Lone Survivor

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MARCUS LUTTRELL

Marcus Luttrell grew up in Texas and began training to become a Navy SEAL at the age of fourteen. He enlisted in the Navy in 1999 and served in Iraq during the 2003 invasion of the country. In 2005, Luttrell was deployed to Afghanistan, where he was involved in the famous Operation Red Wings (which he calls "Redwing"), the principle subject of his book *Lone Survivor* (2007). For his bravery in the aftermath of the operation, Luttrell received the Purple Heart and the Navy Cross. In the last decade, Luttrell founded the Lone Survivor Foundation for helping wounded American service members, got married, had two children, and began hosting *After Action*, a TV show about veteran issues.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The memoir revolves around the events of the War on Terror. Marcus discusses the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, which prompted the American government under President George W. Bush to invade the nations of Iraq and Afghanistan in the interest of defeating two terrorist groups, al Qaeda and the Taliban. The War on Terror is still considered a controversial part of American history, with advocates arguing that it made America safer and critics arguing that it inspired more new terrorists than it defeated. Marcus also discusses the changes afflicting the American oil market in the 1970s and 1980s, as the price fixing techniques of OPEC (the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, a group including many Middle Eastern countries) crippled the market for Texas oil companies.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The book that's arguably most similar to *Lone Survivor* is *American Sniper* (2012) by Chris Kyle. Kyle, a friend of Luttrell, was also deployed to Iraq, and may have been inspired to "write" a book (like Luttrell, he used a ghostwriter) after the success of Luttrell's memoir. Furthermore, both Luttrell and Kyle's books have been made into Hollywood films—the former starring Mark Wahlberg, the latter starring Bradley Cooper. There have been many works of fiction inspired by America's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan in the last twenty years, though they tend to take a more cynical view of the war. One of the most critically acclaimed of these works is *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* (2012) by Ben Fountain, set during the course of a football game. Fountain uses this clever conceit to attack the exhibitionism and crudeness of American foreign policy during the War on Terror. Marcus Luttrell also mentions that his favorite film is *The Count of Monte Cristo*, based on the 1844 novel by Alexandre Dumas. In this famous adventure novel, Edmond Dantès, a man wrongfully accused of treason, seeks revenge against the men who plotted his downfall.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Lone Survivor: The Eyewitness Account of Operation Redwing and the Lost Heroes of SEAL Team 10
- **When Written:** ca. 2006-2007
- **Where Written:** Houston, Texas
- **When Published:** June 12, 2007
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary nonfiction
- **Genre:** Memoir, nonfiction, military history
- **Setting:** Afghanistan (with other scenes in Texas, Virginia, and Iraq)
- **Antagonist:** Ben Sharmak / Osama bin Laden / the Taliban / al Qaeda
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

Of course they made it into a movie. It didn't take long for Hollywood to pounce on *Lone Survivor*. In 2013, Universal Pictures released a feature film based on Luttrell's memoir, starring Mark Wahlberg and directed by Peter Berg. The film didn't earn great reviews, but it raked in well over a hundred million dollars, and picked up two Oscar Nominations in technical categories. Weird fact: Marcus Luttrell cameos in the film, seemingly as three different characters.

Where is he now? In the ten years since *Lone Survivor* was published, Marcus Luttrell has become a right-wing political pundit. His TV show, *After Action*, is produced by Glenn Beck, the famous Fox News host, and in 2016 he endorsed Governor Rick Perry for the presidency. At the 2016 Republican National Convention, he spoke in support of Donald Trump.

PLOT SUMMARY

In 2005, Marcus Luttrell is a Navy SEAL serving in the Middle East. He's about to be deployed to Afghanistan for a special mission, along with half a dozen of his teammates. Luttrell is a proud supporter of the War on Terror, and a great admirer of President George W. Bush—a "true Texan," just like him.

On his flight to Afghanistan, Luttrell thinks about his relationship with the American military. For as long as he can

remember, he's been a big, tough kid, and he's long wanted to serve in the military. Growing up in Texas with his twin brother Morgan Luttrell, Luttrell was raised to be strong, confident, and brave. Local ex-marines would teach him how to fight and fire a gun.

As a young man, Luttrell signed up for the Navy SEALs, the most challenging branch of the military. As part of his training, Luttrell had to attend a rigorous training camp, during which he worked harder than he'd ever worked in his life. Under the tutelage of the tough but fair Inspector Reno Alberto, Luttrell bulks up and learns how to conduct himself on land and in the water. The most challenging part of Luttrell's training is the legendary "Hell Week," the period during which SEAL recruits are worked exceptionally hard, forbidden from sleeping for long periods of time, and given little to no food. While dozens of recruits give up on their dreams of becoming marines—via the symbolic act of ringing a tiny **bell**—Luttrell stays strong and survives Hell Week. For the rest of his time in SEAL training, Luttrell learns about parachuting and firing guns, and passes courses that train him to act as a medic for his fellow soldiers.

Luttrell officially graduates from SEAL training in early 2002. By this time, the American military is deploying to the Middle East in response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, engineered by Osama bin Laden, the head of al Qaeda. Luttrell is hot for revenge, and looks forward to fighting the "ungodly," wicked terrorists who planned the attacks. As he sees it, the American military needs to use aggressive tactics to defeat al Qaeda, as well as the terrorist organization known as the Taliban, which is believed to be cooperating with al Qaeda. Luttrell has no patience for figures in the "liberal media" who criticize the American war effort for being too harsh and unethical.

Luttrell deploys to Bahrain for a short time, where he sees first-hand the widespread opposition to America in the Muslim world, especially in the Middle East. In 2005, he deploys to Afghanistan, where, Luttrell believes, terrorists planned the September 11 attacks. In Afghanistan, Luttrell works closely with his friends Lieutenant Michael Patrick Murphy, or "Mikey," Petty Officer Danny Dietz, and Matthew Gene Axelson, or "Axe," among other members of SEAL Team Ten. The team's main duties include searching the Hindu Kush mountains for wandering Taliban soldiers, and tracking down important Taliban commanders.

Luttrell, Danny, Mikey, and Axe are deployed on a secret mission known as Operation Redwing. As a part of this mission, they're sent into the Hindu Kush mountains in search of a dangerous Taliban leader named Ben Sharmak. Sharmak is responsible for killing many American soldiers, and he commands a vast army of Taliban troops. Because of Sharmak's power, it's imperative that Luttrell and his teammates have the element of surprise—in an ordinary fight, they'd be impossibly outnumbered.

Late at night, The SEALs land near the village where Sharmak is suspected to be living, and stake out the area. The next day, they cross paths with a group of Afghan goatherds, posing a major challenge to the mission. If the SEALs let the goatherds go, there's a good chance that the goatherds will either tell Taliban soldiers about the SEALs, or they'll be tortured and forced to reveal what they know. Nevertheless, Luttrell and Mikey are reluctant to murder innocent people, while Axe wants to kill them and Danny doesn't voice an opinion. In the end, the SEALs vote to let the goatherds go free.

Within just a few hours, dozens of Taliban soldiers show up in the mountains, no doubt sent there by the goatherds. The SEALs are put in an impossible position. They fight back, killing many Taliban soldiers, but they're so badly outnumbered that they have no choice but to retreat, jumping down the side of the mountain again and again. In the conflict, Luttrell's three fellow SEALs are murdered. Luttrell tries to care for his men, since he's the team medic, but he loses his medical supplies in a fall down the mountain. In his moment of crisis, Luttrell prays to God for mercy. Amazingly, Luttrell is able to hold onto his rifle during his fall, and then he's able to hide from the Taliban troops.

Luttrell's leg has been badly wounded in a grenade explosion, and he's cracked his vertebrae. He's losing a lot of blood. He sends out a distress signal, and then attempts to search for water. Meanwhile, responding to a distress signal put out by Mikey shortly before his death, the military sends a helicopter full of SEALs to assist in the rescue. However, the Taliban shoot down the helicopter, killing everyone onboard. Back in the United States, it's widely reported that all four marines involved in Operation Redwing are dead, devastating Luttrell's parents and his two brothers, Morgan and Scottie.

Luttrell crawls up the side of the mountain, at several points falling back down and further injuring himself. However, he manages to climb up the mountain and find a waterfall. While he's drinking, he realizes that there are three Afghan men pointing guns at him. The three men mean him no harm, however. They are Pashtuns—an ethnic group that lives primarily in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Luttrell explains that the Pashtuns have an ancient custom, *lokhay*, that requires them to take care of people in need, even if it means risking their own life. The leader of three men, a doctor named Sarawa, has Luttrell carried back to his village, Sabray, and treats his wounds. Luttrell is terrified, but realizes he has no choice but to go along with the Pashtuns' offer of help.

In Sabray, Luttrell befriends a man named Mohammad Gulab, the son of the wise elder who runs the village. With Gulab and his father's help, Luttrell is hidden and protected from the Taliban forces. Luttrell later learns that the Taliban are careful to respect the Pashtuns' communities for fear of losing valuable allies. Gulab's father carries a message to an American military base two miles away, explaining that Luttrell is alive.

After the Taliban attempt to raid the village and kill Luttrell, Gulab decides that it's no longer safe for Luttrell to stay there. He leads Luttrell out of the village and into the mountains, where they come face-to-face with Ben Sharmak and his forces. Sharmak orders Gulab to give up Luttrell, or else Sharmak will murder Gulab's entire family. However, Gulab continues to protect Luttrell.

While Gulab and Luttrell are wandering through the forest, they cross paths with a group of American Rangers who've been searching for Luttrell, responding to the emergency beacon he activated. The Rangers have been searching for Luttrell for days, and had begun to think he was dead. They carry Luttrell and Gulab away from the village and back to an American military base. There, Luttrell and Gulab part ways—it's an emotional goodbye for Luttrell, who has no words to convey his gratitude to Gulab for saving his life.

On the military base, Luttrell receives medical treatment for his wounds. He's eventually sent back to America, where he reunites with his family and friends. He also begins to come to terms with the realities of Operation Redwing: he's the lone survivor of the mission. Luttrell travels across the country, visiting the relatives of his deceased teammates and offering his condolences. Luttrell is proud to have served the American military, and feels certain that, if given the option to go back in time, he'd volunteer for the SEALs once again, without a second's hesitation.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Marcus Luttrell – Marcus Luttrell is the protagonist, narrator, and hero of *Lone Survivor*. A Navy SEAL who fights in Iraq and Afghanistan, Luttrell is involved in Operation Redwing, the ill-fated SEAL mission in which Luttrell and three other SEALs are sent to capture or kill Ben Sharmak, a dangerous Taliban official. During the operation, Luttrell's team is attacked by an army of Taliban soldiers, and later, the American helicopter full of SEALs sent to provide backup is shot out of the sky, killing everyone onboard. Luttrell is the only survivor of the brutal battle—hence the title of the book. Over the course of *Lone Survivor*, Luttrell describes his struggle to save his own life in the aftermath of Operation Redwing, as well as his feelings on patriotism, military service, and the War on Terror. He is, in many ways, a model soldier: a good, loyal friend, a faithful servant of his superior officers, and a loving family man and patriot. Luttrell's perspective on the War on Terror, however, is in many ways much more problematic. He sneers at the rules of warfare designed to prevent soldiers from committing war crimes and murdering innocent people, and he paints the people of Afghanistan with a broad brush, seeing them as ungodly, untrustworthy murderers.

Sarawa – The primary doctor for the tiny Pashtun village of Sabray, Sarawa is one of the key figures in the book, and arguably the person most responsible for saving Marcus Luttrell's life. Sarawa finds Luttrell after Luttrell has been wounded by the Taliban soldiers. Instead of turning Luttrell over to the Taliban, Sarawa takes care of Luttrell, treating his wounds and bringing him back to Sabray for further care. Sarawa's behavior proves that, contrary to what Luttrell himself sometimes suggests, the people of Afghanistan aren't all colluding with the Taliban—on the contrary, most of its people are compassionate individuals, willing to help a stranger. However, Luttrell claims that Sarawa helps him because of an ancient Pashtun custom known as *lokhay warkawal*, rather than because of any basic human decency or universal moral values.

