a .50 cal on a HMMWV or Pandur. I'm happy to be on the assault force. It just doesn't matter because there is so much work to be done. I'm always doing different stuff, and I'm always learning. I have become a devoted student of John."

"My biggest challenge is getting sleep. It's gotten so hard to get to sleep after the adrenaline rushes we experienced every night that I started doing two-a-day workouts. I work out when I wake up to start the day, and then after the

missions I work out so I can get some sleep."

"Three nights in a row we came within one building of getting [Zarqawi]. We continued to tighten the noose and now there's only thirty targets left as the noose gets tighter and tighter after each remaining target is neutralized. This mission is a who's-who of badasses. Delta, Rangers, SAS (Special Air Service), ICTF (Iraqi Special Operations Forces), and both CIF troops. (There are no SEALs. They are too busy in Al Asad not driving out of the gate.) This is 2006 peak President Bush "we're not messing around vengeance time." The guy who hung Americans alive and posed with their dead bodies, who beheaded two Americans, who slaughtered thousands of Shia Iraqis, is within our grasp."

"On February 24, 2006, Zarqawi was made the number two man on the most wanted list. On June 7, 2006, he was killed. CAG got positive confirmation he was in a building and rather than risk their lives to go in, they did what John McPhee would do. They lazed the target and two F16s dropped a laser-guided GBU-12 and a GBU-38, two 500-pound bombs. After the bombing, they went in and found him. He wasn't quite dead, but he would be within fifteen minutes from all the damage he received. [...] Within minutes of TOUCHDOWN, the Iraqi police arrive on scene and start shooting at us. They are Zarqaw's QRF, and before our task force blew him the fuck up, he must have called in for the cavalry. At the same time they arrive at Zarqawi's building, another police force arrives at ours. So these regular shitty Iraqi cops are so afraid of Zarqawi and what he will do to them or their families that they think the better option is to go to war with Delta Force and the CIF. Absolutely wild. They are quickly dispatched with extreme violence. President Bush flies in the night after the mission to greet us. Only the officers and the senior NCOs get to shake his hand, but we all get to see him and hear him speak. You can tell how much he genuinely cares about us, and the mission. *Holy shit, there's the President.* I'm blown away that I'm anywhere near this level of power. Two years ago, I was scraping together money for pizza and prizefighting on an Indian reservation and now I'm in a room with the President of the United States after being part of arguably the most important mission of the Iraq War."

***[Veterans often comment about how the return from war takes its toll. Jonathan Shay discusses this at length of Vietnam vets in his book Odysseus in America. Carr, more recently, touches on it in his book Terminal List: "Homecomings from a war zone are difficult to describe to those who have not experienced them firsthand. They are exceedingly powerful experiences, made all the more remarkable when children are part of the picture. Emotional floodgates that have been held at bay month after month are finally opened, allowing those feelings of love and devotion to pour through all at once. Homecomings made the deployments almost worth it, almost. Those pent-up feelings, forced to take a six-month back seat to the mission of defending the nation, were now free to be expressed." To touch on what Kennedy says, it may be that one reason people are more stressed on returning is because the body has already***

***normalised warfare; the dial on their nervous system is all the way up. Now they're in a 'safe' enough place with the dial conditioned upwards and there's this dissonance—my body is geared up but there's no danger that I can see ... so, instead, I must see danger where there is not. That's the only thing that will make sense to the predicting mind. The brain is an organ of prediction. Where one cannot see what is expected then the brain fills in the pieces. Add to that the severe contrast or wartime to civilian life and you have a recipe for distress. P.S. I like this idea of 'dials' vs 'switches' in the brain. I didn't think of it—heard it first in a Huberman Lab podcast featuring former SEAL DJ Shipley. He spoke about how the brain dials up and dials down distress. It's not as easy as flipping a switch and we're there—instead, if we feel like a switch has been flipped then we haven't yet learned how to pick up on the cues (triggers) our brain has been sensing until it 'flipped'. Here are a few quotes from Huberman Lab: How to Make Yourself Unbreakable | DJ Shipley (<https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/huberman-lab/id1545953110?i=1000730378193&r=573>): "I just keep pushing. I just keep myself in motion the entire time. And I talk about dials not switches a lot with people. And it sounds selfish, but I have to be selfish right now in order to be selfless later."; "And I could just focus on work because I'm running on dials and not switches. You can't just turn it on and shut it off. You can't. You gotta be able to back it off slowly."]***

"Landing back in the States is weird. People always say it's weird, but I didn't really believe it until just now. I want to see my wife. I want to have a nice meal. I want to have sex. I want to sleep in a nice bed instead of a cot. I want to go a day without sweating. I want all these things and more. But I also miss the important work. I miss the life or death of it. I keep scanning the horizon for a threat. I keep assessing people who are just trying to be friendly to see what their real intention might be. I'm more stressed here than I was over there."

## **Chapter 8 - Pride Cometh**

"I pull up to the compound. As I walk in, I stare at the ominous sign that every Ranger student knows well, "Ranger: Not for the weak or fainthearted." Tomorrow morning, I will be here wearing blank BDUs. No rank. No badges and tabs. Nothing. Every student is equal at Ranger School. You're defined and judged only by your performance."

"Ranger School is hard but fair. There is one standard: the Ranger Standard. You either meet the standard or you go home. This is a meritocracy. There's no rank. There are no favors. There are no exceptions to the standard. It's a simplicity I immediately respect. I'm a combat-deployed Special Forces Staff Sergeant, and if I fail the push-ups at the beginning of this course, I go home, just like a cherry Second Lieutenant would."

"Suffering is the great equalizer. The cadre, the missions, the lack of food and

sleep, and the elements bring everyone to a place where they no longer hide their real feelings. You might be my best friend in the world in real life, but so help me God if you fall asleep on that SAW (Squad Automatic Weapon) one more time, I am going to murder you."

"Occasionally, students die at Ranger School, usually from hypothermia or heat stroke. So when a combination of weather factors moves the RI's threat assessment from yellow (caution) to red (NO GO) they are quick to move. They may pretend to hate us, but these NCOs are professionals, and we are their responsibility. Besides, it would really look bad if one of us died on their watch."

"I quit!" The words shock me. The dude immediately to my right stands up. We have been at this school for about forty days. He has weathered a lot but he cannot take it anymore. The Ranger Instructors immediately run over to him. Gone are their harsh tones. Gone are their stern looks. "No problem, buddy. Here you go," one offers, handing him a hot cup of coffee. Moments later, another shows up with a warm cup of soup. "Make sure you eat this. You'll feel better, man." I'm trying to process what is happening, as the RIs [Ranger Instructors] wrap this guy in a blanket, say nice things to him, and walk him down the road. I can smell the coffee. I can taste the soup. But something is weird about the whole incident and I can't put my finger on it. [...] Then it hit me. The weird thing that threw me for a loop earlier: They weren't calling him "Ranger." From the moment you start this course, you have that title. You lose your rank and your awards. But they lend you that title. Ranger Kennedy. Ranger Aryana, Ranger Smith. Ranger Whoever. They lend it to you with the expectation that you'll actually earn it. That guy spent forty days earning it, and then the cold ground was too much for him, and he gave it back. They started calling him "man" and "buddy" but not "Ranger," because he wasn't going to be one."

"There are food Rangers and there are sleep Rangers. Some people can live without sleep. Others can live without food."

"The pass rate for Ranger School is about 33 percent and the class is already well below that. The winter storms broke a lot of hearts."

***[On 'servant leadership'—cf. the approach of Jesus of Nazareth, who epitomised this approach.]***

"everyone by now knows that the sure way to graduate is by helping and contributing to the team. We all understand servant leadership is the process by which to do that. The missions run smoother. Everyone knows their job. You'd happily go to combat with any of the guys still in your squad because you know what they are made of. You know you can count on them."

"I love shooting. So when I get the chance to go to the Special Operations Target Interdiction Course (SOTIC), aka "SF Sniper School," I jump at it. I have



to admit, I didn't expect it to go this way. In SOTIC, you pass or fail as a team, not as an individual. I have the highest individual score in the class. My partner has the lowest. He's a great guy, but he is absolutely not a natural sniper, doesn't have the right temperament to train himself to be one, and is dealing with some post-traumatic stress. In 2008, these things are not talked about the way they will be later, so he likely is in a very bad place worrying about people thinking he is weak, with the additional stress of the schoolhouse stacked on top of that."

## **Chapter 9 - The Valley Of Death**

***[The following chapter represents a no-holds-barred account of a major attack Kennedy was involved in in Afghanistan. Reader beware...]***

"I hate classroom work. I especially hate Army classroom work because the Army is incredibly skilled at cramming five hours of instruction into a forty-hour class. It is always taught at an eighth-grade level and, hence, takes longer than it should by a factor of five. I hate class-work with the fiery intensity of a thousand suns, especially when that classwork is keeping me from doing something I want to do, and make no mistake, I *really* want to start hunting bad guys."

"The Czechs were the same [SF] guys, but genetically engineered to be twice the size of normal men. Honestly, those guys were rad. Watching them do missions was like watching "tactical Baywatch." Everyone was a specimen and you wondered how they could find so many enormous, chiseled, good-looking dudes with a penchant for crushing the souls of their enemies."

"Each truck had three drivers, because we were anticipating we would be losing some along the way, either from cowardice, treachery, or enemy bullets. The drivers were not allowed to have phones or any other communication devices because we were worried some of them might tip off the Taliban to our makeup and timelines."

***[Over-confidence? Pride cometh before the fall...]***

"Oddly, I didn't even consider we wouldn't dominate the situation, whatever it turned out to be. I was the guy that came out on top in MMA fights I wasn't supposed to win. I passed the 18X program I wasn't supposed to pass, I made it on the CIF team no one had ever made it on without being on an A-Team first, I chased down Zarqawi alongside a bunch of other trigger pullers Call of Duty—style on my first deployment, and I had just finished Ranger School as the Honor Graduate when challenged to do so. I was a fucking juggernaut. I was absolutely unstoppable. This was going to be just another few days of awesome for Tim Kennedy."

