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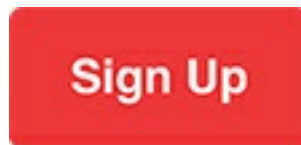
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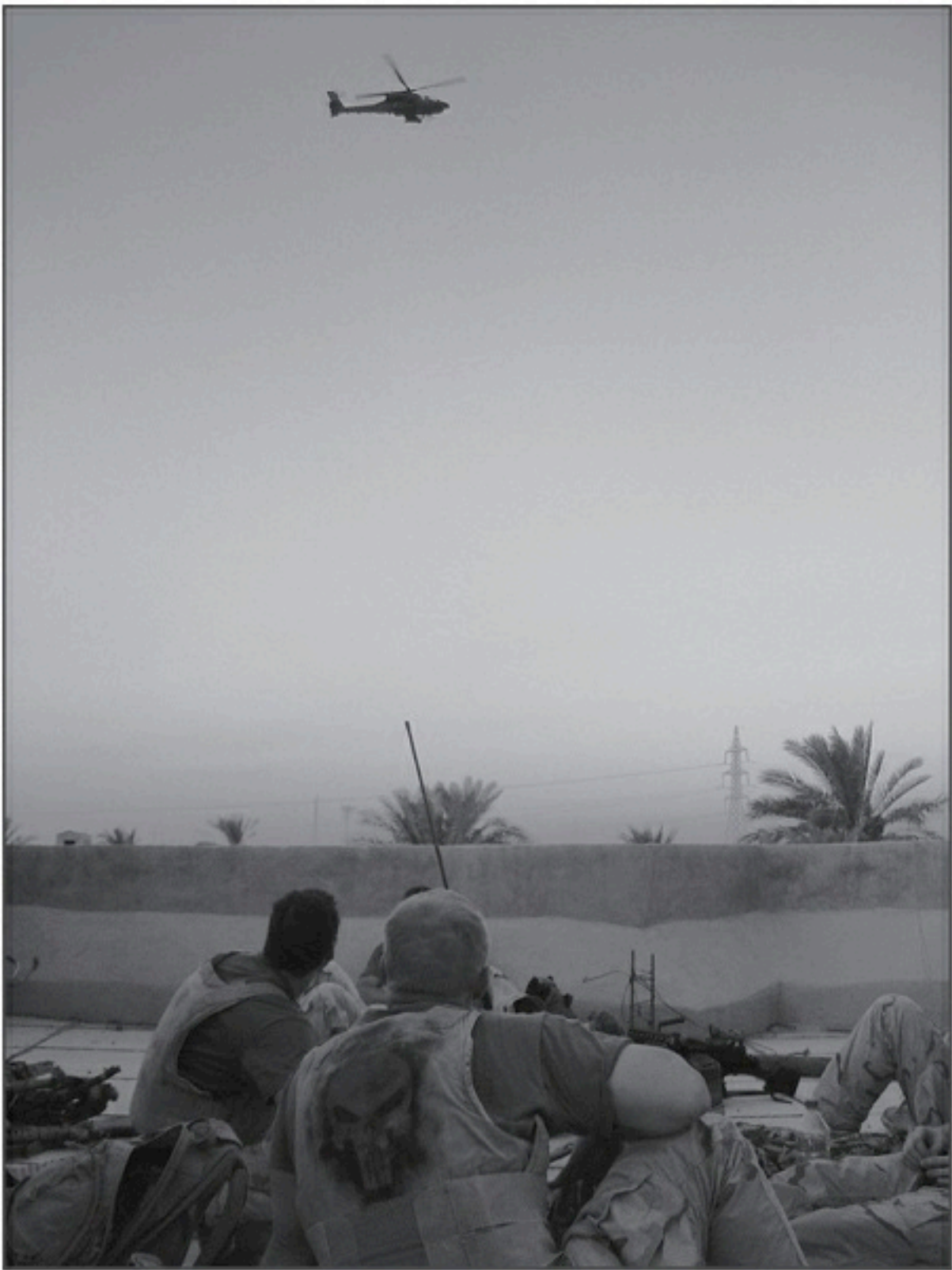
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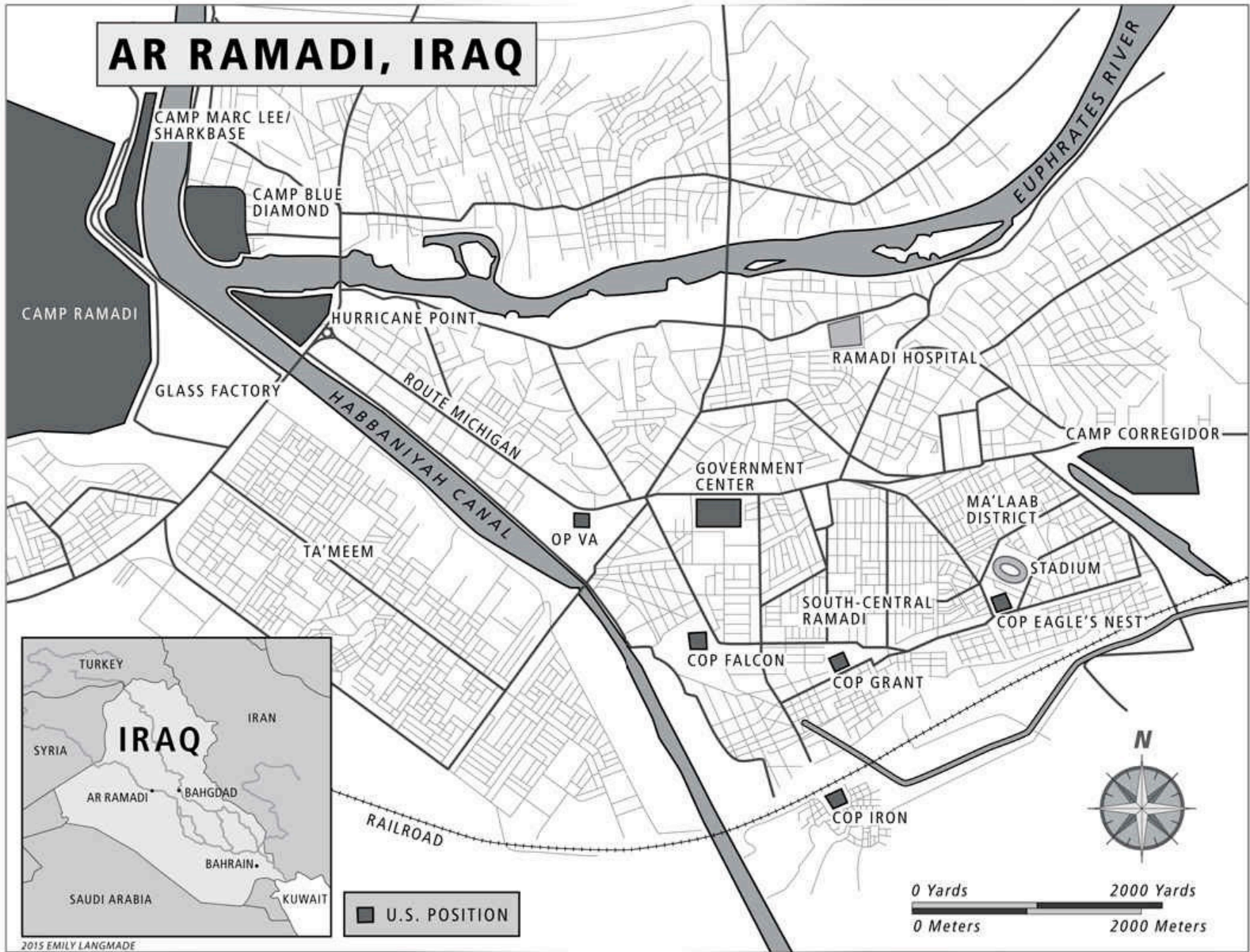
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Dawn breaks over South-Central Ramadi. Task Unit Bruiser, Charlie Platoon sniper overwatch deep into enemy territory with AH-64 Apache gunship overhead. Enemy fighters shot thousands of rounds at the helicopter as they overflew the city.
(Photo courtesy of the authors)