Mohammad Gulab – The official police chief for the village of Sabray and, along with Sarawa, the person most responsible for the survival of Marcus Luttrell. Gulab is a kind, honorable man, and he and Luttrell come to like and respect one another, in spite of their language and culture barriers. Gulab risks his own life to protect Luttrell from the Taliban soldiers who menace his village, at one point refusing to give up Luttrell even when the Taliban threaten to murder his entire family. (After the publication of the book, Gulab and Luttrell reconnect and go on to have a rather fraught relationship, best described in the 2016 *Newsweek* article "Marcus Luttrell's Savior, Mohammad Gulab, Claims 'Lone Survivor' Got It Wrong".)

Lieutenant Michael Patrick Murphy / "Mikey" – Lieutenant Michael Patrick Murphy is the best friend of Marcus Luttrell, and one of the ill-fated SEALs involved in Operation Redwing. "Mikey" is a talented, compassionate SEAL, and during Operation Redwing, his compassion leads him to vote to spare the lives of the Afghan goatherds the team encounters—a decision that arguably leads to Mikey's own death. Mikey dies fighting for his life against an army of Taliban soldiers, honoring the SEAL tradition of refusing surrender.

Petty Officer Danny Dietz – Danny Dietz, who Marcus Luttrell describes as a calm, competent, but somewhat reserved man, is one of the four Navy SEALs involved in Operation Redwing. He fights bravely alongside his fellow SEALs, but dies in the "Battle of Murphy's Ridge," in which the SEALs fight off dozens of Taliban soldiers. Dietz's character is somewhat difficult to understand, and he's often depicted as passive—for example, when the SEALs are trying to decide whether to kill the Afghan goatherds or not, Danny refuses to offer an opinion. Nevertheless, Luttrell stresses Danny's bravery and talent.

Matthew Gene Axelson / "Axe" – Matthew Gene Axelson, or "Axe," is one of the four Navy SEALs involved in Operation Redwing. He's murdered in the "Battle of Murphy's Ridge," during which the SEALs fight off dozens of Taliban soldiers. Like his fellow SEALs, Axe is a highly competent, extremely tough soldier. Marcus Luttrell also describes Axe as a very intelligent, pragmatic thinker, who's not afraid to do what is necessary

under pressure. When the SEALs have to decide whether to kill the goatherds or not, Axe immediately argues that killing them is the only way to save their own lives—an argument that the other SEALs ultimately reject, arguably leading to Axe's own death.

President George W. Bush – The 43nd president of the United States from 2001 to 2009, Governor of Texas from 1995 to 2000, and the president most associated with the "War on Terror" of the early 21st century. Bush was president during the American military's invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and he was alternately described as a strong leader and an incompetent fool. Marcus Luttrell hero-worships Bush, whom he sees as the living, breathing embodiment of "Texas values" (even though Bush was actually raised in Connecticut and attended such elite east-coast schools as Philips Andover Academy, Yale, and Harvard).

Ben Sharmak – Ben Sharmak (an alias that Marcus Luttrell uses throughout the book for legal purposes) is a highly dangerous Taliban leader whose capture or assassination is the goal of Operation Redwing. Over the course of the book, Luttrell describes Sharmak as a highly intelligent, crafty opponent for the American military, who uses his military training and ruthlessness to murder not only American soldiers, but also defenseless Afghan families.

Saddam Hussein – Dictator of Iraq during the early years of the War on Terror. Hussein was accused (by the Bush White House) of hoarding biological and chemical "weapons of mass destruction," as well as collaborating with al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. These two accusations were then used as justification for America's invasion of Iraq in 2003, though both were later found to be exaggerated or even false. Hussein was captured in 2003 and executed in 2006.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Osama bin Laden – The Saudi Arabian founder and head of al Qaeda, the organization responsible for the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, and the figure most associated with the enemy side during America's "War on Terror." Bin Laden was killed by American troops in 2011.

Morgan Luttrell – Identical twin brother of Marcus Luttrell and, like Luttrell, a Navy SEAL.

Holly Luttrell – Marcus Luttrell's mother.

Scottie Luttrell – Marcus Luttrell's "kid brother."

Senior Chief Danny Richard Healy – The leader of Marcus Luttrell's SEAL team in Afghanistan, Danny Richard Healy is a talented soldier and a superb tactician (although Luttrell mentions, without providing any details, that he and Healy don't always agree on things).

Petty Officer Shane Patton – Shane Patton is another member of Marcus Luttrell's SEAL team in Afghanistan, described as being a stereotypically laid-back California surfer.

James Suh – James Suh is a member of Marcus Luttrell's SEAL team in Afghanistan. Suh, a Chicago native, is described as being highly likeable.

Maureen – The mother of Lieutenant Michael Patrick Murphy.

Heather – The girlfriend of Lieutenant Michael Patrick Murphy.

Billy Shelton – Former American soldier and Texas resident who trains the adolescent Marcus Luttrell and Morgan Luttrell to be tough and soldierly.

Instructor Reno Alberto – The tough ex-soldier who trains Marcus Luttrell and other Navy SEAL recruits. Luttrell greatly respects "Inspector Reno" for his compassion as well as his tough leadership.

Inspector Sean Mruk – Another tough ex-soldier who trains Marcus Luttrell and other Navy SEAL recruits.

Captain Joe Maguire – Highly respected commanding officer in SEAL Team Two.

Instructor Eric Hall – Marcus Luttrell's instructor during Phase Three of his SEAL training.

Lieutenant Eric Kristensen – Commander of Marcus Luttrell's SEAL Team, Team Ten.

Major Steve Reich – Commander of the emergency recovery mission deployed after the failure of Operation Redwing.

Norzamund – One of the Pashtun guards who protects Marcus Luttrell during his time in Sabray.

Senior Chief Petty Officer Chris Gothro – Military officer who assures Holly Luttrell that Luttrell hasn't officially been declared dead.

Scott Whitehead – Wealthy Texan who builds Marcus Luttrell a house.

Admiral Mike Mullin – Pentagon's chief of Naval Operations, and one of the many high-ranking military officials who personally meets with Marcus Luttrell after he returns to the United States.

Cindy – Matthew Gene Axelson's wife.

Pope John Paul II – Pope and leader of the Catholic Church from 1978 to 2005, and greatly admired by Marcus Luttrell.

President Hamid Karzai – American-supported Afghan president during much of the Bush Presidency.

Mullah Mohammad Omar – Afghan clergyman often considered to be the founder of the Taliban.

President Bill Clinton – The 42nd president of the United States.

Alexandre Dumas – Author of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, the basis for Marcus Luttrell's favorite movie.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

POLITICS AND THE WAR ON TERROR

Lone Survivor takes place during the War on Terror. After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush declared an all-out "war" on terrorism. Bush targeted al Qaeda, the terrorist organization that claimed responsibility for 9/11, led by Osama bin Laden. Bush also approved the invasion of Afghanistan, a country known to be a stronghold for a terrorist group called the Taliban, which was said to be supportive of al Qaeda. While Bush's initial proposal to invade Afghanistan was supported by both Republicans and Democrats in the Senate, he was widely criticized, both in his own country and abroad, for the way he waged the War on Terror. In particular, it was suggested that the Bush administration was wrong to begin by invading Afghanistan, a country whose connection to the 9/11 attacks was tenuous. Bush also came under fire for approving of "enhanced interrogation techniques" (said to be a euphemism for torture, plain and simple) and an aggressive foreign policy that seemed to be motivated around securing American industry's access to Middle Eastern oil, rather than defeating terrorism.

More than once, Marcus Luttrell, the protagonist and narrator of *Lone Survivor*, claims that he's a Navy SEAL, not a politician. But Luttrell clearly has political beliefs (for example, he obviously idolizes Bush), and over the course of his memoir he makes a series of political points about the War on Terror.

Despite his claims of being apolitical, Luttrell offers many of the same explanations for the War on Terror that the Bush administration did. From the beginning of the book, he emphasizes the point that invading Iraq and Afghanistan was a logical, morally justifiable response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, since the people who plotted 9/11 or their loyal supporters were based out of these two countries. Luttrell acknowledges that the people the American military fought in Afghanistan and Iraq may not have been the "precise same guys" who planned 9/11, but still argues that they supported 9/11 and opposed America. Many of Bush's critics on both the Left and the Right argued that the decisions to invade Iraq and Afghanistan made little sense, especially since al Qaeda trained many of its operatives in Saudi Arabia, and was funded largely by Saudi Arabian citizens. In a similar vein, Luttrell argues that military intervention in Iraq was justified by the fact that Saddam Hussein had access to weapons of mass destruction—again, a claim that's been vigorously disputed. Finally, Luttrell echoes the Bush administration's justifications for a strong, militaristic foreign policy in the Middle East, in contrast to the more diplomatic foreign policy style supported by many on the left during the War on Terror. He claims that Middle Easterners will only be swayed by displays of force—meaning that, in effect, the American military will only be able to compel Middle Easterners' loyalty by providing more "shock and awe" than the terrorists do.

Luttrell's observations about the War on Terror are somewhat surprising, considering that he claims not to be editorializing about George W. Bush's military policies. Yet the fact is that he frequently offers his political beliefs, even when they seem not to have any direct relevance to the plot of his memoir (for example, in the case of his view on weapons of mass destruction). Luttrell's career in the last ten years, during which he's become a right-wing TV show host and a supporter of Governor Rick Perry and later Donald Trump, confirms what is already obvious in *Lone Survivor*: he's a strongly right-wing political figure. Reflecting his political beliefs, Luttrell defends the strong militarism of the War on Terror—even in the cases of policy decisions such as the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan where military force may have done more harm than good.

BIGOTRY AND AMERICA'S ENEMIES

Most of the events in *Lone Survivor* take place in the Hindu Kush region of Afghanistan. Here, Marcus Luttrell is involved in one of the worst disasters in the history of the Navy SEALs: the failed Operation Redwing, during which Luttrell and his three fellow SEALs are attacked by over a hundred Taliban soldiers. (It's worth noting, however, that Marcus later claimed there were far fewer Taliban soldiers than he'd suggested in his memoir, and some intelligence reports suggest there were as few as a dozen. Even more oddly, Marcus gets the name of the operation slightly wrong—it was actually called "Operation Red Wings.")

For Luttrell, Afghanistan is the jumping-off point for a discussion of America's enemies more broadly. He sees Afghanistan as a hostile place, full of people who despise America and reject basic moral values, such as mercy and compassion. Luttrell also associates these qualities with the people of other Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq, where he also serves. In short, Luttrell often seems to suggest that America's enemies are all the same, united in a common set of corrupt values.

Throughout *Lone Survivor*, Luttrell paints America's enemies during the War on Terror with an outrageously broad brush. At various points, he claims that the "bad guys" in the Middle East are working together. These "bad guys" include al Qaeda, the non-state terrorist organization headed by Osama bin Laden; the Taliban, the terrorist organization originally led by Mullah Mohammad Omar; and the Iraqi government of Saddam

Hussein. Luttrell suggests that all three entities cooperated at various times to plot the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. This suggestion have been disputed in recent years—in particular, the idea that the secular government of Saddam Hussein was cooperating with al Qaeda, a religious extremist, non-state organization. Luttrell also suggests that the terrorists in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Middle Eastern countries subscribe to the same set of un-American values. He claims that America's enemies are united in their belief in an unjust, immoral interpretation of the religion of Islam. He further contrasts extremist Islamic values with the Christian values he was taught as a child, emphasizing the importance of love and mercy. As evidence of the evil of America's enemies, Luttrell brings up the cowardice of Iraqi suicide bombers and the murderousness of Taliban soldiers. He makes little to no effort to distinguish between these different groups' religions or political motivations—they hate America, and that's all Luttrell needs to know about them.

In short, Luttrell's thoughts on America's enemies reek of bigotry and Islamophobia. Throughout *Lone Survivor*, he suggests that Muslims are all alike, and that they've attacked America because their misbegotten religious ideology puts them in conflict with American values—or, as was often said during the War on Terror, "They hate us for our freedoms." In making this argument, Marcus arguably misses a key point of the War on Terror—many of the Muslims who attacked Americans in the Middle East weren't as motivated by ideology as they were responding to America's aggressive, militaristic foreign policy.