"The Afghans always lead in the first vehicle as a sign of trust. The lead vehicle

is most likely to get hit in an ambush or run over an IED that has a pressure plate trigger; this is their way of showing us they are not the enemy. Pretty baller. Plus, we wouldn't trust them if they didn't do it. As I look out the window into the countryside, I start to feel worse and worse about the mission. Sure enough, immediately upon beginning the movement, we start intercepting cell phone calls from the drivers, who aren't supposed to have phones. They are informing the Taliban we are on the move. So, we have to stop and search the trucks. We find and take a ton of phones. This is a very bad sign."

"These aren't the usual Taliban riffraff. These guys are being led by Iranian fighters. And the Iranians, unlike the incompetent hodgepodge of farmers, goat herders, and angry teenagers that make up the Taliban, are well-trained elite troops. They employ good tactics. They set up near- and far-side security elements to ensure they know when we hit critical checkpoints. They build fallback points after first contact to ensure we can't zero in on them quickly and blow them to hell with artillery or close air support. They mark kill zones so that when we hit the big X on their maps, they can unleash maximum firepower on us. We are fighting a foreign army, not a militia. This situation repeats itself often in the Middle East and it is the big reason military people don't understand why the U.S. cuts Iran so many breaks—these guys have been killing us for years. They just take their uniforms off right before they do it, then put them back on when it's done."

"It is unclear whether it was a 50 cal round that had ricocheted or a piece of shrapnel from the grenade launcher, but a piece of metal had come back toward the Czech vehicles and hit one of their men in the leg, severing his femoral artery at the groin. Blood is pouring out of him. I've never seen so much blood leave a man so quickly.

The medics rush around him working their magic as fast as they can. They do everything possible to stop the bleeding, but he is in bad shape. Fortunately, because we aren't under fire, a MEDEVAC comes quickly and airlifts him out. To this day, I don't know whether he lived or died.

Our demeanor changes after losing that man. *We're in the shit now*. I feel like I am living in some old Vietnam movie. I don't realize how prophetic my feelings are. If I did, I'd probably turn the whole goddamn convoy around. That is the last village we will see before we hit the Chokazoid Pass, an unknown little valley in the middle of a hole-in-the-wall country made up entirely of dirt, rot, and pain that would break me in a way nothing ever had or has since.

"That's when the explosion rocks me. It is so big that at first I thought our vehicle had been hit. My vision goes completely white and there is a ringing in my ears—a gentle whine—as my brain reignites and starts working again... sort of. It is the same feeling I had in the old days when Chuck Liddell used to hit me. Sure, I am conscious, but I am not quite right. My brain doesn't feel like it is processing at full speed. My vision slowly returns and white flecks of light frolic through my eyes as my situation comes back to me in a jolt. I realize we're okay but immediately know we are totally fucked. The vehicle in front of me hit my

roof. I don't know if it hit a pressure plate or what, but a two-and-a-half-ton armored vehicle just did a backflip wenty meters in the air, is completely shredded and missing everything from the front wheel forward, and is now sitting on top of my vehicle."

"I fucking know I am about to die. I am not going to see my wife again. I am not going to see my kids again. I don't want it to end like this. Irish Mike agrees. He slams us in reverse and turns the vehicle so it can back up the hill. I don't know if we will make it. The axle is bent from the explosion and we have an extra few tons on top of us, but we slowly crawl backwards as the metal of the axle strains and whines. Bullets keep pinging off us. An RPG misses us by a few inches in front of me. If Irish hadn't started the move, that would have been a direct hit."

"We get to the vehicle unscathed, and I look inside. Fuck. They are in bad shape. The first guy has lost both of his legs at the quads. They simply aren't there. I pull him out in a sandbag carry and his bile and blood and guts spill out onto my uniform, rolling down my stomach and soaking my legs. Even with the adrenaline and the fear and the explosions and the bullets, I acknowledge this is the most disgusting thing that has ever happened to me. Irish grabs the other dude, who is in rough shape but is still breathing. As we start moving the sixty meters back to our vehicle, I see a squad of six to eight guys moving out of the woods to finish us. They are the assault element getting ready to fight to the X and kill those of us standing on it."

"The sweet melody of the .50 cal fills my ears and they evaporate. When I say that, I need you to understand what I mean. They didn't die. It wasn't like there were corpses sitting there. They fucking *evaporated*. There is just a pink mist floating in the air where they had just been. It is like that Jake Gyllenhaal scene in Jarhead where he says he wanted "the pink mist" you see after pulling the trigger on a sniper rifle. I had never wanted it before. But right now, I have never been happier to see anything in my entire life. Keller just saved me for what proved to be the first of many times over the next few days."

"I generally live by the rule you don't rise to the moment but rather fall to the level of your training."

### ***[How palpable the fear in the middle of warfare...]***

"As the sun goes down, the situation gets more dire. We cannot keep moving because the Jingle trucks do not have night vision and we are skirting a dangerous ravine along a mountain. So, we are sitting ducks. We don't know this land. They do. Shittier than that, though, we are dangerously low on ammo. My rifle has nothing left. It is now a very expensive baseball bat. We barely have any linked ammo left on the machine guns. The SAWs are dry except for a canister or two floating around. I hug my service pistol because that's all I have left to defend myself. I use the scope on my sniper rifle to try to find a bad guy

with an AK so I can go kill him and grab it. I am that desperate. I am scared. It isn't the kind of scared I felt when I was sprinting to the downed truck to help Irish save the wounded Afghans. That's the "watching a horror movie and jerk from a sudden shock" variety of fear. This version is much worse. I am watching my options disappear. My choices are being taken from me, and I do not get a vote as to what is going to happen next. If they attack full force right now, we are going to die. I know it. We just do not have the juice to stave them off. So, I constantly anticipate that attack. It is a helpless kind of fear, like a dream where you just can't move fast enough or you're frozen in place and can't move at all.

"If you've seen *Braveheart* or *Game of Thrones*, you can picture that moment after the battles where there is a sea of humanity lying on the ground: some dead, some wounded, some pretending to be dead to avoid being slain. And there's always that throwaway shot of the plungers walking the lines of bodies and stabbing anyone that didn't look quite dead enough to make sure they wouldn't live to fight another day. As the only sniper, today this is my job. It is a terrible job I do not want. We had barely lived through the night, and we couldn't afford to have these guys reengage us as we drove past, so the RG used its thermals to identify bodies that still had heat signatures and they dialed me in. I'd get on target with my scope and if that body had a weapon, I put a round through it.

Young or old, it didn't matter. If they had a gun, they died."

"I am very proud of being a sniper. I'm proud of the training I put myself through to be able to do what I do. I'm proud of our profession. We save a lot of lives, and I'm convinced I saved American and Czech lives that day, but there's something most people don't understand about our job. Our kills are up close and personal, even though we're often very far away. We see their last breath through that scope. We see their faces. It's one thing to kill a man who is actively shooting at you, or even to shoot a leader responsible for atrocities. I never lost any sleep about those shots. But these shots are awful. There is no satisfaction. There is no rush of knowing you quieted the gun that was hunting for American lives. This is just killing. With every trigger pull, I lose a little bit more of my soul. But the target calls kept coming from the RG and I have a responsibility to keep my team safe. I shot for two hours. It haunts me still. I wish I could forget everything that happened through that scope. I hope every one of those people I killed meant to kill me too, but I will never know that. When you're in Afghanistan you don't know who is good and who is bad. Who is an insurgent? Who is a villager? How do I identify a combatant?"

"When people say war is hell, they mean this moment. Half of my friends are covered in their own blood. Some of us are dead. I still have someone else's shit and bile running down my chest and pants. My head is pounding from overpressure sickness, an adrenaline dump, and dehydration. The exhaust that was coming off the HMMWV all night as I camped underneath it trying to maintain security probably added to my throbbing head as well. Just for good measure, my stomach decides it is fucked, and I am trying like hell not to add

my own shit to the mixture of human fluids already covering me. And were surrounded. And we want to live. I want to live."

"What sticks out most, though, is that one of us would see a target and call out distance, description, and direction, and then everyone would lock in and shoot. We did this all day. It becomes so repetitive it feels like folding a pile of shirts or pairing a pile of socks. It isn't cognitive thought anymore. I am robotically going through the motions of eliminating the enemy. So, all of that stays with me, but that day remains blurry to me compared to the first day and the days that follow. I'll leave it to you guys to decide if that is because of blood filling my brain, a lack of sleep, or some psychological issue associated with everything around me being the absolute fucking worst."

"We radio command and call "Broken Arrow." Broken Arrow means that ground units are under threat of imminent attack and need air support on station. We need the birds running all night long. Words are not minced. "This isn't just a TIC [troops in contact]. If you don't send us everything you have, and keep it running all night, we're all going to be dead in the morning.""

"the main building they are fighting from is a large modern school that we had built for them. It is clearly their headquarters. I want it blown up, but the Team Leader refuses. I'm sure he has excellent officer reasons for not wanting to do so. I'm sure it is a pivotal part of "win-ning hearts and minds" on some fucking PowerPoint slide in some TOC somewhere. I'm sure that PowerPoint was converted into a division PowerPoint and that PowerPoint ended up in the Pentagon and then on the President's desk. I'm sure a whole bunch of people who have no idea what it is actually like on the fucking ground are patting themselves on the back telling each other that they have hit the goal of building 347 schools in Afghanistan and that the mission is being accomplished, and that we are winning. But I don't have any of those guys to yell at. I have this poor Captain who probably feels the same way I do and has his hands tied behind his back, but I don't care, because he is here and they aren't. I am insubordinate as fuck and tell him he is a pussy for not doing it. I add a bunch more colorful insults about his height, weight, hair color, and anything else I can think of and close it all out by basically telling him he is prioritizing officer bullshit over his men. I can tell you that 99 percent of him doesn't deserve it, but I also wish he would just blow off whatever orders he has and make the call to demolish that thing, because it is the sturdiest, most bullet-resistant, hardest-to-breach building in the entire town, so it's still 1 percent his fault. To his credit, he doesn't seem to hold a grudge. He tells me to fuck off and we move on. My dad reminds me this reaction is the mark of a good leader. But I think a good leader would have listened to me and blown up the damn school."