Dedicated to Marc Lee, Mike Monsoor, and Ryan Job—three courageous warriors, SEAL teammates, and friends—who valiantly wielded their big machine guns on the mean streets of Ramadi and laid down their lives so that others might live.

AR RAMADI, IRAQ



PREFACE

“So, there I was....”

Plenty of glorified war stories start like that. In the SEAL Teams, we make fun of those who tell embellished tales about themselves. A typical war story told in jest about something a SEAL did usually begins like this: “So, no shit, there I was, knee-deep in grenade pins....”

This book isn’t meant to be an individual’s glorified war story. As SEALs, we operate as a team of high-caliber, multitalented individuals who have been through perhaps the toughest military training and most rigorous screening process anywhere. But in the SEAL program, it is all about *the Team*. The sum is far greater than the parts. We refer to our professional warfare community simply as “the Teams.” We call ourselves “team guys.” This book describes SEAL combat operations and training through our eyes—from our individual perspectives—and applies our experience to leadership and management practices in the business world.

Yet, our SEAL operations were not about us as individuals; our stories are of the SEAL platoon and task unit we were lucky enough to lead. Chris Kyle, the SEAL sniper and author of the best seller *American Sniper*, which inspired the movie, was one member of that platoon and

task unit—Charlie Platoon’s lead sniper and point man in Task Unit Bruiser. He played a part in the combat examples in this book, as did a host of other teammates who, though deserving of recognition, remain out of the spotlight. Far from being ours alone, the war stories in this book are of the brothers and leaders we served with and fought alongside—the Team. The combat scenarios describe how we confronted obstacles as a team and overcame those challenges together. After all, there can be no leadership where there is no team.

* * *

Between the Vietnam War and the Global War on Terrorism, the U.S. military experienced a thirty-year span of virtually no sustained combat operations. With the exception of a few flashes of conflict (Grenada, Panama, Kuwait, Somalia), only a handful of U.S. military leaders had any real, substantial combat experience. In the SEAL Teams, these were the “dry years.” As those who served in heavy combat situations in the jungles of Vietnam retired, their combat leadership lessons faded.

All that changed on September 11, 2001, when the horrific terrorist attacks on the U.S. homeland launched America once again into sustained conflict. More than a decade of continuous war and tough combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan gave birth to a new generation of leaders in the ranks of America’s fighting forces. These leaders were forged not in classrooms through hypothetical training and theory, but through practical, hands-on experience on the front lines of war—the front echelon.¹ Leadership theories were tested in combat; hypotheses put through trials of fire. Across the ranks of the U.S. military services, forgotten wartime lessons were rewritten—in blood. Some leadership principles developed in training proved ineffective in

actual combat. Thus, effective leadership skills were honed while those that proved impractical were discarded, spawning a new generation of combat leaders from across the broad ranks of all U.S. military services—Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force—and those of our allies. The U.S. Navy SEAL Teams were at the forefront of this leadership transformation, emerging from the triumphs and tragedies of war with a crystallized understanding of what it takes to succeed in the most challenging environments that combat presents.

Among this new generation of combat leaders there are many war stories. After years of successful operations, including the heroic raid that killed Osama bin Laden, U.S. Navy SEALs have piqued the public's interest and received more attention than most of us ever wanted. This spotlight has shed light on aspects of our organization that should remain secret. In this book, we are careful not to remove that shroud any further. We do not discuss classified programs or violate nondisclosure agreements surrounding our operational experiences.

Many SEAL memoirs have been written—some by experienced and well-respected operators who wanted to pass on the heroic deeds and accomplishments of our tribe; a few, unfortunately, by SEALs who hadn't contributed much to the community. Like so many of our SEAL teammates, we had a negative view when SEAL books were published.

Why then would we choose to write a book? As battlefield leaders, we learned extremely valuable lessons through success and failure. We made mistakes and learned from them, discovering what works and what doesn't. We trained SEAL leaders and watched them implement the principles we ourselves had learned with the same success on difficult battlefields. Then, as we worked with businesses in the civilian sector, we again saw the leadership principles we followed in combat lead to

victory for the companies and executives we trained. Many people, both in the SEAL Teams and in the businesses we worked with, asked us to document our lessons learned in a concrete way that leaders could reference.

We wrote this book to capture those leadership principles for future generations, so that they may not be forgotten, so that as new wars begin and end, such crucial lessons will not have to be relearned—rewritten in more blood. We wrote this so that the leadership lessons can continue to impact teams beyond the battlefield in all leadership situations—any company, team, or organization in which a group of people strives to achieve a goal and accomplish a mission. We wrote this book for leaders everywhere to utilize the principles we learned to lead and win.

Who are we to write such a book? It may seem that anyone who believes they can write a book on leadership must think themselves the epitome of what every leader should aspire to be. But we are far from perfect. We continue to learn and grow as leaders every day, just as any leaders who are truly honest with themselves must. We were simply fortunate enough to experience an array of leadership challenges that taught us valuable lessons. This book is our best effort to pass those lessons on, not from a pedestal or a position of superiority, but from a humble place, where the scars of our failings still show.

We are Jocko Willink and Leif Babin, SEAL officers who served together in Ar Ramadi, Iraq, during Operation Iraqi Freedom. There, we became intimately familiar with the humbling trials of war. We were lucky enough to build, train, and lead high-performance, winning teams that proved exceptionally effective. We saw firsthand the perils of complacency, having served on a battlefield where at any time the possibility of our position being overrun by a large force of well-armed

enemy fighters was quite real. We know what it means to fail—to lose, to be surprised, outmaneuvered, or simply beaten. Those lessons were the hardest, but perhaps the most important. We learned that leadership requires belief in the mission and unyielding perseverance to achieve victory, particularly when doubters question whether victory is even possible. As SEAL leaders, we developed, tested, confirmed, and captured an array of leadership lessons as well as management and organizational best practices. We then built and ran SEAL leadership training and helped write the doctrine for the next generation of SEAL leaders.