But at other points in the book, Luttrell shows signs of a grudging respect for certain people in Afghanistan. During the aftermath of Operation Redwing, Luttrell is severely wounded. The only reason he survives is because of the generosity of a village of Pashtuns—an ethnic group that lives primarily in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Sarawa, a Pashtun doctor, and Mohammad Gulab, a Pashtun police officer, risk their lives to protect Luttrell from the Taliban, and Luttrell is undeniably grateful to them. However, when explaining why Sarawa and Gulab help him, Luttrell argues that they do so because of the Pashtun custom of *lokhar*. According to *lokhar*, Pashtuns must risk their lives to defend people in need. *Lokhar* is a counterpart to the Pashtuns' strong emphasis on violence and honor—values which, Luttrell claims, make them natural Taliban recruits. Even when he's praising the Pashtuns for saving his life, then, Luttrell stresses that the Pashtuns are acting because of an obscure tradition, rather than because of basic human decency, or because of universal moral values. Furthermore, he emphasizes that this tradition is symptomatic, paradoxically, of the Pashtuns' hostility, viciousness, and primitivism. (In a bitter irony, one could just as easily say the same of Marcus: he's been raised in an aggressive, militaristic culture that prepares him for service in the brutal, violent American military.)

In all, Luttrell depicts the people of Afghanistan and the Middle East only through very broad stereotypes, suggesting that all the people of these parts of the world are violent, untrustworthy, and immoral. And even when Luttrell is forced to admit that some Afghans aren't so bad—they've saved his life, after all—he depicts them as strange and fundamentally different from the good, honest, Christian Americans he knows and loves.

MACHISMO AND THE NAVY SEALS

At its core, *Lone Survivor* is a book about a very particular type of masculine culture: the machismo of the U.S. military. American soldiers are recruited and trained for their bravery and toughness, and Navy SEALs are said to be the toughest, most highly trained American soldiers of all. By writing about his time in the SEALs, Marcus Luttrell paints a picture of U.S. military machismo, offering a strong set of ideas about what it means to be a "real man."

Over the course of the book, Luttrell emphasizes three aspects of SEAL machismo: cooperation, stoicism, and pride. Navy SEALs are taught to work together at all costs, and their military training encourages them to think of a "real man" as one who can protect his friends and remain loyal to them at all costs. SEALs are taught to "leave no man behind," and this philosophy becomes very important to Luttrell when he's involved in Operation Redwing. Luttrell fights not only to save his own life, but to protect his fellow SEALs from harm. Furthermore, he's genuinely upset when the military can't recover his fallen friends' bodies, because he feels as if he's failed personally by leaving them behind. Luttrell's behavior, and the SEAL code in general, suggest an interesting variation on traditional Western ideas about manhood: while many versions of machismo stress rugged individualism and the ability to "make it on your own," the SEALs' code suggests that it's primarily about taking care of other people.

Another important aspect of the SEAL code of machismo is stoicism—in other words, the ability to control and conceal one's emotions. Displaying emotion is often considered a sign of weakness, and, by the same logic, being able to control one's emotions at all times is seen as a form of strength. This becomes especially clear when Luttrell is describing his rigorous SEAL training: the manliest, most admirable recruits are the ones who can crack jokes and make light of their situation, rather than revealing their fear. However, the rules of SEAL machismo suggest that it *is* acceptable to display strong emotions under serious circumstances. For example, after Luttrell comes to accept the deaths of his three fellow SEALs, he sheds tears. In this case, Luttrell has "earned" the right to display his emotions, since he's dealing with one of the greatest tragedies a man can face: the deaths of his friends.

The third and most ambiguous aspect of machismo that Luttrell discusses is pride. Navy SEALs are, by almost any measure,

extremely impressive people. They've passed a series of incredibly rigorous tests of their strength, endurance, and willpower, and they risk their lives to protect their country. As a result, they're justifiably proud of their accomplishments. However, the SEALs' pride takes many different forms. Luttrell insists that SEALs are humble and quiet about their accomplishments—echoing the second aspect of machismo, they refrain from *showing* their pride. On the other hand, Luttrell admits that SEALs sometimes brag about their accomplishments and act superior to others, especially other branches of the military. A good example of how SEALs balance pride and humility: describing his achievements in training, Luttrell writes, "SEALs don't look for personal credit, and thus I cannot say who the class voted their Honor Man." Luttrell and the other SEALs are clearly and justifiably proud of themselves, and find ways to express their pride, even if they sometimes do it in a roundabout way.

In some ways, Marcus Luttrell suggests (or his readers can infer) that the War on Terror itself was an extension of SEAL machismo culture. Instead of pursuing diplomacy or economic means of persuasion, the United States under President George W. Bush adopted an aggressive, militaristic foreign policy in Iraq and Afghanistan. Expertly trained American soldiers invaded the two countries, cooperating closely with one another and suppressing their natural feelings of sympathy for civilians. And while the Bush administration presented these invasions as humble, dutiful operations, meant simply to protect American lives, they were widely seen as arrogant, swaggering confirmations of American strength self-righteousness. Luttrell celebrates the macho aspects of the War on Terror, but the last ten years in the Middle East arguably tell a different story: the machismo of the Navy SEALs provoked as much terrorism as it defeated.

ETHICS AND THE "RULES OF ENGAGEMENT"

In arguably the most harrowing scene in *Lone Survivor*, Marcus Luttrell and his three fellow SEALs have to make a difficult ethical decision. They've journeyed to a remote village in Afghanistan, where they're attempting to capture or kill a dangerous Taliban officer named Ben Sharmak. The element of surprise is paramount, since they're badly outnumbered. However, the SEALs cross paths with a group of defenseless goatherds. The SEALs have two choices, neither of which is ideal: 1) let the goatherds go, in which case they'll almost certainly inform the Taliban of the SEALs' arrival, or 2) kill the goatherds to preserve their cover. The SEALs' dilemma comes down to a clash between two very different ways of thinking about war: on one hand, war as a savage, all-out conflict in which almost any actions are justified, including the murder of unarmed goatherds; on the other, war as a moral, systematic endeavor, governed by "rules of engagement."

Throughout *Lone Survivor*, Luttrell shows his support for the first way of thinking about war and criticizes the rules of engagement for endangering the lives of American soldiers. For Luttrell, war is a high-stakes conflict in which almost any of the American troops' actions are justified. Al Qaeda and the Taliban, he argues, are deadly enemies who've caused the deaths of many thousands of American citizens. Therefore, American soldiers should be allowed to use their military training to do anything they can to defeat these terrorist groups. As Luttrell puts it, war is a game with no rules—anyone who thinks there should be rules "like baseball" shouldn't be involved in war to begin with.

However, Luttrell believes that Navy SEALs' right to protect themselves and protect American citizens is being compromised, thanks to "soft" but influential liberal Americans. These liberals, he writes, raise a fuss whenever American soldiers accidentally hurt Middle Eastern civilians, and seem to hate American soldiers more than they hate al Qaeda. It is largely because of liberals in the media, Luttrell believes, that the American soldiers have to obey the rules of engagement—American soldiers can't shoot unarmed civilians unless they have sufficient proof of the civilians' intention to do harm. To this day, Luttrell blames the rules of engagement for his friends' deaths in Afghanistan. After much debate, Luttrell and the other SEALs vote to let the goatherds go, partly because killing them doesn't seem like the moral thing to do, but partly because they're afraid of being vilified as murderers in the American media. After the goatherds run away, Luttrell strongly implies, they inform Ben Sharmak of the SEALs' position, and Sharmak sends an army of hundreds (or maybe just dozens) of Taliban soldiers to murder the SEALs.

Luttrell and his fellow SEALs faced a moral challenge that most people, thankfully, never have to think about. Looking back, he says, he'd have killed the goatherds without a second thought, thereby saving the lives of three of his closest friends. But perhaps Luttrell is wrong to criticize the rules of engagement themselves. Even if these rules can endanger SEALs' lives, they've been put in place to prevent soldiers from hurting innocent people—not simply because of the influence of the "hateful" liberal media. More than once, Luttrell complains that the American military has to deal with rules of engagement while the Taliban can do "whatever they want" to win. But this is what makes the rules of engagement so important: they prevent American soldiers from becoming as murderous and cruel as the terrorists they fight. During the War on Terror, American soldiers at Abu Ghraib prison tortured, raped, and abused Middle Easterners, some of whom hadn't been convicted of any crime. The Abu Ghraib incident suggests that soldiers, if left to their own devices, will sometimes sacrifice their moral codes and become bullies and sadists. Luttrell treats the rules of engagement as an irritation, but in fact they're necessary for protecting the values of honor, respect,

and decency that, by Luttrell's own argument, Americans are fighting to defend.

SURVIVAL AND TRAUMA

As the title would suggest, *Lone Survivor* explores the experience of living on after a horrible tragedy, and the kinds of emotions that survivors have to deal with in order to preserve their mental health. Marcus Luttrell is the lone survivor of a horrific shootout with Taliban soldiers near the Afghan village of Sabray. Living through a firefight with the Taliban would take a psychological toll on almost anyone, but Luttrell bears a particularly large burden because he's a Navy SEAL, meaning that he's been trained never to leave a man behind. Luttrell faces trauma and, it would seem, survivor's guilt as a result of being the only American to survive the fight.

After he's rescued from Afghanistan, Luttrell begins to display symptoms of trauma. He finds himself reliving the experience of being shot by Taliban soldiers. He also has vivid nightmares in which he hears the screams of his dying friends. These are classic symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a psychological affliction that harms many soldiers who've seen active combat. Traumatized soldiers often have dreams or even hallucinations in which they re-experience their original trauma. They often feel that they're all alone in the world, and that nobody can understand their harrowing experiences. Luttrell's traumatic symptoms appear to be exacerbated by the fact that he's the lone survivor of the battle, and that he's been unable to take care of his friends in a manner consistent with his SEAL training. Luttrell is the team medic, but he's unable to treat his friends' wounds since he drops his medical supplies during the course of the shootout. Furthermore, Luttrell repeatedly thinks about how he broke a rigid rule of the "SEAL code" by failing to bring his friends' bodies back to safety.

Many survivors of horrific disasters experience survivor's guilt—a psychological affliction similar to PTSD, in which the survivors hate themselves or think of themselves as cowardly because they're still alive. Luttrell appears to be dealing with a particularly intense case of survivor's guilt as a result of being a SEAL, who's been trained to take care of his team at all costs. Luttrell himself doesn't use technical psychological language when talking about his feelings, but he displays some clear symptoms of survivor's guilt and PTSD.

As the book comes to an end, however, Luttrell seems to alleviate some of his trauma through healing rituals of mourning. Luttrell travels around the country, visiting the families and loved ones of his deceased fellow SEALs. He tells them that his friends died fighting bravely, and upheld the dignity of the SEALs. This practice is intended to bring some comfort to the families of the deceased, but it also clearly brings comfort to Luttrell himself. By visiting his friends' families, Luttrell honors his duty to his fellow SEALs, even if he's unable to recover their bodies from the battlefield. Furthermore, he experiences a cathartic outpouring of grief, crying along with his friends' parents and siblings. In these ways, Luttrell escapes some of his own guilt and alienation.