***[How clear and dark and raw and unapologetic is Kennedy's description of how he felt during the firefight...]***

Moving toward that village, I am scared and I am angry—the worst emotions to

have when you know a brutal fight is coming. When I fought MMA, I always did my best when I was emotionless, when I was just in the moment, without judgment, simply executing my game plan. War is the same. You want to be cold and calculating. You want to do the right things because they're the right things. That dispassionate approach, even while someone is trying to kill you, is one of the reasons we are so damn good at what we do. But I am not that right now. I am pissed and I don't care, and that creates risk. You see, door-to-door is an extremely different fight than the valley fight we had experienced thus far. It's closer. It's faster. There are more distractions. You can see and smell everything. You're not shooting at guys in the distance; you're shooting at them in their living rooms. It's extremely personal. To add to the stress and complexity of the situation, this village is not empty. We can see cows and chickens. Civilians are here, and that makes it harder. The patriarchs of the family take the most risk to protect the family, so grandpa is the one sticking his head out the window to scout. They know they are the most expendable because they cannot work anymore. But if grandpa is setting me up to die, then grandpa can go to hell right along with his terrorist son and Iranian best friend. This is dark. This is scorched-earth shit. I don't just want to kill these guys. I want to salt their fields so nothing will ever grow again and throw goats down their wells so the water is never drinkable. I want them gone. If shots are coming at me from a house, then everything in the house is going to be dead. The fighter, the donkey, the chicken, the cat, every-thing. Our timeline is shortened too. The natural human pause between assessing the threat and pulling the trigger to take another human's life is now at the absolute minimum amount. If you haven't been in it, you can't understand. Believe me: I know how dark it sounds. But think about watching a video where a cop is arresting someone and everything is fine, and then the criminal goes for his gun. There's that split second where the cop realizes this just went from a regular day to a fight for his life. He gets faster, meaner, more brutal. This is the same. I want to hurt everything that wants to hurt me and my brothers around me.

"The adrenaline is gone and I am now sweating acid. You can tell when you get there, because you reek of ammonia."

### ***[On killing women and children...]***

A grenade going off in the movies is very different from what happens in real life. It's not this giant fireball. It's not dramatic. It's a hollow thud. It's that late-night sound of opening the refrigerator to see what's in there, and the watermelon rolls out and hits the ground. That's all a grenade is after you throw it. A little hollow pop. And after you hear that pop, you either want to hear nothing, or you want to hear men scream-ing. You do not want to hear women or children scream. You absolutely do not want to hear that. Yet that's what I hear. [...] Every scream tears me apart. After everything I have been through, I thought my soul was dead. I was as hollow as the thud of that grenade. I thought there was nothing left. It all comes flooding back. I am a raw nerve of emotion, and each sound coming from that room burns me worse than anything

that has ever happened to me. Shame, horror, and guilt at what I have just done envelopes me. [...] When I hit the first doorway, I instantly see food everywhere. It's a kitchen. I can smell the tea kettle with the clove tea that everyone here drinks. It has just been made. I can smell it right now as I write this. It's amazing how smell stays with you. You can forget details and images, specific words and conversations, but the smell of a moment is forever. [...] There are two women, six kids, and an old man inside. I am once again that kid standing on the street looking at a crashed church van, so desperately wanting to help, but not knowing where to start. Except this time, in addition to being the guy who so desperately wants to fix it all, I am also the guy who crashed the van. [...] The smell of death, emptied bowels, and vomit hangs in the air. The hot machine gun is right there. Someone was shooting it, goddamnit! Who? The old man? One of the women? Someone else? Everyone that can scream is screaming. Some aren't. They aren't all going to make it. I did this. I am the bad guy.

"We're taught over and over again that a good hasty plan executed violently is far better than a flawless detailed plan executed with hesitation. We hit them hard with absolute violence of action and we destroyed their will to fight. We took them from "kill mode" to "flee and regroup mode." We aggressively took the high ground and key terrain features and cleared everything from that point to the main supply route (MSR). And if you were a man and you were outside, you are probably dead. It was absolute dominance."

"We started this mission with eighty trucks. Four days later, we arrive with twenty."

"the Team Sergeant from the ODA [SF Operational Detachment Alpha, an acronym for the elite SF team like Green Beret or Army Ranger] at Anaconda walks up to me and does a health and welfare inspection. "Show me that you're not bleeding or leaking fluid." "Show me your skin so I can see for sure." "Do you know who you are and what you're doing here?" He then did a roll call of battle roster numbers to see who actually made it here alive and uninjured. As he moves on to others and his voice trails off into the distance, I lie down on the floor. I don't even remember what floor. It is plywood with dirt on top of it. I cuddle my backpack of grenades and magazines like it is my wife and I sleep for twelve hours. I'm still covered in shit and blood but I don't care. I am alive. It is the best sleep of my life.

## **Chapter 10 - Return To The Valley Of Death**

"I know in movies they make it seem like we turn our brains off-like were some kind of killing machines that do not feel. But the opposite is true. The more time you spend in bad situations, the more exposed you become. Think of a normal person with a good, healthy view of life-love, family, friends, empathy—all those positive things. They are your shield. Every bad situation is an arrow in that shield—is a sword blow against that shield. Eventually, if you take enough hits,

that shield is splintered or broken, and you're just getting shredded. You're getting cut wide open. Every scream from these kids drives a spike right into me, sending electricity through every nerve ending in my body and jolting my conscience. The pain and guilt is absolutely unbearable.

"The round splashes about a foot and a half away from his head and hits the wall right above where his AK is leaning. We're far enough away that he hasn't heard the shot yet, only the splash. I chamber another round, about to make an adjustment to take another shot, when the dude leans in to see what just happened to the wall and places his head exactly in front of where the last shot just landed. So I just hold position and squeeze off the second round. Pink mist. A perfect headshot."

"The base had been nearly overrun three times already. And when I say nearly, I'm not talking about they were outside the fortifications and were stopped. I mean, they climbed the barriers, got inside, and were in hand-to-hand combat with Green Berets. The ODA claimed a couple of guys killed Taliban with rocks in the midst of a life-or-death struggle. Rocks. We're not talking war stories here. We're talking about three times every American inside came close to being killed. When you're talking about bashing a guy's head in with a rock, you're talking about the primal need to survive and nothing else."

***[A story about comforting the baby he almost killed with a grenade (account in the previous chapter)...]***

"Almost immediately after [the medic] leaves, the tiniest little girl starts moaning and crying. It is the helpless sound that only a little kid can make. She doesn't understand why she is in pain. She doesn't understand what is happening to her. Her mother is handcuffed to a bed on the other side of the med-shed, and she can't provide her comfort. So, I walk over and stroke her head. She quiets just a little, but is still sobbing. Her mother, across the room, is leaning forward, extremely worried. Men are different here. It is considered unmanly for a man to deal with children, especially girls. If a man is touching a child, more often than not, it is not for a good reason. I do my best to assure her I do not mean her daughter any harm as I gently lift this tiny baby into my arms. I don't know if I've ever moved slower. I pick her up so gently because she is in so much pain and has so many little holes in her that any sudden movement sends her into fits of sobbing. I have not moved this slow since Sniper School. I just don't want to inflict any more pain on this tiny little baby. I want to make her feel better and wash away all her suffering. After what feels like an hour, I finally have her cradled in my arms. I lower myself into one of those tiny metal chairs the Army seems to buy in bulk that no actual adult can fit in and rock her and talk to her. I sing lullabies. I tell her stories. She finally falls asleep and for one moment that beautiful little baby girl looks just like any happy baby I'd ever held. My legs are now numb, but there is no chance that I'm going to risk moving her or placing her down. I want her to stay in this comfortable baby sleep for as long as she can. So I don't move—for six [...]"



hours. I cramp and I hurt, but it is my mission not to move. Eventually, everything numbs, except my shame. I have to see this mission through. I thought about it all night while holding that little girl. There is a recurring pattern that is forming in my life, and I don't like it. I don't necessarily run from my problems, but I'm definitely not addressing them either. I've always found a path around the thing that scared me, hurt me, or upset me. It is the same unhealthy coping mechanism that I have used ever since Jared died. Fireman problems? Cool, no big deal. I'll become a cop. Screwed up my chances of being a cop because I paintballed a kid? Cool, I'll go Army."

"I do not want to go back into that valley. I am scared as hell. But I can't shake that night in Iraq when John McPhee made me fight the entire team after I mouthed off. I said all the right things back then. I said I understood that the team can accomplish anything, but the individual is weak. But I also thought that I had beaten up eight of them, and that even though they all beat me up, no single one of them could have taken me. I let myself cope with the humiliation by protecting my ego. I ignored the reality that no one man, least of all me, is that big of a deal. I'd heard the sayings before, and I thought I understood them. You don't leave a man behind. You fight for the man next to you. But I didn't understand them until this moment. I'm afraid of letting these guys down. But I am also having an awak-ening. I am finally taking the red pill that I have refused to swallow for years. I wasn't good enough. I wasn't fast enough. I wasn't a good enough shot. And neither was anyone else around me, even my old boss John. We weren't unstoppable as individuals, but together we had a chance."

"The Czechs are staying at Anaconda, so our team is now an ODA of twelve guys, twenty Afghans, twenty Jingle Truck drivers, and me."