Our SEAL task unit served through the bulk of what has become known as the “Battle of Ramadi.” But this book is not intended as a historical account of those combat operations. In a concise volume such as this, we cannot possibly tell the stories of service and sacrifice by the U.S. military men and women who served, fought, bled, and died there. We—the authors and the SEALs we served with in Ramadi—were tremendously humbled by the courage, dedication, professionalism, selflessness, and sacrifice displayed by the units we served with under both the U.S. Army 2nd Brigade, 28th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, and the U.S. Army 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division—the Ready First Brigade Combat Team. These included a distinguished list of courageous and storied units, both U.S. Army and Marine Corps. It would require an entire book (or series of books) to detail their heroism and unfaltering dedication to the mission and our country. God bless them all.

Inside that Band of Brothers carrying out the broader fight for Ramadi was our SEAL task unit: Naval Special Warfare Task Unit Bruiser. Again, the combat experiences relayed in the following chapters are not meant for historic reference. Although we have used quotes to

impart the message of conversations we had, they are certainly not perfect, and are subject to the passage of time, the constraints of this format, and the shortfalls of memory. Our SEAL combat experiences depicted in this book have been carefully edited or altered to conceal specific tactics, techniques, and procedures, and to guard classified information about when and where specific operations took place and who participated in them. The manuscript was submitted and approved through the Pentagon's Security Review process in accordance with U.S. Department of Defense requirements. We have done our utmost to protect the identities of our brothers in the SEAL Teams with whom we served and for those still serving in harm's way. They are silent professionals and seek no recognition. We take this solemn responsibility to protect them with the utmost seriousness.

We took the same precaution with the rest of the warriors in the Ready First Brigade Combat Team. We have used, almost entirely, rank alone to identify these brave Soldiers and Marines.² This is by no means meant to detract from their service, but only to ensure their privacy and security.

Likewise, we have done our utmost to protect the clients of our leadership and management consulting company, Echelon Front, LLC. We have refrained from using company names, changed the names of individuals, masked industry-specific information, and in some cases altered the positions of executives and industries to protect the identities of people and companies. Their confidentiality is sacrosanct. While the stories of our lessons learned in the business world are based directly on our real experiences, in some cases we combined situations, condensed timelines, and modified story lines to more clearly emphasize the principles we are trying to illustrate.

The idea for this book was born from the realization that the principles critical to SEAL success on the battlefield—how SEALs train and prepare their leaders, how they mold and develop high-performance teams, and how they lead in combat—are directly applicable to success in any group, organization, corporation, business, and, to a broader degree, life. This book provides the reader with our formula for success: the mind-set and guiding principles that enable SEAL leaders and combat units to achieve extraordinary results. It demonstrates how to apply these directly in business and life to likewise achieve victory.



Task Unit Bruiser SEALs unleash lethal machine gun fire and 40mm grenades on insurgents during a clearance operation in southeast Ramadi.

(Photo courtesy of Michael Fumento)

INTRODUCTION

Ramadi, Iraq: The Combat Leader's Dilemma

Leif Babin

Only the low rumble of diesel engines could be heard as the convoy of Humvees¹ eased to a stop along the canal road. Iraqi farm fields and groves of date palms spread for some distance into the darkness in all directions. The night was quiet. Only the occasional barking of a distant dog and a lonely flickering light gave any indication of the Iraqi village beyond. If intelligence reports were accurate, that village harbored a high-level terrorist leader and perhaps his entourage of well-armed fighters. No lights were visible from the convoy, and darkness blanketed the road, blacking out most of the surroundings to the naked eye. But through the green glow of our night-vision goggles a flurry of activity could be seen: a platoon of Navy SEALs kitted up with helmets, body armor, weapons, and gear, along with an element of Iraqi soldiers, dismounted from the vehicles and quickly aligned in patrol formation.

An explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) bomb technician pushed forward and checked out a dirt bridge that crossed the canal ahead. Insurgents often planted deadly explosives at such choke points. Some were powerful enough to wipe out an entire vehicle and all its occupants

in a sudden inferno of flying jagged metal and searing heat. For now, the way ahead appeared clear, and the assault force of SEALs and Iraqi soldiers stealthily pushed across the bridge on foot toward a group of buildings where the terrorist reportedly took refuge. A particularly evil insurgent responsible for the deaths of American Soldiers, Iraqi security forces, and innocent civilians, this notorious al Qaeda in Iraq emir had successfully evaded capture for months. Now was a critical opportunity to capture or kill him before his next attack.

The SEAL assault force patrolled up a narrow street between the high walls of residential compounds and moved to the door of the target building.

BOOM!