Luttrell further alleviates his trauma by staying a part of the military, both literally and metaphorically. Luttrell redeploys to the Middle East shortly after returning from Afghanistan. In doing so, he writes, he reminds himself that he's not alone in the world—on the contrary, there are thousands of soldiers just like him, who would have done exactly the same things he did during the shootout with the Taliban. By contemplating his place in the American military tradition, Luttrell overcomes some of his trauma and guilt. He realizes that he's not a coward or an outcast—rather, he's surrounded by people who can relate to him. So even though Luttrell's trauma is in some ways exacerbated by military culture (which has taught him to suppress signs of "weakness," and to never leave a man behind), military culture also helps him come to terms with his trauma.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE BELL

During Hell Week—the notoriously difficult portion of Navy SEAL training—recruits are given the option of ringing a small bell. Doing so signals to the officers that the recruits have given up on becoming SEALs: they've finally reached a breaking point. The bell is a constant temptation for Marcus Luttrell during his SEAL training, but one which he refuses to give into. Later on in the book, after Marcus lives through the horrors of Operation Redwing, the bell takes on a new symbolic dimension: it symbolizes the life Marcus could have had had he not chosen to become a SEAL. After contemplating the bell and, implicitly, this alternate course of events, Marcus comes to a proud conclusion: as challenging as his career as a soldier has been, he wouldn't trade it for anything.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Little, Brown, and Company edition of *Lone Survivor* published in 2013.

Prologue Quotes

❝ I heard that terrible, terrible scream, the same one that awakens me, bullying its way into my solitary dreams, night after night, the confirmation of guilt. The endless guilt of the survivor.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

In the Prologue to *Lone Survivor*, Marcus Luttrell conveys the trauma and guilt in which he lives as a result of having survived the failed Operation Redwing. Luttrell served in Afghanistan at the height of the War on Terror; during his service, he was involved in a lethal shootout with Taliban forces, which left his three closest SEAL friends dead. After the shootout, Luttrell is rescued, but he exhibits symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a common affliction for soldiers who see intense combat.

Luttrell's military background also seems to exacerbate his psychological trauma in some ways. He's trained to become a SEAL, and one of the cornerstones of his training is that he must never leave a man behind. Thus, Luttrell is consumed with guilt for abandoning his three friends on the battlefield—he feels as if he's failed them, and also failed the SEALs as a whole. In all, the passage is an uncommonly frank, vulnerable description of what it's like for a hardened warrior to survive a brutal battle.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ In Baghdad we were up against an enemy we often could not see and were obliged to get out there and find. And when we found him, we scarcely knew who he was—al Qaeda or Taliban, Shiite or Sunni, Iraqi or foreign, a freedom fighter for Saddam or an insurgent fighting for some kind of a different god from our own, a god who somehow sanctioned murder of innocent civilians, a god who'd effectively booted the Ten Commandments over the touchline and out of play.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

Right from the beginning, Luttrell misses no opportunities to write about America's enemies during the War on Terror. Following the bombing of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, the Bush administration pursued military action primarily against two countries: Iraq and Afghanistan. While many supported Bush's policies, others questioned why America had invaded these two countries, whose connection to the 9/11 attacks was somewhat tenuous (Iraq under Saddam Hussein, for example, hadn't supported al Qaeda, the group that took credit for the 9/11 attacks, in any way).

In contrast to these criticisms of the Bush administration's policies, Luttrell argues that America's enemies during the War on Terror were all fundamentally the same, meaning in effect that it didn't really matter which country the American military invaded. As Luttrell sees it, America's enemies are Muslim, extremist, violent, and openly hostile to American values. He doesn't bother to distinguish between different Muslim sects or ethnic groups, or between the different aims of the different extremist terrorist groups in the Middle East. In short, he paints America's enemies with an extremely, and absurdly, broad brush. He also seems to condemn the religion of Islam itself, suggesting that Muslims worship a fundamentally different god, follow a fundamentally different set of religious values, and are, in general, fundamentally different from good, honest Americans.

❝ In our view, the question of whether Saddam Hussein had biological and chemical weapons was answered. Of course he did. He used them in Halabja, right?
I guess by now the issue in the minds of the American public was, Did he have a nuclear weapon, an atom bomb?

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker), Saddam Hussein

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

At one point in the memoir, Marcus Luttrell claims not to be a politician. But as this passage clearly suggests, Luttrell is absolutely a politician, in the sense that he's using his fame and popularity to make political, partisan points about the War on Terror. One of the most controversial elements of the Bush administration's foreign policy was its decision to invade Iraq on the basis of Iraq's suspected access to

weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), which many people interpreted to mean nuclear missiles. Bush was widely criticized for hedging, or even actively lying, about Iraq's access to WMDs, and after months in Iraq the American military uncovered no evidence that Hussein had access to nuclear missiles.

In response to these objections, Luttrell offers the standard party line of the Bush administration: "weapons of mass destruction" meant chemical weapons, of the kind that Saddam Hussein used to attack the Kurds in the 1990s. Luttrell neglects to mention that members of the Bush administration suggested that Hussein had access to *nuclear* weapons specifically. In short, the passage is a good counterexample to Luttrell's claim that he doesn't editorializes on political issues.

> That situation might look simple in Washington, where the human rights of terrorists are often given high priority. And I am certain liberal politicians would defend their position to the death. Because everyone knows liberals have never been wrong about anything. You can ask them. Anytime.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

Luttrell ends the chapter by complaining about America's excessive bureaucracy during the War on Terror. He points out that, too often, American soldiers have been prosecuted or sanctioned for accidentally shooting unarmed civilians on suspicion that the civilians are collaborating with terrorists. He also finds it outrageous that there are rules of engagement, or ROE, preventing soldiers from doing so. In Luttrell's view, it would seem, the ideal war effort is one in which American troops are allowed to proceed however they see fit, without having to worry about being prosecuted by American lawyers or demonized by liberal American journalists.

The mention of "liberal politicians" is important, and Luttrell will criticize liberals at many points throughout the book (further calling into question his claim that he's "not a politician"). At times, Luttrell seems to despise liberals in his own country almost as much as he despises Middle Eastern terrorists: he sees liberals as self-righteous, out of touch with the realities of warfare, and actively opposed to America's success during the War on Terror. As readers, then, we might see that the kind of tribalism—or "us vs. them"—that defines many of Luttrell's positions applies not only to America vs. the Middle East, but also to what he sees as "real" America vs. "liberal" America.

Chapter 2 Quotes

> Now, everyone in the area knew that Billy trained kids for the special forces. And when he had a group of us running down the street, cars driving by would blow their horns and cheer us on. He always ignored that, and he showed us no mercy.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker), Billy Shelton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Luttrell describes his early life in Texas, during which he was raised to be tough and strong, and to idolize the American military. Texas is often considered one of the main recruiting centers for the American military, in part thanks to the strong, proud military culture in the state. Luttrell remembers a man named Billy Shelton, an intimidating ex-Marine who trained the adolescent Luttrell to become a soldier one day. In this way, Luttrell shows how Texas's strong military code perpetuates itself over time: children grow up wanting to be soldiers, do so, retire, and go on to train the next generation of Texans to want the same thing.

The passage is interesting and in some ways darkly ironic, given what Luttrell later says about Pashtun Afghans being "ideal Taliban recruits" because of their strong emphasis on violence and militarism. One could say exactly the same thing about many Texans: they're raised to aspire to violence and warfare.

> They are a proud people who adhere to Islam and live by a strict code of honor and culture, observing rules and laws known as Pashunwalai, which has kept them straight for two thousand years. They are also the quintessential supporters of the Taliban. Their warriors form the backbone of the Taliban forces, and their families grant those forces shelter in high mountain villages, protecting them and providing refuge in places that would appear almost inaccessible to the Western eye.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Luttrell gives some background on the Pashtuns, an ethnic group that lives mostly in Afghanistan and Pakistan. As Luttrell sees them, the Pashtuns are a proud, warlike people who follow a rigorous code of honor and retribution. As a result of their strong code, the Pashtuns make good Taliban soldiers: they understand the Taliban's warlike practices, or at the very least support the Taliban by providing them with shelter and resources. In short, Luttrell argues, Pashtuns are either Taliban operatives or Taliban operatives in the making.

Luttrell is far too generalizing in his criticism of the Pashtuns. In fact, as he later shows, many Pashtuns risk their lives to oppose the Taliban (and save Luttrell's life in doing so). And even if the Pashtuns are a "warlike" people, the same could be said of Americans like Marcus Luttrell—being warlike doesn't necessarily mean being cruel or immoral. Perhaps the most famous Pashtun in the world right now, Malala Yousafzai, risked her life to oppose the Taliban, even after being shot in the face for her views. Evidently, Luttrell is much too harsh (or, at the very least, broad) in his description of the Pashtuns.

❝ I had in my rucksack a DVD player and a DVD of my favorite movie, The *Count of Monte Cristo*, from the novel by Alexandre Dumas *père*. It's always an inspiration to me, always raises my spirits to watch one brave, innocent man's lonely fight against overpowering forces of evil in an unforgiving world.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker), Alexandre Dumas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

The chapter ends with Luttrell describing his favorite film, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, based on a famous adventure novel by Alexandre Dumas. It's worth thinking about this book more closely, and what Luttrell likes so much about it. Dumas's novel is about a man named Edmond Dantes, who's unjustly imprisoned for years and goes on to seek revenge against his more powerful, influential enemies. The theme of revenge is important throughout Luttrell's memoir, and revenge is a constant motive for Luttrell, both during and after his deployment to Afghanistan. Luttrell seems to think of himself, and the American military more generally, as a proud, righteous fighter in search of justice and retribution for past evils, such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It's also notable that Luttrell prefers the movie to the book (if he read the book at all), since he often describes the events of his life in a cinematic, Hollywood-esque manner.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ "Marcus, the body can take damn near anything. It's the mind that needs training. The question that guy was being asked involved mental strength. Can you handle such injustice? Can you cope with that kind of unfairness, that much of a setback? And still come back with your jaw set, still determined, swearing to God you will never quit? That's what we're looking for."

Related Characters: Instructor Reno Alberto (speaker), Marcus Luttrell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

Luttrell trains hard to become a Navy SEAL, partly under the guidance of the tough but fair instructor, Reno Alberto. At the end of the chapter, Reno gives Luttrell some valuable advice about becoming a SEAL. Being a SEAL, he claims, isn't just about physical strength; it's also about summoning the willpower and bravery to fight in dangerous circumstances, and to push oneself to succeed against all odds. The passage is important because it establishes the importance of willpower in warfare. It also foreshadows the event of the second half of the book, in which it becomes clear that willpower is every bit as important as physical strength for a SEAL like Luttrell. Luttrell survives his ordeal in Operation Redwing not just because he's in peak physical condition, but because he never once considers giving up: evidently, Reno's words leave their mark on him.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ We loved him, all of us, because we all sensed he truly wanted the best for us. There was not a shred of malice in the guy. Neither was there a shred of weakness.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker), Instructor Reno Alberto

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

Luttrell greatly admires his instructor during SEAL training, a man named Instructor Reno Alberto. Reno is a tough man, and he works Luttrell and the other recruits exceptionally hard. However, he earns the men's respect because he obviously wants them to succeed, and works them hard for this very reason—and, furthermore, he himself can do all the things he demands the recruits do. In a way, Reno's toughness is a mark of his love for his men. This is an important point, because it echoes the code of machismo that Luttrell describes elsewhere in the book. SEALs don't express their love and respect for each other in the traditional way; instead, they treat each other somewhat harshly, while finding camaraderie in the acknowledgment that they're part of the same elite fighting group.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ I remember the pure indignation we all felt. Someone had just attacked the United States of America, the beloved country we were sworn to defend. We watched the television with mounting fury, the fury of young, inexperienced, but supremely fit and highly trained combat troops who could not wait to get at the enemy. We wished we could get at Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda mob in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, or wherever the hell these lunatics lived.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker), Osama bin Laden

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 176-177

Explanation and Analysis

In this important scene, Luttrell underscores the importance of ideas of revenge in the War on Terror. For Luttrell personally, and arguably for much of the Bush administration, the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan represented revenge for al Qaeda's attacks on September 11, 2001. The American military sought to find the terrorists responsible for the attacks and punish them by any means necessary.

Once again, the passage represents a very particular political point of view, in spite of Luttrell's claims not to be a politician. Many critics of the Bush administration's War on Terror argued that invading Iraq and Afghanistan wasn't a logical way to respond to the 9/11 attacks, since al Qaeda operatives had lived in a great number of countries, including Saudi Arabia, and invading the countries themselves wouldn't necessarily result in al Qaeda's defeat. However, Luttrell's words strongly suggest that the invasion of these countries *was* a logical, morally justifiable response to the attacks.