"As we take the northern path, something is odd. The buildings are still full. I see men, women, and children, all looking at us. This sends our anxiety spiking through the roof. Our heads are on a swivel as we come upon the orchard we saw in the ISR. I'm three vehicles back from the front of the convoy when I notice a little kid on the roof. He's maybe eight or nine. No threat. I go back to scanning the houses and tree line. Then I hear *clank, clank, clank!* A grenade bounces off the back of our truck and explodes right behind us. I didn't see him do it, but I'm 99 percent sure it was that nine-year-old. *Fuck.* My brain is already recalculating a threat assessment and my own personal rules of engagement. It isn't like a lot of true healing has happened within my soul over the past three days. I didn't get a soul transfusion, just a little food and sleep. I don't want to shoot an eighty-year-old man on his balcony, and I sure as shit don't want to shoot a nine-year-old kid on a rooftop, but that's the message these guys are sending to us already. They want everyone to be a combatant."

***[The power of a narrative—cf. the Israel-Hamas war. An exceptional piece of journalism on the latter is Douglas Murray's On Democracies And Death Cults, which explores the recent history of the conflict, the tactics used***

***by terrorists to make Democratic nations the 'bad guys', and how this culminated with what we're now seeing: the glorification of death cults to the demise of democracies. Kennedy, here, touches on something similar.]***

"At no point will [the terrorists] state that I threw the grenade because an Iranian fighter was shooting at us while using women and children as shields. They'll just say that the American invaders tortured, maimed, and killed women and children. We have a lot of evidence that they often would simply kill women and children on their own and then blame it on us for the same effect."

***[On the protection of God in the midst of warfare. How many coincidences must happen before one concedes divine intervention?]***

"A dozen RPGs kick off in our direction in less than ten seconds. Another five or six grenades rain down from the rooftops. Machine guns start to unload on us from fortified nests. Rifles start poking out of every window. We're now in a point-blank gunfight. I can literally reach up and grab some of these rifle barrels.

When I first told my mom about the next part, she just smiled with a smirk of satisfaction. As a devout Christian, she had a prayer chain for me throughout my entire deployment. Sixty women called each other and prayed for me every day, asking God for a bubble of protection around me. I'm not saying she's right. I'm not saying she's wrong. But twelve RPGs—and RPGs aren't quiet with a shooshing sound like they are in the movies—bounce off our vehicles, go over our vehicles, and slide under our vehicles. Twelve. There is also machine gun fire, but it hits no critical targets. Rifle fire is ineffective too. The best way I can describe what is happening is the scene in *Pulp Fiction* when the guy jumps out and fires at John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson and he misses with every shot. It's impossible that he misses. It is point-blank range. But he still misses. The Taliban shouldn't have missed. Some of us should be dead. But we aren't. So whether it is guardian angels knocking back RPGs with shields and swords or just the absolute fucking luckiest thing that has ever happened to every single guy on this convoy, they miss. Thank God.

***[The soldiers come across a peaceful Shangri-La village, untouched (an untouchable?), by the Taliban ... and they encounter beauty amidst the horror of war. When read in the context of safety/vigilance, one sees how a Polyvagal lens applies: The pit of terror in the gut (sympathetic arousal) is gone once welcomed while attentive vigilance remains (a combination of sympathetic and ventral vagal activity)]***

As the afternoon turns to evening, it is time to continue our journey. I think the old man could sense that we were once again putting ourselves in warrior mode as we prepare to leave Shangri-La, and he walks over and lets us know that we will be safe from here to Kandahar. He assures us there are no Taliban fighters past his village. We believe him and it provides an incredible calm over our group. Now don't get me wrong, there is nothing anyone can say at this point

that can make us drop our guard. We have gone through too much to be lackadaisical now. But we all begin thinking we may just have made it. My memory from this moment on is much better. My lizard brain—the primitive brain that focuses on keeping you alive—relaxes a little and lets my higher functions join the party. As we drive, I let my brain slip into highway mode just a little. I'm still looking out the window. I'm still scanning my sector. But the pit in my stomach is gone.

"I get back to my hooch with my booze and I start to drink. Drinking downrange is stupid, childish, and unprofessional and I shouldn't be doing it. I have been overseas twenty times with the military in Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa, and South America and I've never touched it on any other mission. Nothing good comes from it. And I'm not making excuses for it. I just want the pain to stop for a little while. Dulling the pain only postpones healing. I wish I could take that week back, but unfortunately, that isn't how life works."

***[And here we see the redemptive quality, an essence of personal transformation and humility, rise in Kennedy. Must one's resolve be tested in the most extreme way for redemption to occur? What of those untested? What of us? Is it true that only when one is pushed beyond one's limit does one's true character emerge? If we never reach this peak (or depth), what happens—do we just idle by never really showing ourselves what we are made of, becoming, as it were, ourselves in the process?]***

"When I landed in Afghanistan, I wanted these things on my uniform. I wanted the bling that told people I was a badass. Now, I felt like I didn't deserve any of it, and didn't want it if it was offered. I didn't even report my wartime injuries to my actual chain of command. Everything I had done thus far—Ranger School, Sniper School, deployments, fighting—were no longer accomplishments meant to stand alone. They were tools to make me better. And the only thing I proved on this deployment was that I wasn't good enough. And I never wanted to "not be good enough" again. I will never live up to being the man I once thought I was. And I will certainly never be perfect. But I can be better."

## **Chapter 11 - Time To Fight**

***[I've often wondered about the utility of avoiding problems. Sure, they stay beneath the surface, but you can get the job done with life. As long as you can tolerate the fluctuations in personality and the defences you employ as a by-product. But who am I to say one ought to address their issues? It's up to the person to decide. Kennedy, evidently, 'heals' by taking action (here here talking about providing security to the president as part of an Army initiative)]***

"I won't go as far as to say I was falling apart back home, but I am not a "sit around with my thoughts" kind of guy. I wish I was. I respect people that can do

that and derive a good outcome. I need to do shit. I need to sweat. I need to put my mind to a good purpose. And protecting the President of the United States definitely checks that box."

***[Here, Kennedy is split—does he continue with the SF or give it all up to pressure a fighting career? He loves both. The Army won't have any of it though—they don't like the idea of having an enlisted man fighting outside of the Defence Forces. What follows is Kennedy trying to figure out what to do. I love the advice of his friend ... You can't force somebody to love you. You can force a 'thing' either. If you're split, zoom out to get a wider lens. Kennedy could only see what was before him—his friend helped him take in the whole picture.]***

"I bump into my first senior 18 Bravo, Ben Rios. I explain my conundrum. He thinks for a minute. "You ever try to date a girl that doesn't like you, and you try to like her enough for the both of you, because you just like her so fucking much?" he asks me. "Yeah," I respond, not sure where he is going. "If the Army loved you, they'd give you a way to make this work. They'd make you sign a longer contract. They'd outline recruiting things you had to do or deployments you have to take. Could you do what they are doing to one of your guys? Would you make someone you loved choose? That's not love. That's envy. Are you going to let someone else's envy dictate your life? Meanwhile, how long can you be at peak performance? How long can you do this thing that you have been gifted—truly gifted—to do?" He stops for a minute and lets me absorb the words. I don't know what to say back. After a pause, he starts again. "Tim, you don't owe anybody here anything. Just get out there and become a champion. Do not love anything that doesn't love you back. We're all expendable. If you die on the next deployment, the Army will not mourn you. Only your friends and family will. As your friend, I'm telling you to prioritize what's best for you and your family. And I gotta say, I think that's fighting." The next day, I let my command know that I will not be reenlisting. The same dickhead Sergeant Major that started this whole problem is legitimately surprised. He tells me something along the lines of, "This decision will ruin your life." I thank him for his comments, and I mean it. *I made the right call.*"

***[On managing fame...]***

"ever since the Strikforce fights started, and the media exposure got bigger, everyone I meet wants something from me. I cannot really trust people anymore, because right when I start to like them, they ask me for something: tickets to a fight, an introduction to someone they want to meet, or money. [...] I know I sound like a bitch complaining about making money and being a little famous, but it really gets lonely when you can no longer make friends without wondering what they want."

***[Steven Bartlett once said (on LinkedIn - 26/11/2025): "Your life partner is the most important hire you will ever make. They can have more influence***

*on your success than your degree, your network, or your skills. They can be your greatest competitive advantage or your single point of failure. Choose wisely." The context? Here's the full post: "I was sat in LA this week, as a founder explained how her entire life had been ruined by the worst hire she ever made... her husband. [...] I've seen brilliant aspiring founders get destroyed by partners who resented their ambition - belittled their ideas and rolled their eyes when they told them they were going to step out their comfort zone. I've also watched unqualified founders build empires because someone at home genuinely believed they could. In fact, had a young lady Faye Halliday (who I was seeing at the time) - not looked me in the eyes when I was a broke 19 year old, and passionately told me how far she thought I was going to go, maybe I wouldn't have had the confidence to strive. If my current partner, who I've been with for some 7 years not told me on a weekly basis how much she believes in me, and frequently pointed out the things I'm good at, I would not be the person I am today. Being successful at anything is really F\*cking hard... no matter what you try. It's even harder if you're fighting a war on two fronts". Ginger (below) is Kennedy's wife. She doesn't want to see him lose. She urges him to win. It reminds me, less seriously, about what Jim Carey's character in Bruce Almighty said about his wife: "Being every successful man is a woman rolling her eyes [with a smile]." One must look at who's cheering you on ... from the home front. What to do if there's nobody? Well, even Jesus was rejected by those he grew up with ... and the result? He couldn't perform the miracles espoused in the Gospels in his home town. An age old story, ey?]*

"Ginger is more abrupt. "You're not allowed to lose anymore. I don't like it. So either win all the time or quit this dumb sport." She absolutely means it. She doesn't give two shits about MMA or me being famous."

## **Chapter 12 - Prizefighter**

*[If you're keen on MMS and the UFC, this chapter is all about that. A few things stood out to me, but not being a huge UFC fan—though I do love to watch what I can, and occasionally practice BJJ—I rushed through this chapter...]*

"I hated the UFC control mechanism. I know fans think the UFC is the best thing ever, but I don't. Their contracts are restrictive, they pay fighters less than Strikeforce, you cannot have your own sponsors, and they just generally are not nice."