The deep concussion from the explosive breaching charge shattered the quiet night. It was a hell of a wake-up call for the occupants inside the house as the door blew in, and aggressive, well-armed men with weapons ready for a fight entered the house. The Humvees pushed forward across the bridge, down the narrow street wide enough only for a single vehicle, and came to a stop in security positions around the target building. Each vehicle's turret contained a SEAL manning a heavy machine gun, ready to provide fire support if things went sideways.

I was the ground force commander, the senior SEAL in charge of this operation. I had just stepped out of the command vehicle and onto the street near the target building, when suddenly someone yelled: "We've got a squirter!" It was our EOD operator nearby who had seen the "squirter," meaning someone fleeing the target building. Perhaps it was the terrorist himself or someone with information on his whereabouts. We couldn't allow him to escape. The EOD operator and I were the only ones in position to pursue him, so we sprinted after the man. We chased

him down a narrow alleyway, around a group of buildings, and down another dark alleyway that paralleled the street where our Humvees were parked. Finally, we caught up to him, a middle-aged Iraqi man in a traditional Arabic robe, or *dishdasha*. As we were trained, he was quickly forced to the ground and his hands controlled. Those hands didn't possess a weapon, but he might have a grenade in his pocket or, worse, be wearing an explosive suicide belt under his clothing. Anyone associated with such a high-level terrorist might have such deadly devices, and we couldn't assume otherwise. Just to be sure, he had to be searched quickly.

In that instant, I became keenly aware that we were all alone in the world, totally separated from our unit. The rest of our SEAL assault force didn't know where we were. There hadn't been time to notify them. I wasn't even sure exactly where we were located relevant to their position. All around us were darkened windows and rooftops of uncleared buildings, where enemy fighters might be lurking, preparing to attack and unleash hell on us at any second. We had to get back and link up with our troops ASAP.

But even before we could cuff the man's hands and begin a pat-down search for weapons, I heard movement. As I looked down the alleyway through my night-vision goggles, suddenly seven or eight men rounded the corner not forty yards from us. They were heavily armed and rapidly moving toward us. For a split second, my mind questioned what my eyes were seeing. But there it was: the unmistakable outlines of AK-47 rifles, an RPG-7² shoulder-fired rocket, and at least one belt-fed machine gun. They weren't there to shake our hands. These were armed enemy fighters maneuvering to attack.

Now, the two of us—the EOD operator and I—were in a hell of a

tight spot. The subdued Iraqi man and possible terrorist we were holding had not yet been searched, a situation that carried huge risks. We needed to fall back and link up with the rest of our force. Now, with a larger enemy force maneuvering on us with heavier firepower, the two of us were outnumbered and outgunned. Finally, I desperately needed to resume my role as ground force commander, dispense with handling prisoners, and get back to my job of command and control for the assault force, our vehicles, and coordination with our distant supporting assets. All this had to be accomplished immediately.

I had deployed to Iraq before, but never had I been in a situation like this. Though combat is often depicted in movies and video games, this was not a movie and it certainly was no game. These were heavily armed and dangerous men determined to kill American and Iraqi troops. Were any of us to fall into their hands, we could expect to be tortured in unspeakable ways and then decapitated on video for all the world to see. They wanted nothing more than to kill us and were willing to die by the dozen to do so.

Blood pumping, adrenaline surging, I knew every nanosecond counted. This situation could overwhelm the most competent leader and seasoned combat veteran. But the words of my immediate boss—our task unit commander, Lieutenant Commander Jocko Willink—echoed in my head, words I'd regularly heard during a full year of intensive training and preparation: "Relax. Look around. Make a call." Our SEAL platoon and task unit had trained extensively through dozens of desperate, chaotic, and overwhelming situations to prepare for just such a moment as this. I understood how to implement the Laws of Combat that Jocko had taught us: Cover and Move, Simple, Prioritize and Execute, and Decentralized Command. The Laws of Combat were the

key to not just surviving a dire situation such as this, but actually thriving, enabling us to totally dominate the enemy and *win*. They guided my next move.

Prioritize: Of all the pressing tasks at hand, if I didn't first handle the armed enemy fighters bearing down on us within the next few seconds nothing else would matter. We would be dead. Worse, the enemy fighters would continue their attack and might kill more of our SEAL assault force. This was my highest priority.

Execute: Without hesitation, I engaged the enemy fighters moving toward us with my Colt M4 rifle, hammering the first insurgent in line carrying the RPG with three to four rounds to the chest, dead center. As he dropped, I rapidly shifted fire to the next bad guy, then to the next. The muzzle flashes and report of the rifle announced to all within earshot that a firefight was on. The group of enemy fighters hadn't bargained for this. They panicked, and those who could still run beat a hasty retreat back the way they had come. Some crawled and others dragged the wounded and dying around the street corner and out of sight as I continued to engage them. I knew I had hit at least three or four of them. Though the rounds had been accurate and impacted the enemy fighters' centers of mass, the 5.56mm round was just too small to have much knock-down power. Now the bad guys were around the corner, some no doubt dead or gravely wounded and soon to be. But surely those who were unscathed would regroup and attack again, likely rounding up even more fighters to join their efforts.