❝ SEALs don't look for personal credit, and thus I cannot say who the class voted their Honor Man.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

This somewhat humorous passage gives readers a good sense for the Navy SEALs' peculiar mixture of arrogance and humility. Luttrell is describing his military training leading up to his deployment in Iraq. He obviously did very well in Phase Three of his training, during which he was voted Honor Man by his fellow recruits, meaning that the recruits respected him and considered him a highly capable soldier. But instead of saying this directly, Luttrell "modestly" claims that he's unable to say who was voted Honor Man—albeit in a way that makes it transparently obvious that *he* was the "Honor Man."

As Luttrell says elsewhere in the memoir, SEALs are humble about their service to their country. Yet Luttrell also argues that SEALs are justifiably proud of their accomplishments, and consider themselves superior to other people, particularly to other soldiers. One could argue that SEALs' sense of superiority makes them unlikeable and generally difficult to work with. One could even argue that the SEALs' sense of self-importance reflected the Bush administration's policies during the WAR on Terror, during which American troops invaded Iraq and Afghanistan, cockily convinced that they were doing the right thing. However, Luttrell seems to take a more humorous view of SEAL arrogance, essentially characterizing it as roguish and endearing.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ The truth is, any government that thinks war is somehow fair and subject to rules like a baseball game probably should not get into one. Because nothing's fair in war, and occasionally the wrong people do get killed.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 194-195

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Luttrell restates his criticism of the ROE (rules of engagement) by which the American military abides. The ROE, he suggests, do more harm than good, because they force American soldiers to go out of their way to be cautious and careful not to harm civilians. Luttrell characterizes war as a game with no rules—a fight in which both sides will do whatever they can to win. He further argues that governments shouldn't enter into war unless they're willing to allow their troops to do whatever they can to win. Worrying about killing civilians by mistake is simply a distraction from achieving victory.

This is one of several disturbing passages in *Lone Survivor* in which Luttrell seems to argue that American soldiers should be able to take matters into their own hands and, in essence, act like the terrorists they fight—killing or capturing whoever they like to ensure the success of their side. During the War on Terror, there were many American soldiers who behaved cruelly and sadistically to their enemies, or people who they presumed to be their enemies. The purpose of ROE, it could be argued, is to prevent American soldiers from behaving in this immoral way. While ROE may occasionally be frustrating for soldiers like Luttrell, they serve a crucial purpose: they ensure that America wages war in a manner consistent with (what it claims are) its moral values—the moral values which, according to Luttrell himself, are the reason American is fighting in the Middle East in the first place.

In stepping even further back from Luttrell's perspective, we might also see this view as rather tragic, as it emphasizes the divide between those starting wars (usually elderly, wealthy politicians) and those actually fighting them (usually young, often working-class people). Luttrell emphasizes with Bush and other right-wing politicians, but doesn't seem to see how disconnected these politicians really are from soldiers like him—instead, he demonizes liberals as the epitome of "the other side," rather than seeing that it's often "patriotic" politicians like Bush who are the ones actually sending American soldiers to their deaths.

❝ This was definitely a mistake. That helo crew was supposed to have taken the rope away with them. God knows what they thought we were going to do with it, and I was just glad Mikey found it. If he hadn't and we'd left it lying on the ground, it might easily have been found by a wandering tribesman or farmer, especially if they had heard the helicopter come in. That rope might have rung our death knell, signifying, as it surely must, that the American eagle had landed.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker), Lieutenant Michael Patrick Murphy / "Mikey"

Related Themes:

Page Number: 218

Explanation and Analysis

Toward the end of the chapter, Luttrell and his fellow SEALs land in a remote part of Afghanistan and proceed with Operation Redwing, the purpose of which is to capture or kill Ben Sharmak, a dangerous Taliban commander. But the operation doesn't get off to a good start. The helicopter crew that drops off the SEALs in the middle of the night throws down a rope. Had the SEALs not spotted this rope, it would have been a telltale sign to passing goatherds and civilians that American troops had landed recently. This would have been a major setback for the mission, since the element of surprise is one of the few advantages that the SEALs have against the more numerous and heavily armed Taliban soldiers. In short, the rope represents the first "chink" in the SEALs' armor, foreshadowing some of the problems that their mission will face in the next chapter. (And, according to Gulab's later claims, the helicopter drop did make locals aware of the SEALs' presence—not the goatherds, as Luttrell later claims.)

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ If these Afghans blew the whistle on us, we might all be killed, right out here on this rocky, burning hot promontory, thousands and thousands of miles from home, light-years from help. The potential force against us was too great. To let these guys go on their way was military suicide.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter Seven, Luttrell and his fellow SEALs are forced to make an incredibly difficult moral decision. They're in the middle of Operation Redwing, a difficult mission that involves the SEALs approaching the residence of Ben Sharmak, a Taliban commander, without being detected. But on the way, the SEALs accidentally cross paths with a group of Afghan goatherds. If the SEALs allow the goatherds to keep moving, there's a strong possibility that they'll warn the Taliban of the SEALs' presence, meaning that the SEALs will be in grave danger. On the other hand, the SEALs have the option of killing the goatherds here and now, preserving their cover, their lives, and the success of the mission.

In short, Luttrell presents the reader with two options, corresponding to two different ideas about warfare. Allowing the goatherds to live would uphold the ideal of war as a moral endeavor, governed by unbreakable rules. Killing the goatherds would uphold a different view of warfare, in which the ends justify the means, and the most important "end" of all is the success of a mission, rather than the protection of life or virtue. It's a moral dilemma that, thankfully, most human beings never have occasion to think about.

> Axe said firmly, "We're not murderers. No matter what we do. We're on active duty behind enemy lines, sent here by our senior commanders. We have a right to do everything we can to save our own lives. The military decision is obvious. To turn them loose would be wrong."

Related Characters: Matthew Gene Axelson / "Axe" (speaker), Marcus Luttrell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 234

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the SEALs continue to contemplate their decision: they can either kill the three Afghan goatherds they've just captured, preserving their cover and protecting their lives, or they can let the goatherds go, raising the possibility that the goatherds will tell the Taliban about the SEALs' presence, endangering their lives. When faced with this moral conundrum, Matthew Gene Axelson, or "Axe," argues that it wouldn't be murder to kill the goatherds. Doing so would be a logical, militarily correct way to protect the SEALs' lives, as well as the success of the mission. Axe, who's previously been described as an extremely logical SEAL, seems to believe that there's nothing inherently wrong with taking a life, provided that it serve a higher purpose (in this case, protecting the SEALs' own lives).

In the end, however, the SEALs vote to allow the goatherds to live. They can't face the moral consequences of killing unarmed civilians, partly because it clashes with the Christian values they've been raised on (and, arguably, universal moral values). Marcus votes to allow the goatherds to leave with their lives, but in the end, he regrets his decision. (Yet once again, this scene has been disputed. Military authorities argue that it would be unheard of for a commanding officer—"Mikey," in this case—to actually take a vote on whether or not to execute unarmed civilians, instead of just issuing an order.)

> We tried to take the fight to them, concentrating on their strongest positions, pushing them to reinforce their line of battle. No three guys ever fought with higher courage than my buddies up there in those mountains. And damn near surrounded as we were, we still believed we would ultimately defeat our enemy.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 257

Explanation and Analysis

Following the SEALs' decision to let the three Afghan goatherds go free, it's implied that the goatherds run to the Taliban and tell them about the SEALs' presence (although this has later been disputed). As a result, the SEALs now have to face the threat of dozens, or even hundreds, of Taliban soldiers attacking them. They fight bravely, but they're so badly outnumbered that they have no choice but to retreat. In the end, the Taliban soldiers kill Luttrell's three friends, leaving only Luttrell alive.

It's worth noting, however, that Luttrell has been accused of exaggerating his own heroism in this situation. Luttrell officially reported that there were only a few dozen Taliban soldiers firing upon him and his friends (rather than the eighty to two hundred he reports in the book), and later intelligence reports have suggested that the number could

have been as low as eight. The deciding issue that led to the SEALs' defeat wasn't the *number* of Taliban soldiers, but rather the Taliban soldiers' superior position and firepower—they had the "high ground," as well as grenades, RPGs, and other deadly weapons with which they soundly defeated the SEALs.

Chapter 8 Quotes

"You stay alive, Marcus. And tell Cindy I love her."

Related Characters: Matthew Gene Axelson / "Axe" (speaker), Cindy, Marcus Luttrell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 275

Explanation and Analysis

Immediately following the events of the last chapter, the SEALs bravely fight back against the Taliban forces. However, the Taliban soldiers kill Luttrell's fellow SEALs. In this poignant scene, Luttrell listens to Axe's dying words. He begs Luttrell to protect himself, and to tell Cindy that he loves her. Cindy is Axe's wife.

The scene is so moving in part because of its simplicity. In his dying moments, Axe doesn't have any big, complicated thoughts about life or the war—he just wants to make sure that his wife knows how much he cares about her.

In a way, Axe's dying words seem to protect Marcus, or to predict his role as the "lone survivor," who is meant to bear witness to his comrades' heroism. The passage also foreshadows the final chapter of the memoir, in which Luttrell will live out Axe's words and travel across the country, offering comfort and support to the grieving families of the fallen SEALs.

Chapter 9 Quotes

I think at this point I may have been suffering from hallucinations, that very odd sensation when you cannot really tell reality from a dream. Like most SEALs, I'd experienced it before, at the back end of Hell Week.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 301

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter Nine, Luttrell is at his lowest point. He's been severely wounded, and he's losing a lot of blood. He's also dealing with the psychological wounds of the shootout with the Taliban troops, a shootout that resulted in his friends' deaths.

Under these crushing circumstances, many people would give up and surrender or die. But Luttrell finds the willpower to keep moving and find the help he needs to survive. In no small part, the passage suggests, Luttrell finds the willpower to do so because of his expert training as a SEAL. During Hell Week, Luttrell is worked so hard that he begins to hallucinate. The purpose of Hell Week, it now becomes clear to Luttrell, is to prepare SEALs for the most difficult possible circumstances in a real battle. Luttrell manages to survive in Afghanistan in part because Hell Week has prepared him for the very worst.

To an American, especially one in such terrible shape as I was, the concept of helping out a wounded, possibly dying man is pretty routine. You do what you can. For these guys, the concept carried many onerous responsibilities. Lokhay means not only providing care and shelter, it means an unbreakable commitment to defend that wounded man to the death. And not just the death of the principal tribesman or family who made the original commitment for the giving of a pot. It means the whole damned village.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 327

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of Chapter Nine, Luttrell is discovered by a group of three Pashtun men, who seem not to mean him any harm. As Luttrell explains it, the Pashtuns take care of Luttrell, who's slowly bleeding to death, because of an ancient Pashtun custom called *lokhay*. *Lokhay* is the concept that Pashtuns must take care of the sick and the wounded, even if doing so causes them to risk their own lives, or the lives of their entire families.

Throughout the memoir, Luttrell has characterized the people of Afghanistan as warlike, hopelessly violent, and untrustworthy. Here, he offers a seemingly different interpretation of Pashtun culture. Under the right circumstances, he allows, Pashtuns can be impressively kind, hospitable, and generous, even risking their lives for

the sake of a stranger. However, it's interesting to think about how Luttrell qualifies his thoughts on the Pashtuns. The Pashtuns *can* be hospitable, he admits, but their hospitality is symptomatic of the same fierce, unflinching traditionalism that also makes Pashtuns ideal Taliban recruits. Not once in the book does Luttrell float the possibility that the Pashtuns help him simply because it's the moral, universally "right" thing to do. In this way, it could be argued, Luttrell subtly conveys the Pashtuns' foreignness and otherness even while he's praising them.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ Often, deep within the communities, there are old family ties and young men who sympathize with the warlike mentality of the Taliban and al Qaeda chiefs. Kids barely out of grade school—joke, they don't have grade schools up here—are drawn toward the romantic cutthroats who have declared they'll fight the American army until there is no one left.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 357

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Luttrell writes about Pashtun society in more depth than he has previously. As he sees it, Pashtun villages are essentially training grounds for the next generation of Taliban soldiers. Little children grow up idolizing the brave, idealistic Taliban operatives, and aspire to fight American soldiers one day. Without a doubt, Luttrell's observations have a grain of truth. In Afghanistan, many saw the Taliban as heroic freedom fighters, opposing the imperialism and tyranny of the Soviet Union and, later on, the United States of America. But there were also many Afghans who grew up despising the Taliban, a violent, sadistic group that tortured children and murdered innocent families. Luttrell, committed to his point that Afghans are inherently violent and dangerous, doesn't talk about these people at all (and furthermore throws in a joke about the lack of "grade schools up here" to show how "foreign" Afghan children apparently are).