"Scott Coker, the Strikeforce President, is a gem of a man. He loves fighting and fighters. Dana White, the UFC President, is a hell of a businessman. He's a pit bull. I respect both of them for different reasons.

They are both winners, but their approach to winning is different. Scott wants to put on the best show he can. He wants people to like fighting for him. Dana

wants to dominate the market, destroy anyone in his path, and deliver the best return to his investors. A Scott Coker motivational speech is a lot like something you'd hear from a high school football coach, or maybe a Rocky movie, with some nuggets of wisdom baked in. A Dana White motivational speech is like the Alec Baldwin scene in Glengarry Glen Ross, where he tells everyone to "fuck or walk" and tells Jack Lemmon he can't have coffee because "Coffee is for closers."

"I was asked in an interview about fighter pay, and I said, 'I'd make more money working as a trashman than fighting in the UFC.' It was a throwaway comment, but it went viral. Naturally Dana White wasn't super appreciative"

"all of a sudden Tim Kennedy, the loudmouth fighter known for being a great grap-pler, was paired with Roger Gracie, the most elite Jiu Jitsu fighter that has possibly ever lived, in a loser goes home match. Right before that match, Dana kicked all of the coaches out and said something to the effect of, 'Maybe instead of talking shit about your pay, you should all go out there and fucking fight! Give the fucking fans what they fucking want! Maybe then you'll get fucking paid the way you want. That'll get you money. Not whining to the press like coward fucking faggot Tim Kennedy. Go put on a fucking show! Don't grapplefuck your opponent like fucking Tim Kennedy. Do you fucking understand what I'm saying, everyone? Tim Kennedy?'"

***[After a 'stolen' fight ends his chances to become champ, Kennedy quits the UFC.]***

## **Chapter 13 - TV And A Movie**

***[On filming the show Hunting Hitler for The History Channel]***

"We start, as anyone should, with open-source materials and informants. We need to figure out where the most likely locations are to track down the cowards who fled the Allied invasion of Germany. We're also well aware that the people we were now hunting have been hunted since 1944. The Mossad and the KGB have hunted these guys for decades.

The Mossad is an Israeli paramilitary group with the mission of getting retribution for the crimes of the Nazis. The KGB (not so unlike the Americans) hunted them for either public relations wins for finding the men who killed so many of their citizens or to capture their best scientists to get ahead during the space race or the Cold War. Avoiding capture is now in their DNA. That makes our mission much harder—and more exciting. These Nazis wrote the book on how to disappear into populations and stay off the radar. Before the mujahideen, before ISIS, and before the IRA, there were the Nazis. An entire generation of them avoided capture and spread throughout the world like a virus. And that virus capsimost no discernible symptoms unless you look closely enough. We want to find every instance of it, and cut it out of its host, leaving the

world a healthier place."

***[Kennedy makes a powerful point on the danger of pride. It cometh before the fall, as the saying goes ... but even when a judicial fall is avoided, a personal fall is always seen. There are many books on man's tendency to fall into darkness. Ordinary Men by Christopher Cummings tells the true story of an ordinary band of 500 German police officers in Poland tasked with the eventual extermination of over 80,000 Jews. They were given an out at the beginning—most stayed on to do the killing. An absolute tragedy. The late Philip Zimbardo (famous for his Stanford Prison Experiment) wrote another book on the trappings of power to lead people towards evil: The Lucifer Effect. Jordan Peterson asks us to ponder whether we would be guards at Auschwitz ... to really ponder that question without the self-ingratiating air of "we'll never be like that" when some celebrate the murder and killings of innocents even in our own era. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn speaks of his time and witnessing of the Soviet horrors in The Gulag Archipelago. The point is clear—once we raise ourselves above others, we are more likely to 'other'. I witnessed this myself during the COVID era where tribalism reached its zenith—each side othering the other.]***

"I find pride can be the fuel and excuse for horrific actions. There's good pride, like believing in the quality of your work, or the generosity of your church or something like that. Then there's bad pride, where you feel some imagined or real injury done to you or your people, and you create excuses and scapegoats for that injury. History shows us example after example of this: the Nazis, the Soviets, the Balkans, Iraq, Syria, ISIS, Armenia. Where there's genocide, there tends to be an aggrieved party that cannot come to terms with their own failures, or just the general unjustness of life, coupled with charismatic leaders that offer up a scapegoat. Pride tells them that they, their friends, their nation, and their actions cannot possibly be to blame. The propaganda starts. Then the bullying. Then the laws. Then the incarceration. Then the killing. I see glimpses of it here [in South America, the German settlements]."

"we decide to fly the drone over the property again. This time, he grabs a shotgun and shoots at the drone.

*Okay, looks like it is actually time to go.* As we head out, two dirt bikes come out of nowhere and start following us. I know you're never supposed to confront your pursuers, and the reason you are not supposed to is because of exactly what happens next. I flip the vehicle around and wait. They both hop off their bikes and pull out machetes. "You need to leave or we're going to kill you! Do you hear? No more questions about Nazis!" one of them yells in English, but with a German accent. This is where riding solo sucks. I'm the only man of violence here. Everyone else will die in place. There's two guys and they have big fucking swords. I can kill one easily, but I'm worried about getting both before the other guy cuts me or someone else. I like my chances, but I don't love them. Plus, I don't think stacking two bodies is going to help our cause or

endear me with the production company. We get back in the vehicle and head back to the hotel, but this is the turning point for Tim Kennedy. I was doing a job before—making a television program. Now I'm hunting motherfucking Nazis. This is fun now."

"When Adolf Eichmann's kids were found, all their bank accounts were emptied. All of their property was taken. While they were not arrested for their father's crimes, they were left destitute. When Nazis are found by the authorities and linked to Nazi money, their entire lineage pays the price. None of these men wanted to pay that price."

***[Jack Carr describes how he felt 'real evil' a few times during his life and career. It's a fairly lengthy quote, but a great account of how to conceptualise the reality of 'evil': "you could feel the evil and as much as I tried not to look at all these reactions, they're just being fed to me because of the algorithm and everything else. So there were two in particular, one guy, one lady, and they were like cackling, like a witch's cackle, like out of some sort of a fairy tale that's meant to scare kids, but in real life, celebrating the death of Charlie Kirk. [...] It was real weird, and continues to really kind of fuck with my head because I didn't think that that would be the case. I had hoped it would be very few people. [...] I mean, it was ridiculous. [...] I could feel the evil coming through the phone, which is a strange thing to say. And I've been in Bagram early on in the war in Afghanistan. [...] it was [...] a nasty prison. They had this smell, and you could feel this overriding sense of [...] despair, but also this little bit of a current of evil in there. And then same thing in Baghdad, where they held Saddam [...] I've been in both those places. And you kind of feel a little... But even more so, you feel it with Saddam's kids. [...] And then I felt it again. It's weird to feel it so many times. My wife and I were in Paris [...] and it [...] just happened to be Fashion Week. [...] We wanted to go to one dinner where we could see some people, kind of do some people watching, and I could store some of it away for books (and that's what I'm always collecting, always collecting.) [...] And then this guy walks in with, like, two minions, and you don't see his face, because he's got this [...] hood on. But there are these earrings that are attached to the outside, and they're hanging down, and he's [...] a fairly obese person. And so you never saw his face the way he walked in, and then sat in front of us with these two guys on either side that had their sunglasses on, and they were [...] both dressed very similarly, and both side of them, they [...] were looking at him [...] and] it was so odd, but you felt this sense of evil. I don't really like using that word too much, but you felt something odd, so much so, that we paid the bill and left. It was odd. It was so odd." (The Joe Rogan Experience: #2390 - Jack Carr)]***

"Being around Nazi stuff is weird. I don't know how people collect vast quantities of it. I don't even like holding the coins because it feels like you're touching evil—like it might suck you in—or you might be somehow touched by



the depraved hate. This is all of those feelings and then some. It feels like I am coming up on the Death Star from *Star Wars*, caught in the tractor beam and heading into something I want nothing to do with, but I cannot stop it. I have to go there."

"Mengele was the guy who ran experiments on children, twins, and pregnant women. It was said that he could be playing with a child, remembering intimate details about what the child liked and giving him a piece of candy, and thirty minutes later be killing that same child in the gas chamber without remorse. While other SS members often blanched at the task of choosing those who would be killed, Mengele was known to smile and whistle as he did it."

"[Chile] is not a nice place. Pinochet ran his torture camps here. Schäfer ran his rape and pedophile rings here—he was the 1960s-1970s version of Jeffrey Epstein. A lot of bad things happened here, and a lot of not nice people still work here. They were everywhere and somehow fice. The woman who greeted us when we arrived was known to have helped her husband capture and torture children. He was in prison. She was there meeting us with her black lifeless eyes and talking about the jams and sausages made on the compound. I am not scared of much, but I didn't want to be left alone with her because I kept waiting for her jaw to distend and swallow my soul. Another man, who must have been eighty-five or ninety but was still well muscled and dangerous, was the local butcher. When they introduced him as such, I couldn't help but think of "the butcher" in a different connotation. His chest was still big. His arms were leathery and powerful. Creepiest of all, he wore the front of his hat poofed up in the Nazi fashion. He weighed us with his eyes almost as a dare. He wasn't afraid of two guys most people tend to be afraid of messing with. Mike and I took one look at him and we both knew he had tortured and killed people. It bothers me that he is living out his life without penalty for the sins I know he has committed. There are many more stories. We found bunkers. We interviewed men and women who had been prisoners here before Chile freed everyone and brought some of the perpetrators to justice. We were chased again. We were threatened again. And then we headed home. When all was said and done, for three consecutive seasons we were the top show on the History Channel. For the next season, we wanted to examine the Nazi ties to the PLO, to Libya, to the mujahideen. We wanted to go to Israel and talk to the guy who hunted down Eichmann. We wanted to investigate the Nazis that ended up at NASA. But we went too far. You see the first three seasons were focused on places no one cared about. Jungle towns and compounds already shrouded in evil. But tying the Nazis to the terrorists of the day wouldn't sit well with the politics of many people in Hollywood. Tying Nazis to America's desire to beat the Soviets would make people uncomfortable. No one wanted that, so the show ended. After three years of chasing Hitler, I'll tell you this: Hitler probably didn't get out, but his ideology did, and that is how he truly escaped."