We needed to move. There was no time for a complex plan. Nor did I have the luxury of providing specific direction to my shooting buddy, the EOD operator next to me. But we had to execute immediately. Having dealt with the highest priority task—armed enemy fighters maneuvering

to attack—and with that threat at least temporarily checked, our next priority was to fall back and link up with our SEAL assault force. To do this, the EOD operator and I utilized Cover and Move—teamwork. I provided cover fire while he bounded back to a position where he could cover me. Then I moved to a new position to cover for him. Thus, we leapfrogged our way back toward the rest of our team with the prisoner in tow. As soon as we reached the cover of a concrete wall in a perpendicular alleyway, I kept my weapon at the ready to cover while the EOD operator conducted a quick search of the prisoner. Finding no weapons, we then continued back and linked up with our team and, once there, handed off the prisoner to the designated prisoner-handling team with the assault force. Then I resumed my role as ground force commander, directing my mobility commander in charge of the vehicles to move a Humvee with its .50-caliber heavy machine gun to a position where we could repel any further attacks from the direction the enemy fighters had come. Next I had our SEAL radioman communicate with our Tactical Operations Center (TOC) located miles away to keep them informed and get the TOC spinning to coordinate air support to assist us.

For the next half hour, the insurgent fighters attempted to maneuver on us and dumped hundreds of rounds in our direction. But we remained one step ahead of them and repeatedly beat back their attacks. The man we had chased down turned out not to be our target. He was briefly detained for questioning, turned over to a detention facility, but then released. We didn't find our target that night. The al Qaeda in Iraq emir had apparently departed sometime prior to our arrival. But we killed at least a handful of his fighters and we collected valuable intelligence on his operations and organization. Though the operation failed to achieve its primary objective, we did demonstrate to the terrorist and his cronies

that there were no areas where they could safely hide. This likely forced him (in the short term, at least) to focus efforts on his own preservation rather than plotting his next attack. In that, we had helped protect American lives, in addition to Iraqi security forces and innocent civilians, which was at least a consolation prize.

For me, the biggest gain was in leadership lessons learned. Some were simple, as in the acknowledgment that before any combat operation, I needed to do a much more careful map study to memorize the basic layout and the area around the target for those times when I couldn't immediately access my map. Some lessons were procedural, like establishing clear guidance for all our operators about just how far we should chase squirts without first coordinating with the rest of the team. Other lessons were strategic: with proper understanding and application of the Laws of Combat, we had not only survived a difficult and dangerous situation but dominated. As an entire generation of SEAL combat leaders and I would learn, these Laws of Combat could be applied with equal effectiveness in an intense firefight or in far less dynamic or high-pressure situations. They guided me through months of sustained urban combat in Ramadi, throughout my career as a SEAL officer, and beyond.

Those same principles are the key to any team's success on the battlefield or in the business world—any situation where a group of people must work together to execute a task and accomplish a mission. When applied to any team, group, or organization, the proper understanding and execution of these Laws of Combat would mean one thing: victory.

LEADERSHIP: THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR

Leif Babin and Jocko Willink

This book is about leadership. It was written for leaders of teams large and small, for men and women, for any person who aspires to better themselves. Though it contains exciting accounts of SEAL combat operations, this book is not a war memoir. It is instead a collection of lessons learned from our experiences to help other leaders achieve victory. If it serves as a useful guide to leaders who aspire to build, train, and lead high-performance winning teams, then it has accomplished its purpose.

Among the legions of leadership books in publication, we found most focus on individual practices and personal character traits. We also observed that many corporate leadership training programs and management consulting firms do the same. But without a team—a group of individuals working to accomplish a mission—there can be no leadership. The only meaningful measure for a leader is whether the team succeeds or fails. For all the definitions, descriptions, and characterizations of leaders, there are only two that matter: effective and ineffective. Effective leaders lead successful teams that accomplish their mission and win. Ineffective leaders do not. The principles and concepts described in this book, when properly understood and implemented, enable any leader to become effective and dominate his or her battlefield.

Every leader and every team at some point or time will fail and must confront that failure. That too is a big part of this book. We are by no means infallible leaders; no one is, no matter how experienced. Nor do we have all the answers; no leader does. We've made huge mistakes. Often our mistakes provided the greatest lessons, humbled us, and enabled us to grow and become better. For leaders, the humility to admit and own mistakes and develop a plan to overcome them is essential to

success. The best leaders are not driven by ego or personal agendas. They are simply focused on the mission and how best to accomplish it.