What Luttrell says about the people of Afghanistan could very easily be said about Luttrell himself. Luttrell grew up romanticizing the American soldiers who claimed they'd fight Middle Easterners until there was nobody left—but Luttrell, of course, seems not to notice this bitter irony.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ This armed gang of tribesmen, who were hell-bent on driving out the Americans and the government, could not function up here in these protective mountains entirely alone. Without local support their primitive supply line would perish, and they would rapidly begin to lose recruits. Armies need food, cover, and cooperation, and the Taliban could only indulge in so much bullying before these powerful village leaders decided they preferred the company of the Americans.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 391-392

Explanation and Analysis

In this puzzling passage, Luttrell and his protector, Mohammad Gulab, prepare for a shootout with the Taliban troops as they enter Gulab's village. However, after a few moments, the Taliban troops leave as abruptly as they've arrived. Luttrell explains their departure by noting that the Taliban have to be extremely careful not to alienate the Pashtuns in rural regions like this: they need the villagers on their side, meaning that they're careful not to disturb the peace in small villages like Gulab's.

The passage offers a subtler portrait of Afghan society than the ones Luttrell offered in previous chapters. Previously, Luttrell has strongly implied that all Afghans are either enemies of America, or enemies in the making. But here, he characterizes the war in Afghanistan as a conflict between the Taliban and the American military for the hearts and minds of the politically neutral Afghan civilian population.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ Gulab walked down the hill to me and tried to explain Sharmak had handed him a note that said, Either you hand over the American—or every member of your family will be killed.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker), Mohammad Gulab

Related Themes:

Page Number: 398

Explanation and Analysis

In this tense passage, Mohammad Gulab, the police chief in the village of Sabray, has just returned from a brief

conversation with Ben Sharmak (Ahmad Shah), the leader of a large group of Taliban soldiers. Gulab has sworn to protect Luttrell from harm, even if means endangering his own life. Here, he informs Luttrell that Sharmak has just threatened to kill everyone in Gulab's family unless Gulab gives up Luttrell without a fight. Heroically, Gulab has stood up for Luttrell, forcing Sharmak to withdraw his men (or risk alienating the Sabray community, as described in the previous quote).

Mohammad Gulab, one could argue, is the single bravest character in the memoir. He not only risks his own life, but also risks the lives of his loved ones, to protect a man he barely knows. Luttrell and his fellow SEALs fight hard to protect themselves and each other, but it's hard to imagine them risking their lives for the sake of an unknown Afghan person. Tellingly, Luttrell often undercuts Gulab's bravery by suggesting that Gulab acted out of obligation, obeying the ancient Pashtun custom of *lokhay*. But *lokhay* or not, Gulab's actions are undeniably courageous, even recklessly so.

> It was a grim smile, I admit, but these guys had chased me, tortured me, pursued me, tried to kill me about four hundred times, blown me up, nearly kidnapped me, threatened to execute me. And now my guys were sticking it right to 'em. Beautiful. I saw a report confirming thirty-two Taliban and al Qaeda died out there that night. Not enough.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 407

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Luttrell has just been rescued by Rangers in the American military, and he's being transported back to a safe American military base. As he's being taken away, he sees the American Rangers open fire on the Taliban forces of Ben Sharmak—some of the same soldiers who wounded him and murdered his SEAL friends. Luttrell makes no secret of the fact that he relishes this experience of watching the Taliban soldiers dying—after enduring so much pain and grief, the prospect of violent retribution is sweet. Here again, revenge is an important part of Luttrell's view of the War on Terror. Just as he sees the war itself as revenge for 9/11, he sees the Rangers' attack on the Taliban as revenge for the shootout that left his friends dead.

At the same time, Luttrell also gives some indication that the attack on the Taliban isn't "enough" to make up for the deaths of his fellow SEALs—and of course, no amount of killing will ever bring them back.

> That night, for the first time, I heard Mikey scream.

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell (speaker), Lieutenant Michael Patrick Murphy / "Mikey"

Related Themes:

Page Number: 415

Explanation and Analysis

After he's brought back to an American military base and given expert medical care, Luttrell begins to exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a psychological condition that afflicts many soldiers who've seen active duty. Luttrell is haunted by vivid memories of the violent shootout with the Taliban. He also finds himself traumatized and, it's strongly implied, guilty because of the fact that he's the lone survivor of the shootout. In this way, Luttrell exhibit symptoms of "survivor's guilt," another psychological condition common among soldiers. Luttrell seems to feel irrationally guilty for having survived—almost as if he must have done something cowardly or otherwise wrong.

> Mostly I remember the laughter. "Jesus, you look awful," said Morgan. "Mom'll have a nervous breakdown when she sees you." It reminded me of what I'd said to Axe when he'd been fatally wounded on the mountain—"Hey, man, you're all fucked up."

Related Characters: Marcus Luttrell, Morgan Luttrell (speaker), Matthew Gene Axelson / "Axe", Holly Luttrell

Related Themes:

Page Number: 423

Explanation and Analysis

As the memoir draws to a close, Luttrell shows some signs of overcoming (or at least mitigating) his PTSD and survivor's guilt. He flies home to Texas to spend time with his family. When his brothers, Scottie and Morgan, greet him at the airport, they immediately see that Luttrell is in

bad shape. He's lost a lot of weight, and he's still recovering from a nasty leg injury. However, instead of treating his brother with exaggerated kindness and seriousness, Morgan opts for humor, ribbing Luttrell for his appearance. For many victims of trauma, humor can be a refreshing reminder that their lives haven't been totally altered: traumatic experiences or none, they still have the same good relationships with their friends and family. Luttrell seems to appreciate his twin brother's jokes—they remind him that nothing has changed between him and his family.

At the same time, this choice of dark humor over emotion and vulnerability is another good example of military machismo. This is made especially clear when Luttrell compares Morgan's joke to his own reaction to Axe's mortal wounds—all three men are SEALs, and all of them find it easier to joke about fatal or near-fatal experiences than to express less "manly" emotions.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

Marcus Luttrell, the author and narrator of the memoir, drives through a small Long Island town, accompanied by five other men. He parks his car and tries to find his destination. Luttrell has made similar trips before, in towns all over the country, and every time, he comes bearing horrible news. As he gets out of the car, he remembers a voice shouting, "Help me Luttrell!" He feels the "endless guilt of the survivor."

The memoir begins after Marcus Luttrell's military service in Afghanistan—and after the traumatic experiences to which Luttrell alludes here. Luttrell appears to be dealing with survivor's guilt, a common form of trauma for soldiers who live through war while their friends die.

Luttrell walks to a little house with an American flag waving in the window. "Mikey's mother," a woman named Maureen, answers the door. Even before Luttrell opens his mouth, she weeps. Inside, Luttrell tells Maureen about Mikey's courage in battle. It's painful for him to talk to Maureen. Tonight, he's going to visit Heather, Mikey's fiancée.

Luttrell's duty as a survivor of war is to visit the families and loved ones of his deceased friends and provide them with comfort. The experience is arguably as difficult for Luttrell as it is for the dead soldiers' families.

Marcus Luttrell is making a "long and melancholy" journey across America, paid for "by the organization for which I work." Luttrell is a Navy SEAL, and he's been trained in "weapons, demolition, and unarmed combat." He's also a sniper and the medic for his platoon. He's fought for his country because he's a patriot, but this means having to deal with the deaths of some of his friends. Mikey died in the summer of 2005: he's Luttrell's friend, and one of the bravest people Luttrell ever knew. Two of Luttrell's other friends, Danny and Axe, died that same summer. Luttrell is writing this memoir in honor of Danny, Axe, and Mikey, and "the indomitable courage under fire of those three Americans."

Over the course of this memoir, Luttrell will describe his experiences fighting in the Middle East alongside his fellow Navy SEALs. In addition to the reasons Luttrell gives for writing the memoir, Luttrell uses Lone Survivor *to tell an interesting story about the changes in the American military during the War on Terror, and to pay homage to the American military itself, which he sees as a strong and noble organization committed to protecting American citizens.*

CHAPTER 1

Navy SEALs have a strict code of behavior, Luttrell writes. One rule of this code is to keep goodbyes short—just a curt hug or backslap. SEALs are big and tough, but they're also stealthy. They can operate anywhere—sea, air, or land—and believe "there are very few of the world's problems we could not solve with high explosives."

One of the first things Luttrell establishes about SEALs is that they don't display strong emotions—for example, they don't get sappy when they're saying their goodbyes. The passage also emphasizes the SEALs' talent, strength, and singular confidence in their ability to use deadly force.

Luttrell can still remember saying goodbye to the other SEALs in the island country of Bahrain. It's March 2005, and hot, even for a Texan like Luttrell. Luttrell and his unit are based outside of the city of Manama. The streets are full of signs signaling that Americans aren't welcome—making Luttrell think of signs forbidding Jews in Hitler's Germany. He knows the Arab world is full of "Muslim extremist fanatics" working for al Qaeda and the Taliban.

Luttrell likens the inhabitants of Bahrain to Nazis. The point he seems to be making is that a significant chunk of the Arab world is murderous, extremist, and committed to the destruction of America—a viewpoint that many would consider Islamophobic. (Since, to name just one reason, the Jews hadn't previously been bombing the Nazis for years, as America had the Arab world.)

Luttrell and his five fellow SEALs drive through Manama toward a U.S. air base. They fly out of the city carrying machine guns, knives, ammunition belts, and other instruments of war. Their flight isn't particularly comfortable, but if they were in battle, they wouldn't utter "one solitary word of complaint." This is a big part of the SEAL code: SEALs stick together instead of "griping." Today, the six SEALs fly off to do "God's work" on behalf of their commander in chief, President George W. Bush.

The SEALs are trained to be competent in almost any military situation, whether it's on land, sea, or the air. Partly because of their talent, and partly because of the overall code of machismo to which they subscribe, the SEALs never complain—they bite their lips and get the job done, whatever it might be. Note Luttrell's early conflation of his job with "God's work" and his idolization of Bush as a "godly" military commander.

The SEALs have fought a dangerous enemy in Baghdad. This enemy goes by many names, Luttrell says, including al Qaeda, Taliban, Shiite, and Sunni. But the enemy fights for "a different god from our own," a god who approves of murder and who "booted the Ten Commandments over the touchline."

Here, Luttrell paints America's enemies with a very broad brush. The different groups Luttrell names aren't always collaborating with one another (and in some cases, they're actively opposed to one another). Like many right-wing figures during the War on Terror, Luttrell argues that Middle Easterners are fundamentally different than Americans, largely because of their Islamic faith (even though Islamic morality is similar to Christian morality in many ways, and both celebrate the Old Testament, including the Ten Commandments).

But the SEALs are headed for Afghanistan, where the combat will be very different. In the mountains of Afghanistan, the Taliban have sheltered al Qaeda operatives and helped Osama bin Laden plot the attack on the World Trade Center. Al Qaeda has also used Saudi oil money to plot against America. These may not be "the precise same guys who planned 9/11," Luttrell admits, but he says they're the "heirs." Luttrell's task is to stop them from hurting America again. Luttrell and his friends know they're engaged in a secret mission that's essentially "payback for the World Trade Center."