***[Looks like Kennedy's pumping his chest again here...]***

"No one wants) to see a guy be good at everything. But, hey, it's not my fault I have the reflexes of a cat on cocaine."

***[Kennedy has made reference throughout how he might not like something but kind of goes along with it. More so with the entertainment industry than his previous life in the military. I wonder whether it's because he wanted so much to be in that industry that he is willing to (marginally) sacrifice his moral compass at times to get things going for him. I've never been in this situation so can't comment on what I'd do, but I think his own accounting of these events (there are more than one) shows another side of his personality, a more insecure one...?]***

"*Hard to Kill* is my brainchild. It came from all the shit I took from Dana White and the UFC for making the comment about how I could make more as a trashman. I started thinking about all the tough jobs people do that are dangerous, and I wanted to show the world what those jobs look like. The more thankless the job, the more I wanted to show it. [...] But the show turned sharply from my original mission of highlighting the hardworking men and women of America that do crazy jobs to "How can we kill Tim Kennedy?" The experiences are cool, and the moments are fun, but unlike with *Hitler* and *Range*, there is no purpose behind it, and I'm getting restless. This is turning into Cirque du Soleil Tim, and I'm starting to wonder if the producers even see me as a human being. On the one hand, they have a lot of confidence in me. On the other hand, they do realize I can die, right?"

## **Chapter 14 - Human Trafficking**

"Every room is the same: several girls are tied down to small beds. There are heroin tracks running into every vein they could find. We find our target. She's an American girl who was here on a mission trip when the earthquake hit. These predators saw a foreigner in a chaotic situation, separated from her friends, and took advantage. She became a target of opportunity. We untied the girls and ushered them out, but sadly we couldn't take them with us. The helicopter only had room for one. We knew most of them were just going to end up back here, either because they were so indoctrinated into this life, or later, when the drugs wore off and they needed another fix. It is really hard to stomach. They are so young. This is the worst kind of slavery."

"Regular people have a moral continuum. They think about things like selling drugs, selling guns, selling sex, and kidnapping and forcing children to have sex as progressively worse steps. And while I'd never compare the kid selling pot to his friends in college to a human trafficker, in my experience, once you get past a certain point, the moral continuum you'd expect to see disappears. Whether I was in South America, the Caribbean, Africa, or the United States, the same assholes selling drugs and guns were typically intertwined with selling kids as well. Assholes are assholes, and a person willing to deal in one form of human

misery is likely willing to deal with all forms, so long as they can turn a profit."

"many of the popular anti-trafficking organizations fall short. These organizations, though well meaning, are feel-good stories that have little impact on the actual problem. They go in and they rescue these kids or women, and it is gratifying to give these people their freedom, but they don't attack the underlying financial organization that allows all of this to happen."

"Over 70 percent of the kids and women who are freed walk right back to the same life. It's the saddest thing in the world. There is no escape for them unless we provide it. Not the Band-Aid. Not the day of freedom. These victims need a structured path to success."

***[Regarding Kennedy's organisation, Sheepdog Rescue... Having done some martial arts (BJJ—and still a completely novice white belt), I attest to the power these arts bring those who have shot confidence. I look at it like therapy—you choose to put yourself in a situation where somebody can literally choke you to death, learn techniques to counter, push yourself as far as you're willing to go, and tap out when you feel like it's too much, knowing full-well that the person will honour your tapout. A wonderful book on the power of BJJ for trauma is Marich and Pirkel's Transforming Trauma With Jiu-Jitsu. Having read some research of various martial arts (though I admit, I am a little biased), I've found that arts like BJJ have better mental health outcomes than arts like boxing and the like (I'm particular for boys and men and for issues such as anger management and confidence building). Striking is all power; grappling is like chess. And to be somebody small who, through technique can take somebody twice their size, well, no talk therapy I know of can compare... I suspect this is what Kennedy sees when he's helping out the traumatised.]***

"Anyone who has ever lived through trafficking can come to our courses for free. We hold women-only courses specifically to facilitate that purpose. We want the women (and men) who have been in these awful situations to eliminate the fear from their lives, to learn how to be situationally aware and avoid bad situations if possible, and to defend themselves, and their loved ones, if necessary. Hearing former victims tell me how much of their mental health we have been able to return to their lives through our work is one of the few things in my life I take great pride in."

"Data, in the right hands, is a powerful thing—just the kind of thing, in fact, that police officers need to make arrests. That's the ultimate goal. We want to collect enough information on these traffickers to put them away for a long time or set the police up to break them and climb higher up the food chain. I am not here to be a nerd. I'm not smart enough. I'm here to run counterintelligence operations, like I have done in South America, like I did in Trinidad and Tobago, and like I did on *Hunting Hitler*. If all goes right, I'm going to catch these guys in the act of selling kids."

"We don't care about the local pimps. We want the power players who bribe politicians and serve the Harvey Weinsteins or Jeffrey Epsteins of this world"

"The blatant manner in which power and money have been used to stop us from bringing people down is appalling. I don't generally condone vigilante behavior, but if I ever lose it and go full "Punisher" mode, these guys are at the top of my list."

***[Kennedy describes the typical structure of a human trafficking set-up...]***

"On the ground floor, there is the madame or "bottom bitch." The bottom bitch is pure evil. She's usually twenty-five-to-thirty years old and she is fucking the pimp. She used to be one of the girls, but for whatever reason, she showed loyalty or skill, and she elevated herself out of that part of the business. The bottom bitch typically runs four to six girls. She recruits them when they aren't just stolen, gets them hooked on meth or heroin, keeps them high, gets them to rest when they're off duty, interacts with the johns when they arrive, and basically runs the day-to-day operation. The reason I say she is pure evil is because she worked the job, knows how terrible it is, knows what it did to her, and still is willing to do the same thing to other girls. The girls are usually fourteen to twenty-one and the bottom bitch keeps them in a room together and releases them one at a time to rooms they have upstairs when the johns arrive. You don't usually see them older than that, because the johns that prefer nonconsensual sex prefer younger girls. Once they don't look young anymore, they are either sold into slavery elsewhere, killed, or thrown onto the street, now with a heroin habit and no way to get a fix. Or, if they're smart enough and evil enough, they become the new bottom bitch. [...] The pimp always locates himself close enough to get involved if a john gets violent, but always far enough away that if the police come, he isn't really involved in what is going on. The pimp may only have one bottom bitch, or he may have up to five. The structure of the relationship of the pimp to the bottom bitch and the bottom bitch to the girls, though, is always the same. Above the pimps are the higher-end traffickers. What we do is try to hem up the pimps so their asses are on the line, and get them to turn on the traffickers. To do this effectively, we need to inject ourselves into the system they have built."

***[The heartbreak of working so hard for it all to be shut down by law enforcement...]***

A high-ranking member of local law enforcement has just prohibited any federal agents from working in Houston during the Super Bowl, stating, "We don't have a trafficking problem in Houston." *The hell you don't! I've been here for less than a week and it's pretty damn obvious you have a huge problem!* I've done all of this—this team has done all of this work. We've watched girls get beaten. We've watched girls get dragged off to be raped. And this guy is shutting it all down despite overwhelming evidence of it occurring? [...] If you want to know

how traffickers keep winning, this is how. This is the reason. It's no one's priority. Are the politicians shady or uncaring?

It doesn't matter which. If enough people don't care about the problem, then politicians won't care about it. The girls that get taken aren't middle-class white girls with parents who adore them. They're poor black and Hispanic kids, whose parents are either dead, don't care, or have abandoned their children completely. These kids are alone. And now even when guys like us do care, and do try, we cannot even get the police to get up off their asses and do the job they are getting paid to do! [...] I had just stomached a week of watching women be abused; a week of going against my nature in order to win in a court of law; a week of building optimism that we were doing good work and that we were going to put these motherfuckers away for a long, long time; and then *poof*, that dream died. I am thirsty for a justice that will not come. I feel absolutely and completely empty. The energy inside me has evaporated into nothingness and I just want to curl up and die. In a catatonic state, I debrief with the DeliverFund, say my goodbyes to Geo and Matt, and walk to my car. As soon as I slide behind the wheel, I start sobbing uncontrollably, and simply cannot stop, no matter how hard I try to control myself. Two hours later, my chest hurts from crying and salt is stinging my cheeks and lies crusted against my chin. I spend the last hour of my drive in silence, collecting myself so that my daughters, my son, and my wife will not feel or see any of what dad has just gone through."

## Chapter 15 - Rescue

***[This chapter recounts the stories of Kennedy teaming up with like-minded volunteers to assist in bringing vulnerable Afghans out of country to save their lives after the Taliban's rose to power.]***

"I walk into the kitchen, give Ginger a kiss, and start to make some coffee. My phone has been blowing up all day on every platform with people talking about the dire situation in Afghanistan. Once the United States pulled most of our forces out of the country, Afghanistan quickly fell to the Taliban. The government leadership fled, which left hundreds of thousands of Afghans who worked alongside us for twenty years, as well as thousands of American citizens and Green Card holders, stranded. Now, the last bastion of hope for fleeing Afghans is Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA), which we almost lost control of as the Taliban surged past our limited forces on the ground and onto the airstrip. The government sent in 6,000 more troops in the form of soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division and Marines from the 24th MEU, and they finally brought it under control. But the images and sounds from Afghanistan on the news have been awful. The most poignant moment thus far, which was all over the news, was when a C-17 took off and Afghans were hanging on to the landing gear in sheer desperation and fell off about 1,000 feet in the air. It instantly gives me a sharp recollection of the Falling Man on 9/11. Every veteran I know is getting the same messages that I am"

"Chad is a good friend, and he has a problem: His interpreter Aziz is trapped and is actively being hunted. Because of who Aziz is and who he helped, if he is caught they will rape and murder his wife and children while he watches—then they will kill him. Chad isn't looking to send messages to Kabul like everyone else. He's been working with his old JSOC buddy, Santa 6, who now does contracting work in that region, putting a plan in motion to get Aziz out."