* * *

As leaders, we have experienced both triumph and tragedy. The bulk of our combat experiences and the stories told in this book come from what will always be the highlight of our military careers: SEAL Team Three, Task Unit Bruiser, and our historic combat deployment to Ar Ramadi, Iraq, in 2006 through what became known as the “Battle of Ramadi.” Jocko led Bruiser as task unit commander. Leif and his SEALs of Charlie Platoon, including lead sniper and point man Chris Kyle, the “American Sniper,” and their brother SEALs in Delta Platoon fought in what remains some of the heaviest, sustained urban combat operations in the history of the SEAL Teams. Bruiser SEALs played an integral role in the U.S. Army 1st Armored Division, Ready First Brigade’s “Seize, Clear, Hold, and Build” strategy that systemically liberated the war-torn, insurgent-held city of Ramadi and radically lowered the level of violence. These operations established security in the most dangerous and volatile area in Iraq at the time and set the conditions for the “Anbar Awakening,” a movement that eventually turned the tide for the United States in Iraq.

In the spring of 2006 when Task Unit Bruiser first arrived in Ramadi, the war-torn capital city of Al Anbar Province was the deadly epicenter of the Iraqi insurgency. Ramadi, a city of four hundred thousand, was a total war zone marred by rubble-pile buildings and bomb craters—the scars of continuous violence. At that time, U.S. forces controlled only about one-third of the city. A brutal insurgency of well-armed and determined enemy fighters controlled the rest. Every day, brave U.S.

Soldiers and Marines were bloodied. The Camp Ramadi medical facility saw a near constant flow of severely wounded or dead. Valiant U.S. military surgical teams desperately fought to save lives. A U.S. intelligence report leaked to the press grimly labeled Ramadi and Anbar Province “all but lost.” Virtually no one thought it possible that U.S. forces could turn the situation around there and win.

Through the summer and fall of 2006, Jocko orchestrated Task Unit Bruiser’s contribution to the Ready First Brigade’s efforts as his SEAL platoons fought side by side with U.S. Army Soldiers and Marines to clear out enemy-held areas of the city. Leif led Charlie Platoon’s SEALs in scores of violent gun battles and highly effective sniper overwatch missions. Delta Platoon fought countless fierce battles as well. Together, Task Unit Bruiser SEALs—snipers, riflemen, and machine gunners—killed hundreds of enemy fighters and disrupted enemy attacks on U.S. Soldiers, Marines, and Iraqi security forces.

Bruiser SEALs frequently spearheaded the Ready First operations as the first U.S. troops on the ground in the most dangerous, enemy-held neighborhoods. We secured buildings, took the high ground, and then provided cover as Soldiers and Marines moved into contested areas and Army combat engineers furiously worked to build and fortify outposts in enemy territory. Bruiser SEALs and the Ready First Soldiers and Marines built a bond that will forever be remembered by those who served there. Through much blood, sweat, and toil, the Ready First Combat Team and Task Unit Bruiser accomplished the mission. The violent insurgency was routed from the city, tribal sheikhs in Ramadi joined with U.S. forces, and the Anbar Awakening was born. Ultimately, in the months following TU Bruiser’s departure, Ramadi was stabilized and the level of violence plummeted to levels previously unimaginable.

Tragically, Task Unit Bruiser paid a tremendous cost for the success of these operations: eight SEALs were wounded and three of the best SEAL warriors imaginable gave their lives. Marc Lee and Mike Monsoor were killed in action; Ryan Job was blinded by an enemy sniper's bullet and later died while in the hospital recovering from surgery to repair his combat wounds. These losses were devastating to us. And yet they were only three of nearly one hundred U.S. troops killed in action that were part of the Ready First Brigade Combat Team, each one a tragic, immeasurable loss.

Despite the doubters and naysayers, Ramadi was won, the city stabilized, and the populace secured. By early 2007, enemy attacks plunged from an average of thirty to fifty each day throughout much of 2006, to an average of one per week, then one per month. Ramadi remained a model of stability and one of the safest areas of Iraq, outside the historically stable Kurdish-controlled north, for years afterward.

These operations were victorious but also extremely humbling; the takeaways—both good and bad—vast. The Battle of Ramadi provided a litany of lessons learned, which we were able to capture and pass on. The greatest of these was the recognition that leadership is the most important factor on the battlefield, the single greatest reason behind the success of any team. By leadership, we do not mean just the senior commanders at the top, but the crucial leaders at every level of the team—the senior enlisted leaders, the fire team leaders in charge of four people, the squad leaders in charge of eight, and the junior petty officers that stepped up, took charge, and led. They each played an integral role in the success of our team. We were fortunate for the opportunity to lead such an amazing group of SEALs who triumphed in that difficult fight.