The American invasion of Afghanistan following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, was generally supported by Republicans and Democrats. However, the invasion was also criticized for its tenuous link to the 9/11 attacks—it was argued that the al Qaeda operatives who planned 9/11 weren't primarily based out of Afghanistan at all. Luttrell simply brushes these criticisms aside and insists the invasion was justified.

The SEALs are about to embark on a dangerous mission. Their philosophy is to try their hardest to defend the "proud tradition and feared reputation" of the SEALs. The SEALs on Luttrell's team include Matthew Gene Axelson, who everyone calls "Axe." Luttrell's twin brother Morgan is Axe's best friend. Axe is an intelligent man, with incredible self-control. While he's a feared warrior, to his family he's just a cheerful guy who likes "a laugh and a cold beer." He has a lovely wife, Cindy.

The SEALs are tough, highly trained, and, under the right circumstances, brutal killers. But Luttrell distinguishes them from their opponents in the Middle East by describing their kindness and their love for their families—humanizing them, while continuing to see his opponents as evil and inhuman.

Luttrell's best friend in the SEALs is Lieutenant Michael Patrick Murphy, or "Mikey." Mikey was accepted to law school before he decided to fight in the Middle East, and he's served in many countries before his time in Iraq. He has a beautiful girlfriend, Heather. He can be a smartass, but he's also the finest officer Luttrell has ever known.

Mikey gives up a promising career as a lawyer in order to defend his country, a clear sign of his commitment to the SEALs. He's also portrayed as a loving boyfriend to Heather, and a good friend to Luttrell himself.

Also on Luttrell's SEAL team is Senior Chief Daniel Richard Healy. Healy is a loving father of seven children, and he treats his fellow SEALs like an extension of his family. Healy and Luttrell argue sometimes, but he's also a talented chief and a great role model. Luttrell's number two on the SEALs is Petty Officer Shane Patton, a laid-back surfer. He's a great guitarist and photographer, and a computer whiz. The sixth and final member of Luttrell's SEAL team is James Suh, a likeable, Chicago-born soldier. He originally wanted to be a veterinarian, but later decided to fight in the navy. Luttrell never met a single SEAL "with a bad word to say about him."

Luttrell's other friends among the SEALs are distinguished by two things: 1) their extreme competence as soldiers for the American military, and 2) their kindness and friendliness as private citizens. In short, the SEALs are tough but not heartless—they're still good friends and family men.

Three hours after their plane takes off, Luttrell and the other SEALs fly over the Gulf of Oman. This can be a dangerous point for American soldiers, since it's close to an Iranian military base. On the plane, Luttrell thinks back on his years in the Middle East.

This section establishes the "frame" for the next few chapters, in which Luttrell describes his early life, much like a flashback in a Hollywood movie.

Luttrell joined SEAL Team 5 in Iraq on April 14, 2003, just one week after the American military began its attack on Baghdad. Luttrell's mission was to destroy any remaining opposition in the city. Just one day after Luttrell arrived in the city, President George W. Bush announced that Saddam Hussein and his political party had fallen. But Luttrell's work was just beginning. Working in small units, he fought terrorists and other "enemies."

President Bush was widely criticizing for claiming that the War in Iraq was "over" (and for displaying a banner saying, "Mission Accomplished" when there was still a lot of work to do in Iraq). He was also criticized for alienating Hussein's military and police instead of trying to cooperate with them, as many of his Pentagon advisers had suggested. The result was that soldiers like Luttrell spent years rooting out corruption and opposition in Iraq even after the fall of Saddam Hussein and America's supposed "victory."

Some people have called the Iraqi insurgents "freedom fighters." Luttrell finds this ridiculous, arguing, "They'd sell their own mothers for fifty bucks." Luttrell enjoys fighting the terrorists. Often, he and his fellow SEALs would surround them while they were in a house, and the SEALs would usually blast open the door in case there was someone waiting behind it with a gun. Then, Luttrell and the other SEALs would rush into the house, where the terrorists would usually be gathered on the verge of surrender. The SEALs would determine who the terrorists' leader was, and then question him for more information.

Luttrell attacks the terrorists for their cowardice and greed. In this way, he contrasts the terrorists' behavior with the bravery and self-sacrifice of the American SEALs who risk their lives to raid houses and track down Iraqi terrorists. Luttrell here also vaguely addresses the idea that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter"—but he entirely scorns this view, rejecting any empathy for the other side and presenting all of the insurgents as cowards and savages.

As time went on, Luttrell and his SEALs learned to "fight like terrorists," using their superior firepower to frighten their enemies. Luttrell's unit never lost a SEAL during his time in Iraq, largely because the SEALs used these "shock and awe" tactics.

By "fight like terrorists," Luttrell seems to mean that he and his fellow troops tried to shock and intimidate Iraqi civilians into cooperating. However, the passage disturbingly foreshadows some of Luttrell's remarks about disliking the rules of engagement designed to keep American soldiers from killing innocent people.

Once, Luttrell and his SEALs made a mistake. They'd uncovered an insurgent ammunition dump, and instead of confiscating the ammunition, the SEALs decided to blow it all up. When they did so, the explosion was so massive that the surrounding buildings began to crumble, throwing chunks of concrete down on the SEALs. Amazingly, nobody was hurt. One night, however, Luttrell almost died. He was fighting alongside his fellow SEALs when he realized he was standing on a bomb. One of his teammates pushed him to the ground, away from the bomb, just seconds before it detonated. Luckily, neither Luttrell nor his teammate was harmed.

The American soldiers in Iraq weren't perfect, but, according to Luttrell, their mistakes were mostly harmless and didn't violate the ethics of warfare. If anything, Luttrell's anecdote implies, the only people who were really endangered because of the American troops were other American troops. But in fact, many Iraqi civilians were killed, sometimes accidentally and sometimes on purpose, because of American troops' actions.

Fighting in Iraq changed Luttrell, he says. His senses sharpened, and he learned how to move stealthily. He also learned how to deal with terrorists: make them drop their guns and fall to the ground, never giving them an inch of latitude. He also learned that "no one can hate quite like a terrorist."

Fighting terrorists made Luttrell a tougher soldier (in his own description), and he learned not to show any mercy to his opponents in Iraq. Of course, once again he is portraying all of his enemies and perceived enemies as fundamentally the same.

On May 1, 2003, President George W. Bush announced that phase one of the war in Iraq was complete: the military's new job was to root out weapons of mass destruction. Meanwhile, terrorists continued to kill American soldiers. The SEALs hunted down insurgents, using bribery and force. In July, two of Saddam Hussein's sons died in an explosion because terrorists had sold them out.

Luttrell again emphasizes the deviousness and corruption of the Iraqi side in the war, contrasting it with (what he sees as) the idealism and lofty Christian morality of the American troops.

Suicide bombers continued to wreak havoc. By August, more Americans had died after the "end" of the war in Iraq than before it. By this time, the American military still hadn't found weapons of mass destruction. Luttrell claims that Saddam Hussein obviously had these weapons—biological and chemical weapons. However, Luttrell understands that the public interpreted "weapons of mass destruction" to mean nuclear missiles. The military was looking for evidence that the Iraqi government had been using uranium-235, which would prove they were trying to build a bomb. SEALs found trucks in the desert, from which large machines seemed to have been removed in a hurry—suggesting, Luttrell argues, that the trucks had held centrifuges used to house uranium-235.

This is one of the many times in the book when Luttrell editorializes about the politics of the war in Iraq. Many Americans on both the left and the right believed that the Bush administration manipulated the facts to hasten an invasion of Iraq, strongly implying that Saddam Hussein had nuclear missiles (or any kind of "WMDs" at all). Luttrell takes the Bush administration's position, arguing that, WMDs or not, Hussein was an evil man who had to be stopped. (And Hussein was indeed a brutal, sometimes genocidal dictator—the question is whether America has any kind of power or moral high ground as the "world's policeman" to simply depose of any leader they disagree with.) Luttrell also doesn't mention the possibility, widely discussed during and after the War on Terror, that America invaded the country to ensure access to Iraq's lucrative oil reserves.

As he flies from Bahrain into Afghanistan, Luttrell thinks about the growing problem in America today: too many liberals, who know nothing of combat, believe that America shouldn't invade other countries. Luttrell and his teammates have been trained in the rules of engagement, or ROE, which prevent them from firing on insurgents until they have proof of their intentions. Luttrell finds it ridiculous that "the human rights of terrorists are often given high priority." From his perspective, ROE creates a serious problem for soldiers, forcing them to wait before firing and therefore risking their lives.

The ROE that Luttrell discusses are in large part the result of the Geneva Conventions following World War Two. During these talks, many Western countries agreed to abide by certain rules of war and refrain from killing or torturing civilians in times of conflict. Luttrell has nothing but contempt for these rules, which were put in place to protect innocent lives. He seems to wish that the American troops could act like terrorists themselves, killing on even the suspicion of wrongdoing, for the greater good of protecting America—a disturbing proposition to say the least.

Luttrell isn't a political person, he claims—he's a patriot, sworn to defend his country and obey the president of the United States. But he knows one thing for sure: if he ever met Osama bin Laden in person, he'd shoot him "in cold blood." And at that point, he'd probably be incarcerated and found guilty of murder.

Luttrell's claims that he isn't a political person should be taken with a grain of salt. Luttrell clear has strong political views: he supports Bush's policies during the War on Terror and resents what he sees as a left-wing attempt to protect Middle Easterners' human rights. (And, of course, bin Laden later was killed by other Navy SEALs "in cold blood"—at the command of the Democratic president Barack Obama.)

CHAPTER 2

Luttrell and his SEAL team fly over the Gulf of Oman. They're headed over the Arabian Sea, toward the region of Baluchistan, a part of modern-day Pakistan. The plane lands in Baluchistan, on a base outside of the city of Dalbandin. Baluchistan, a mountainous area, is a haven for terrorists.

The SEALs are entering one of the most dangerous parts of the world for Americans—a region full of Taliban soldiers, who actively support al Qaeda (and hate the West for their own reasons).

Luttrell thinks about his home. He's from East Texas, and he's still very close with his identical twin, Morgan Luttrell. Morgan is also a Navy SEAL. The twins grew up in a nice house in Texas, overlooking pastures of oak trees and cows—"a peaceful place for a God-fearing family." Luttrell and his twin were raised to love God. He wasn't baptized, but Catholicism "suits me," he says, and he imagines that Pope John Paul II would have made a good SEAL.

Luttrell is a lifelong Christian, and his belief in a particularly American brand of Christian morality informs his perspective throughout the book. Somewhat surprisingly, though, Luttrell considers himself a Catholic, making him the minority in the predominately Protestant American South.

Luttrell's mother, Holly Luttrell, is a "brilliant horsewoman," and Luttrell grew up surrounded by horses. Holly is a seventh-generation Texan, and Luttrell believes that Texas is a part of his own spirit. Texans, he believes, are the kindest, friendliest, most hospitable people in the world.

Luttrell grows up in Texas, a state famous for its hospitality, friendliness (towards white Christians, at least), and its strong support for the American military. All three of these themes show up throughout Luttrell's memoir, suggesting that his upbringing has a huge influence on his adult life—and also his support for George W. Bush, another Texan.

How did Luttrell, "a farm boy from the backwoods of East Texas," become a Navy SEAL? To begin with, Luttrell has always been strong. Even as a child, he was great at sports, largely because he didn't mind practicing for hours. From his father, Luttrell learned about the importance of hard work. Luttrell's father was a savvy investor and horse breeder, and he often made huge profits selling stallions. Around this time, the Texas oil market was booming. But in the late 1970s, with the Iranian revolution, the price of oil dropped. By the mid-1980s, the oil market was tanking, and almost everyone in Texas felt the effects. Luttrell's family had to sell their house and horses.

While Luttrell doesn't comment on it, it's very interesting that Luttrell grows up aware of a connection between the Texas oil market and the Middle East. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 sparked much of the anti-Middle Eastern prejudice in America today, and also weakened the American economy by restricting American access to Iranian oil. George W. Bush, a former Texas "oil man" himself, was criticized for rather blatantly using the invasion of Iraq to secure America's access to Middle Eastern oil. Also note that Luttrell, despite his later hardships, grew up in comfortable circumstances.