***[In country...]***

"We start to move out from the field we're currently in, toward the town proper, when we see movement that doesn't belong to us. Taliban. The news has shown a very calm and nonviolent Taliban, but that isn't the Taliban we're seeing out here. Another group, operating parallel to us, had rescued a woman and was about to load her into their vehicle when she got separated from them by a few feet. The Taliban merc'd her right on the hood of their vehicle—brains everywhere. It was a dare. Now that she was dead, that team had no legal cause to fire on the Taliban, as they were no longer a threat. So they left. We didn't want that situation, but we also didn't want a two against lots of bad guys gunfight woman and five kids in row. In fight-or-flight, sometimes flight is the right response. We grab them and start running. There's no way we are going to outrun adults while dragging kids in a straight line, so we cut corners of angles, running through alleyways, houses, and gardens, and make whatever turns we can to slow them down by forcing them to make a directional decision. My heart is pounding, and I keep looking over my shoulder as we move through the city. Finally; I see the crowds in front of me."

"I look around at the thousands of people pressing against the walls and the wire. I have never seen such desperation in my entire life. They want so badly to be on the other side of this wall—it's the real difference between life and death for many of them. They all know the clock is ticking and that come August 30, in six days, their chance to get to safety will be gone. I feel incredible pain for the soldiers and Marines guarding these walls. They're playing God right now—deciding who lives and who dies—and I know that will weigh on them for the rest of their years. Every once in a while, as the Taliban beat people away from the cameras, or fire AK rounds into the occasional person they can separate from the crowd, the entire body of humanity comes to life and surges toward the walls. I see people ripped up by the concertina wire as they get pushed forward and they have nowhere to go. I see babies crowd-surfed to the front of the wall the way the rest of the world would crowd-surf a beach ball at a rock concert. Imagine being so afraid that you just trust your infant to a sea of strangers because you legitimately think that it is their best chance at survival? In the worst cases, mothers throw their babies over the wall, hoping someone will catch them on the other side. Instead, those children hit the concertina wire on the inside of the wall and bleed out."

***[Where ego leads to the (potential) death of hundreds...]***

"Sean G crafted a master plan to rescue several high-risk populations in a single night. It was daring and we are smoked, but in our convoy of buses, we have 300 orphan children, just under 100 Nazarenes—Christians who will likely be killed or tortured under the Taliban— several families of the Afghan pilors who have been flying us in and out of Afghanistan, several personnel the government asked us to rescue, and best of all, more than seventy United States citizens. All we have to do is get through the gate. [...] By the time the runner gets to the Colonel to stop him, he has already kicked our buses out. All of the U.S. citizens. All of the kids. All of the Christians. And all of the people our government asked us to save.

In my entire life, I have never seen a more pointless display of authority. I don't know how guys like my Special Forces boss, Colonel Theo Unbehagen, and Nick come from the same place as this guy."

***[Later, after leaving country, Kennedy recounts the following... It reminds me of something van der Kolk said in his book The Body Keeps The Score—he mentioned how art therapy is instrumental for kids who have been traumatised. Then he said how, often enough, the mind loses its ability to imagine, to visualise, when under incredible duress and trauma. Similar to what Doidge covers in his book The Brain's Way Of Healing in that when the brain is experiencing chronic pain, "cortical real estate" is passed, meaning the brain fights for resources and cannot function the way it usually would ... your ability to imagine goes out the wildfire while pain takes over. Interestingly, Doidge notes how one pain specialist developed a therapy that helped eliminate chronic pain through visualisation approaches. I suspect what follows is the therapist's effort to determine who has lost the ability to imagine and who is "safe".]***

"These kids were already learning. The exercise for the day had been to "draw the ideal village." Domniki explains that the teachers do this to see if any of the kids are potentially suffering from post-traumatic stress or other traumas. All of the villages were beautiful and colorful, like the stuff you'd see happy American kindergartners draw."

***[A throwback to an earlier chapter... and the utility of failure.]***

"Now, that night in the ocean is a blip on the radar; it doesn't matter except as the imperus to finally get off my ass and attack life. Those two pregnant women gave me Sabrina and Julia, my first two reasons to be a better man. Those girls have given me nothing but joy and pride.

Being kicked off the force created a situation where I had to come to terms with my shortcomings: I didn't fail because life was unfair. I failed because I was a cocky asshole who made poor decisions. Without that failure, I would never be a Green Beret. I would never have found my calling. I would never have reached my potential. Thank God for those failures and that night. [...] Failure isn't final. It's necessary. It is the fuel that allows you to advance, to succeed."

## Afterword

### *[On volunteering to assist during the Russia-Ukraine War...]*

"Drones are not new to the battlefield, but these aren't Predators or Reapers. These are the kind regular people can buy at the store—the ones kids buy for fun and videographers buy to film. Except now when you hit the camera record button, instead of capturing video, these have been fashioned to drop grenades or explosives. These drone attacks had become more and more of a problem for both sides. If a drone was in the air, the pucker factor immediately went from a normal "I'm at war and people want to kill me" seven out of ten to an eleven. This was true not only because they had become more successful as of late, but because you had no way of telling whose side they were on or what their intentions were until it was essentially too late. [...] Dark humor rules the battlefield.

But I knew it wouldn't be funny to the Russian on the other side of the charge who would be screaming in agony if he was lucky, and would never scream again if he wasn't. Nor would it be funny to his mother and father, who would never see him again, at least not whole.

I didn't think about things like this as a young man, but I do all the time now. I've been in enough war zones to know that it's never the bill of goods that you're sold on television. It's never what the politicians are telling you. It's always young men dying to give old men something they want: money, power, or pride. And in the case of Ukraine, it's far worse. These people considered each other blood not long ago. Even after Ukraine became its own nation, ties were close. Intermarriage was common. Both Russian and Ukrainian were spoken freely on both sides of the border. Not now. Vladimir Putin and the evil cowards who serve him have ruined that for generations—maybe forever. People don't forget the loss of a son, of a daughter, of a parent, of a friend. Those wounds don't heal. What's left is a need for Vengeance. [...] The drone anxiety is a new wrinkle on the battlefield for me, as are the World War I-style trenches that I have encountered on this mission, but everything else is the same. The smells of burning fuel and rot and the thousand-yard-stares of the men in the trenches are old friends I wish I didn't know, but are so much a part of me that I will never be able to shake them."

"immediately after I returned from Afghanistan, I was deployed to the Texas border as part of the Texas National Guard Operation Lonestar. I spent six months there fighting cartels, coyotes, drug smugglers, and human traffickers. We worked hard and did a lot of good to try to keep our border secure, but when the enemy is willing to throw babies into the river in front of you as a diversion, knowing you'll jump in the water to try to save them, so that they could cross their product two hundred meters upriver, it's hard to feel good about the work you do, or about humanity for that matter. Especially when one of your own drowns trying to save a child's life.



"When you're putting your life out there for the world to see, unvarnished, it's scary as fuck. I knew for the book to be meaningful, I had to be honest, but it hurt to relive, and it was often embarrassing and painful to recount. Sometimes it downright sucked.

So thank you for making it feel worthwhile."

**[End...]**

**[A brief commentary:** In a conversation I had with the late Dr. James Fallon, he said to me, "[When] Muhammad Ali says he's the greatest—the thing is, he was the greatest. And so if you say I'm the most powerful man in the world, or powerful woman, it's true, it's not narcissism. You're just telling the facts. It pisses people off. [... It] has to be *not* true. And so there are people who would say "He's a narcissist", but if you say, "Is he really the best at this?" And if he is, then you're just envious [...]. So people throw on narcissism, and you know, half of it, it seems to be people who don't have the talents"

(From The Emil Barna Podcast: Dr James Fallon on Psychopaths & Sociopaths | Re-Release, 27 Mar 2024 <https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/the-emil-barna-podcast/id1574406779?i=1000650588122&r=2612>). I can't help but think of this when I consider Kennedy. Yes, lots of what I read in the book seems to be him beating his own chest ... but if it's all true, well, then, am I just being envious? So I take a step back and assess his life more objectively now ... and I do it with the framing of what I'll include below (with a few of his quotes from various interviews) and I conclude that he's travelling his own "Hero's Journey" as Joseph Campbell put it in his *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. Aren't we all? He's just written a book about it, is unapologetic about his accounts, his faults, his failures. He makes no airs that he must feel bad for laying it out, just says it how he sees it. The things that stood out for me is that he rarely talks of his family. Is this a blind spot or deliberate? I don't know ... in interviews he mentions them a lot. I suspect it was deliberate—how much can you write about before the book is too blood to become unreadable...? Another note: Sign up for your country, fight for your friends, live for yourself. That seems right. And yet, the hero transformed. He wasn't just in it for himself but became the man to help others. Overall, I liked his story (and who am I to say I could dislike it?) and think I'll return to it again, if only to remind myself that giants exist ... and they're totally human.]

***[Below are further notes from interviews with Tim Kennedy that provide much welcomed context to who he is, including his reflections on marriage and parenting, fitness, PTSD, and coping...]***

***From The Shawn Ryan Show: #100 Tim Kennedy, 11 Mar 2024***

***<https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/the-shawn-ryan-show/id1492492083?i=1000648748068&r=59>***

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"[For a successful marriage, you] have to fight. Complacency kills. We know that in combat. And complacency kills in marriage. Where you take things for granted about the person [...] you chose to spend the rest of your life with [...] you let yourself go, you get a little bit the dad bod [...] you stop buying flowers, you stop lighting candles, you stop buying lingerie, you stop fighting for that person that you fought for, that you dated, that you courted, that you tried to sweep off their feet. And [...] now 10 years down the road, [...] you're fat and [...] not sleeping, you're drinking a little bit. You care more about football game than you do her [...] shame on you. You don't deserve her. [...] You set down the sword and when you set down the sword, that sword's hard to pick up [...] you don't have the calluses anymore [...] the strength [...] the condition [...] the heart of a man [...] is a hard thing—we can fall in love easy [...] have these aspirations and these dreams. [...] I have to choose between going overseas and doing something that I know I was put on this planet to do or to be present. And I know I can't be present and look at that person, look at her or my kids in the face and the eyes without the things that I know that [...] God put me on this planet to do. And trying to reconcile those two things, the only way that can happen is with intentionality and discipline."