Upon returning home from combat, we stepped into critical roles as leadership instructors. For many years, Navy SEAL leadership training consisted almost entirely of OJT (on the job training) and mentoring. How a junior leader was brought up depended entirely on the strength, experience, and patient guidance of a mentor. Some mentors were exceptional; others, lacking. While mentorship from the right leaders is critical, this method left some substantial gaps in leadership knowledge and understanding. We helped to change that and developed leadership training curriculum to build a strong foundation for all SEAL leaders.

As the officer in charge of all training for the West Coast SEAL Teams, Jocko directed some of the most realistic and challenging combat training in the world. He placed new emphasis on training leaders in critical decision making and effective communication in high-pressure situations to better prepare them for combat. Leif ran the SEAL Junior Officer Training Course, the basic leadership training program for every officer who graduated from the SEAL training pipeline. There, he reshaped and enhanced training to more effectively establish the critical leadership foundations necessary for new SEAL officers to succeed in combat. In these roles, we helped guide a new generation of SEAL leaders who continue to perform with unparalleled success on the battlefield, validating the leadership principles we taught them.

* * *

Some may wonder how Navy SEAL combat leadership principles translate outside the military realm to leading any team in any capacity. But combat is reflective of life, only amplified and intensified. Decisions have immediate consequences, and everything—absolutely everything—is at stake. The right decision, even when all seems lost, can

snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. The wrong decision, even when a victorious outcome seems all but certain, can result in deadly, catastrophic failure. In that regard, a combat leader can acquire a lifetime of leadership lessons learned in only a few deployments.

We hope to dispel the myth that military leadership is easy because subordinates robotically and blindly follow orders. On the contrary, U.S. military personnel are smart, creative, freethinking individuals—human beings. They must literally risk life and limb to accomplish the mission. For this reason, they must believe in the cause for which they are fighting. They must believe in the plan they are asked to execute, and most important, they must believe in and trust the leader they are asked to follow. This is especially true in the SEAL Teams, where innovation and input from everyone (including the most junior personnel) are encouraged.

Combat leadership requires getting a diverse team of people in various groups to execute highly complex missions in order to achieve strategic goals—something that directly correlates with any company or organization. The same principles that make SEAL combat leaders and SEAL units so effective on the battlefield can be applied to the business world with the same success.

Since leaving the SEAL Teams, we have worked with companies across a wide array of industries, from the financial, energy, technology, and construction sectors to the insurance, auto, retail, manufacturing, pharmaceutical, and service sectors. Having trained and worked with a large number of leaders and company leadership teams, we have witnessed the extraordinary impact in increased efficiency, productivity, and profitability that results when these principles are properly understood and implemented.

The leadership and teamwork concepts contained in this book are not abstract theories, but practical and applicable. We encourage leaders to do the things they know they probably should be doing but aren't. By not doing those things, they are failing as leaders and failing their teams. While rooted in common sense and based on the reality of practical experience, these principles require skill to implement. Such concepts are *simple, but not easy*,³ and they apply to virtually any situation—to any group, team, organization, or individual seeking to improve performance, capability, efficiency, and teamwork. They are sometimes counterintuitive and require focused effort and training to implement in practice. But this book provides the necessary guidance so that anyone can apply the principles and, with dedication and discipline over time, master them and become effective leaders.

ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

The lessons we learned as SEAL leaders through our combined years of experience are numerous. For this book, we have focused our efforts on the most critical aspects: the fundamental building blocks of leadership. The book derives its title from the underlying principle—the mind-set—that provides the foundation for all the rest: Extreme Ownership. Leaders must own everything in their world. There is no one else to blame.

This book is organized into three parts: Part I: “Winning the War Within”; Part II: “The Laws of Combat”; and Part III: “Sustaining Victory.” “Winning the War Within” develops the fundamental building blocks and mind-set necessary to lead and win. “The Laws of Combat” covers the four critical concepts (described earlier) that enable a team to perform at the highest level and dominate. Finally, “Sustaining Victory” discusses the more nuanced and difficult balance that leaders must navigate in order to maintain the edge and keep the team perpetually

operating at the highest level.

Each chapter focuses on a different leadership concept, each unique though closely related and often mutually supporting. Within each chapter there are three subsections. The first identifies a leadership lesson learned through our U.S. Navy SEAL combat or training experience. The second subsection explains that leadership principle. The third demonstrates the principle's application to the business world, based on our work with a multitude of companies in a broad range of industries.

We believe in these leadership concepts because we have seen them work time and again, both in combat and in business. Their proper application and understanding ensure effective leaders and high-performing teams that produce extraordinary results. These principles empower those teams to dominate their battlefields by enabling leaders to fulfill their purpose: *lead* and *win*.