"Americans are hanging from bridges after they've been burnt alive and dragged through the street. That's this era of war. This is Blackwater dudes being tortured, football players being kidnapped and tortured, having anybody that was working for the American government, Zarqawi's having his henchmen, they'd drill their hands to the wall, they'd cut off their eyelids, and then they'd rape their family in front of them before they killed them. And you'd walk in, you'd find this raped and murdered family with this dude's hands drilled to the wall. This is fucking peak war."

"when we finally go to assault and clear the building, as we come in through the front door and you find a couple of kids that had been raped and murdered, your brain doesn't process it. You know, you can't... Not that you're planning what you're gonna see, but the last thing you plan on seeing is, you know, dead kids in a corner. And I have a really good memory and I journal the whole entire time that I was deployed and all my deployments. And I'll go back and I'll read some of these journals. And there's things I literally don't remember, but it's written down. [...] I came back and I sat there with a pencil in one of my green notebooks and I wrote for hours everything that I experienced. [...] Everything's in there. And I'm like, *No way this happened. I don't remember this*. And I'll go and [...] I'll ask teammates that were there at that same time. And they're like, "Dude, I barely remember that." The way the brain works, like the fog of war"

"The trauma. [...] I deny myself that [...] I saw some of the things that I saw, you know, but we saw them."

"The rooms look the same. The trauma looks the same. The date is different. But the journal is accurate."

"I want everybody to know that this dude, (Zarqawi) [is] radical, murderous, raping, torturing, fanatic; burnt people alive [...] dragged them through the street, tortured."

**Ryan:** "I remember rolling up to locations where they would put people's heads on cinder blocks [...] and then just launch cinder blocks straight down and pop people's heads like a grape. I've seen pregnant women [...] get hung on hooks just to bleed out with the fetus inside. And he was part of all that [...] Beheadings—all of the shit that you saw over there, he had a hand in."

**Kennedy:** "every time I hear a politician say [...] "Why do you need a gun?" [...] I think back to a little boy, a peasant, a nomad that had been kicking the American Special Operations ass in this valley for three days. And he's running around with an 1875 musket—one man with a rifle protecting his own land, how powerful he is and the power of the Second Amendment and how this insurmountable force of one good guy with a gun, how powerful that is. So that's one reason. And the second is to remind me the cost of war. It's never the way that you want it to be. It's never the way that it is in the movies. It is horrible. It is young. It is pain. [...] I don't want my son to ever have to shoot an 11-year-old kid carrying a gun that doesn't even work. That's war. Everything else is for the movies."

"You can have these ideals and dreams of grandeur, but it's eviscerated bodies and burnt smell of hair and flesh and children that are raped and tortured and die from overpressure wounds and bad guys. [...] I walk up to this door. We see bad guys move into this building. And as soon as I go to reach for the handle of the door, [Green Beret] Mike [...] hits me so hard and shoves me and I stumble back and fall over as this door gets shredded with machine gun fire. And I don't know if he [...] heard a bolt drop or if he heard a selector switch. There's no way because I was at this door, right? [...] I didn't hear anything. [...] I just start falling back and I'm [...] trying to get my feet because I'm gonna come at him and knock his teeth through his face because he just shoved me because I thought he wanted to be the number one guy through the door. And as soon as he shoves me, it pushes him back and this door just gets shredded with machine gun fire and saves my life. No question, had I been there like a half a second later and Mike Goldblum not been there, I'd be dead. And I see as this door [...] starts swinging that there's a machine gun sticking out of this window. And I take a grenade, I throw this frag grenade through this window. Again, it's not like the movies, right? There's not like this flame. There's not this like *ta-da-da-da*—it's just this thud. And what you wanna hear is silence. [Then] I hear is women and children start screaming. This guy had barricaded himself and surrounded himself with a bunch of women and children in this room."

"you drive out and you just see these bodies that have [...] your holes in them. To go into the next village, that dude is fighting from a room that he's surrounded with women and children. This is war. This is war. Fuck war."

"this 'embracing the suck'—embracing failure—as we [...] move into some of the darkest most horrific moments of my life to include the Mexico border, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Israel ... the same thing. I would [...] suck in all of this failure, my failure, the failure of the situation, the pain that I see and then I would like exhale purpose."

***From The Joe Rogan Experience: #497 (episode omitted from JRE on Apple Podcasts when last checked thus full citation cannot be provided)***

**Rogan:** "When guys come back, the big one is PTSD. That's the hardest aspect [...] to integrate back into a normal society with normal life and normal jobs and [...] just the things that we all [...] deal with on a regular basis. For some folks, it becomes almost unbearable. What is the difference between people that integrate smoothly and people that have an incredibly difficult time?"

**Kennedy:** "[...] The degrees of coping mechanisms that an individual has. I have a very strong family [...] like an amazing wife, fantastic father and mother, they're still married, amazing brother and sister [...] so family unit, very supportive. I'm very fit, I'm very healthy, I'm well educated, I was well trained. These are all different mechanisms to deal with stress. Everybody deals with stress differently, but the foundation of how you deal with stress, you have to have these fundamental elements to be able to do it. The more of them that you have, the more stress you can deal with. So a guy like me that was Ranger, sniper, Green Beret [...] killed lots of dudes, can come back and sleep well at night. [...] I had to adjust. [...] I had moments where a guy smoking a clove they'd maybe just ate at Indian restaurant [...] I'm having some sensory [triggers to] how he smells [...] listening to [...] music from that culture that I just spent [...] months with [...] I'm like, I want to shoot this person, like that instant reaction. But then I'm like, *Okay, no, everything's okay.*"

***From The Joe Rogan Experience: #2055 - Tim Kennedy, 2 Nov 2023***

***<https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/the-joe-rogan-experience/id360084272?i=1000644538889&r=9066>***

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""How do you fucking manage your mind dealing with so many horrific and traumatic experiences over and over and over again, just over a few years?" That's what my dad just asked me. But he asked me, like, way more pointed. He's like, are you okay? Are you okay, son?""

"[D]o you remember Mr. Rogers. [...] He was asked a real similar question, and it was during the civil rights protests where Blacks are being beaten in the street [...] and hippies are being condemned as, like, the next plague and pestilence that society could ever see. [...] And Mr. Rogers says, "Just look to the helpers." There's always people trying to help. And, you know, I'm thinking about the ground team that I had with me over there [in Afghanistan ...] the

most brilliant, from the expeditionary Special Operations backgrounds, but the most selfless, hardworking—they're giants of humans. [...] I look at them just in awe of how capable they are and how selfless [...] these are the most lethal humans on the planet, and they could kill you a thousand different ways, but they're putting their lives on the line to try and rescue a pastor that can't book a flight."

"Israel would do anything to have one of these guys go with them and advise them about how to get into this shit show that is Gaza, into the tunnels that are controlled by Hamas, and what are we going to do with Hezbollah at the northern border? How are we going to stop the Taliban that just got permission to cross through Iraq? What are we going to do with Al-Qaeda that just bribed a whole bunch more people to fly them into every single neighboring country? But instead, they're just trying to rescue people. So to ask you a question, when I'm down at the border, I just look to my left or my right, and I see a freaking private that's three o'clock in the morning. He's sitting there with night vision, and he's like, "That kid just fell in the water." Motherfucker's off. He's off. He's running down into the darkness to jump in the water to try and save a kid."

"Like, if you cannot find inspiration from that, and if you cannot find something that's going to nurture and feed your soul and inspire you to do something good for the people around you, and look at the guys that I had with me in Israel [...] in Ukraine [...] I'm just astounded by these. [...] I did so much evil and I dealt so much death, and if I didn't try to do good now, like, I think I would really have a problem. But I'm good because I'm doing good."

"There's something about that, doing good for other people [...] When you're hurting, I don't think there's anything more important that you could do than do something for somebody else [...] that just empowers you and it gives you purpose. And if I'm ever going to think about, should I get up and work out today? Well, I can think about August 24th, 2021, when I had two kids in my arms and a woman behind me, and we're having to run through Kabul [...] while we're being chased by the Taliban. Cool. I want to be in good shape, bro, you know? Find people doing good."

"So in all of the things I've experienced in the past three years, like post-traumatic stress, any single one of those single days over the course of months upon months would be enough for me to be like, *Dude, I'm out of here.* [...] Instead, definitely not on any drugs, exercise every single day, cold plunge, hang out with my friends, do grappling, contribute in a meaningful way back to society. I have an amazing relationship with my beautiful wife. I have incredible children that I'm so proud of. I'm now playing hockey with my son as a 45-year-old dude that just went to a yard sale to buy all the hockey stuff so I can get out there and try to dunk on my eight-year-old who skates around me making me look like an idiot. I also got all my lacrosse stuff. I got tap shoes so I can start doing tap dancing with my four-year-old. These are the things that healthy people do. Sitting on the couch, eating a bunch of shit, not going outside, not

having any relationships, not having any community, not finding ways to give back to their community. Of course you're broken. So how do you get off the drugs? You start doing little tiny little bits, 1% improvement every single day. And ultimately, the sun is brighter, your wife is more beautiful, your kids are just a little bit more rad, you know, and you're able to go do more good for more people."

*These notes were collected by psychotherapist and author Emil Barna in his efforts to assist with professional development and further education for himself and those who read them. You can find out more about Emil by visiting [www.barnacc.com](http://www.barnacc.com)*