When Luttrell was in his twenties, his family was very poor, and he and Morgan had to work hard to pay for college. After Morgan broke his leg, he was forced to undergo an operation without anesthetic because his family couldn't front the money for it. Luttrell and Morgan have always been tough, Luttrell says. When they were children, their father beat them for getting bad grades. The twins grew up to be adept swimmers, runners, and marksmen, thanks to their father's training.

In many ways, it's suggested that Morgan and Marcus's father's harsh discipline prepared them for the harsh tutelage they received while training to become SEALs. The Luttrell family's loss of wealth is also directly related to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East (the main cause of the Iranian Revolution).

Luttrell's father always wanted his children to be Navy SEALs. By the time Luttrell was twelve, he knew he wanted to be a SEAL, and he had a sense of how hard it would be to become one. In East Texas, there were many ex-SEALs and Green Berets. When Luttrell was a teenager, a man named Billy Shelton, an ex-Green Beret, trained Marcus Luttrell and Morgan Luttrell to fight and bulk up. They were terrified of Billy, but this made them work harder and become better soldiers.

Texas is one of the biggest recruitment sites for American soldiers, in part because of its size but also because of the strong, generational military culture (and, often, lack of other opportunities for young people) in the state: many children grow up wanting to become soldiers and fight for their country, and later in their lives they teach young children how to become soldiers themselves one day.

During SEAL training, most recruits drop out. People don't understand how hard it is to become a SEAL, and they often don't have the willpower to work as hard as it takes. Becoming a SEAL, Luttrell says, is probably harder than getting into Harvard. And yet SEALs tend to be humble, even though they know how important their service to their country is.

Luttrell emphasizes the SEALs' pride in their accomplishments, but also their apparent unwillingness to take personal credit for anything. SEALs, as Luttrell portrays them, are proud and yet humble in other ways: they know they're the best of the best, but they'd also sacrifice their lives for their country in a heartbeat. Once again Luttrell expresses scorn for work that's typically associated with intellectuals and the Left, like getting into an Ivy League school.


Back in 2005, Luttrell and the SEALs fly across the Regestan Desert, over the peaks of the Hindu Kush mountains. Luttrell reads through his training materials, learning as much about Afghanistan and the Taliban as he can. There isn't a lot of reliable information about the Hindu Kush: the enemy is too unpredictable. However, Luttrell knows that Taliban warriors and al Qaeda operatives are waiting for a chance to kill American citizens.

Luttrell and the SEALs face an enemy that is, if anything, even more dangerous than the terrorist bombers in Iraq. The Taliban troops in Afghanistan are highly trained, and they know the dangerous Hindu Kush terrain far better than the American soldiers do.



In the weeks leading up to the SEALs' arrival in Afghanistan, there's been a lot of violence in the country. The Taliban have increased attacks on President Hamid Karzai's government. The Taliban have been in existence since 1994, when they were led by a Mullah (Muslim clergyman) named Mohammed Omar. By 1998, the Taliban had conquered the capital city of Kabul, and controlled most of Afghanistan. Once in power, they became more repressive and authoritarian, banning women from attending school and persecuting non-Muslims.

The Taliban have imposed an extremist agenda, based on a fundamentalist interpretation of the Quran, in Afghanistan. As a result of their rule, women are persecuted to an unprecedented degree, since they're not allowed to educate themselves (or even expose their faces in public). As Luttrell points out, the Taliban rose to power in part because they were careful to save their most authoritarian policies for last, essentially deceiving the Afghan people into thinking they were a more moderate group.

The Taliban also collaborated with al Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden, throughout the late '90s. During the presidency of Bill Clinton, the Taliban refused to hand over bin Laden to the military, and in response the U.N. Security Council imposed sanctions on Afghanistan. In the 2000s, the Taliban became more authoritarian. In 2001, they detonated two statues of the Bamiyan Buddha—an act "tantamount to blowing up the Pyramids of Giza." The Taliban were determined to wipe out all non-Muslim culture.

The Taliban have committed many human rights violations, as well as horrific attacks on non-Muslim cultures and ancient, priceless artifacts. And yet one of the Taliban's most destructive acts in the long term may have been to promote the prejudice that all Muslims are extremist, violent, and radical—a prejudice that colors the way Luttrell himself seems to view the people he encounters during his deployment. For a more nuanced account of the Taliban and the Muslim people they terrorized, readers might consult Malala Yousafzai's memoir I Am Malala.

After September 11, 2001, the American government again demanded that the Taliban hand over Osama bin Laden. By October, the military had unleashed a major attack on Afghanistan, but Mullah Mohammed Omar was able to escape. The American military continued to attack Afghanistan, aiming to wipe out the al Qaeda operatives who'd planned 9/11. By the end of 2001, the Taliban and al Qaeda operatives in Afghanistan were in retreat. But by the time Luttrell and his team were preparing to land in Afghanistan, the Taliban had made a resurgence.

Luttrell again links the 9/11 attacks with operatives in Afghanistan, even though many intelligence reports have revealed that the real masterminds of 9/11 were based primarily out of Saudi Arabia (a country with which America has a much warmer political and economic relationship).

To understand Afghanistan, Luttrell says, it's important to understand the Pashtuns, a "tribal group" that make up a large portion of Afghanistan's population. They're also "the quintessential supporters of the Taliban"—the Pashtuns get along with the Taliban, Luttrell argues, because of their military heritage and fierce code of honor. Pashtun women are expected to bear children and perpetuate the Pashtun line, even if this means separating those women from society (through *purdah*: the practice of living in a separate room from men, or wearing clothes that entirely cover one's body). Perhaps "the finest virtue" of the Pashtun tribe, Luttrell claims, is its emphasis on hospitality and protection. Tribes often engage in the practice of *lokhay warkawal*, which involves offering protection and hospitality to others: literally "the giving of a pot." Luttrell has reason to be "eternally grateful" for *lokhay*.

Luttrell characterizes the Pashtuns as ideal Taliban recruits, to the point where he seems to suggest that all Pashtuns are either Taliban soldiers or Taliban soldiers in the making. However, he allows that the Pashtuns have some peaceful, hospitable customs, foreshadowing the protection that he receives at the hands of his Pashtun saviors later on in the memoir. Luttrell seems to see the world in mostly black-and-white terms—and while he sees most Middle Easterners as fundamentally inhuman and savage, those who ascribe to the honorable principles that saved his life are portrayed as heroes.

Luttrell and the SEAL team land in the American military base in Bagram, in the heart of Afghanistan. They're excited for the task ahead of them, which involves fighting the Taliban to the best of their abilities. Luttrell has brought a DVD of his favorite movie, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, based on the book by Alexandre Dumas. The movie, with its tale of a lone man seeking vengeance against powerful foes, inspires Luttrell. Luttrell thinks about the words the hero writes on a cave: "God will give me justice."

It's telling that Luttrell's favorite movie is about a man seeking violent vengeance against his more powerful opponents—essentially a revenge fantasy. Luttrell has already let on that he thinks of the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan as revenge for 9/11, and he seems to be motivated in general by a desire for violent retribution. As a result, it's perhaps hypocritical that he seems to criticize the Pashtuns for their violent, vengeful militarism—the same could be said about Luttrell's own temperament.

CHAPTER 3

Luttrell's SEAL team lands in Bagram in Afghanistan just after dawn. Before he writes anything more about his time in Afghanistan, Luttrell will explain a little about who the SEALs are, and "why we felt entitled to our own private brand of arrogance."

Luttrell again emphasizes the peculiar combination of arrogance and humility in the SEALs—a kind of stoic "humility" that rests comfortably in the knowledge that they are the best.

On March 7, 1999, Luttrell decided to join the Navy SEALs. When he spoke to a SEAL recruiter, Luttrell bragged that there'd be no need for him to attend boot camp, since he was already plenty tough. Naturally, Luttrell *was* sent to boot camp, along with other recruits. The next eight weeks were the most miserable of his life. In the training camp in Illinois, he endured freezing-cold weather, all while training harder than he'd ever trained in his life. He did well in the swimming pool, but found it almost impossible to run in the cold, windy weather.

The SEALs are trained under exceptionally harsh conditions, the rationale being that, if the recruits can survive the training process, they'll stand a better chance of surviving a real war. Luttrell was already rather arrogant before joining the SEALs, but as we'll see, the SEAL training camp is harder than anything he'd previously imagined.

In his weeks of training, Luttrell was made to do thousands of pushups and other exercises. He learned how to handle an M16 rifle and sprint in the cold. One of his toughest challenges was the so-called Confidence Chamber. For this challenge, he was required to inhale tear gas while reciting his name and social security number. After nearly two months, Luttrell graduated from navy recruitment camp.

Luttrell's exercises and drills were designed to simulate the harshest imaginable conditions that Luttrell might experience on the battlefield—for example, inhaling a mouthful of teargas, or having to keep his wits about him while being tortured.

Luttrell's next step is Indoctrination, or Indoc—a two-week course designed to prepare him for BUD/S (Basic Underwater Demolition/SEALs), the last and hardest part of SEAL training. The purpose of Indoc is to train recruits for BUD/S, without "turning up the pressure" too much. The key to Indoc—the one value the trainers emphasize above all the others—is teamwork. Luttrell works with a swim buddy, a partner designed to help him train harder. The swim buddy is a perfect example of the SEAL belief that "no man is ever alone"—the SEALs work together and help each other out.

The SEAL training process is all about individual achievement (individual recruits either pass the training process or they fail it). But at the same time, the process emphasizes the importance of teamwork, since SEALs stand the best chance of survival when they help each other out. This passage foreshadows the guilt that Luttrell feels after leaving his friends behind after the battle in Afghanistan.

During his BUD/S training, which takes place in Coronado, California, Luttrell suffers a major setback. While climbing a rope, he falls and hurts his thigh. The trainer asks him, "You want to quit," and Luttrell immediately replies, "Negative." Then the trainer makers Luttrell climb the rope again.

Luttrell refuses to give up on his dream of becoming a SEAL, even when he's in agonizing pain.

In Indoc, Luttrell adjusts to the harshness of SEAL life. He wakes up at the crack of dawn and huddles with his fellow SEALs to conserve body heat. His main trainer is a man named Instructor Reno Alberto, a tough, intelligent man who puts on a daily "Attila the Hun" act. Reno likes to challenge his men to leave Indoc, which usually makes them work harder. By the end of the first portion of Indoc, Luttrell is in the best shape of his life.

The purpose of Indoc is to work the recruits extremely hard, thereby eliminating all "substandard" men. As a result, the instructor puts on an exaggeratedly aggressive, hostile attitude, effectively challenging the men to succeed under brutal and hostile circumstances.

One of the most challenging parts of Indoc is the four-mile beach run. In the middle of the run, Instructor Reno Alberto forces the men to stop and lie on the beach, so that their boots and clothes become cold and heavy with water. Reno is a tough trainer, but he does everything the recruits do—he can even do one-armed pushups without breathing hard.

Luttrell doesn't always enjoy Reno's harsh training techniques, but he also respects Reno for challenging him, especially since Reno can do everything he asks of his men.

For a later portion of Indoc, the recruits focus on water training. This is a welcome change for Luttrell, who excels at swimming. He can hold his breath for two minutes, and he leads the recruits in swimming.

Luttrell excels in the water—he's been swimming since he was a child. This is a good example of how his father's training prepares him for the SEALs.

As the training process goes on, Instructor Reno Alberto increases the workout load. The recruits proceed with the infamous O-course, an obstacle course designed to eliminate substandard recruits. One of the hardest parts of the O-course for Luttrell is climbing, since he weighs well over 200 pounds. With Reno's help (and pressure), Luttrell learns how to maintain his balance during rope climbs.

As Luttrell's experiences would suggest, Navy SEALs aren't selected simply for their strength and bulk—they need to be agile and fast at the same time. This is one reason why the SEALs are the most elite members of the military—they have to have a broad set of skills.

Instructor Reno Alberto once told Luttrell, "The body can take damn near anything. It's the mind that needs training." With this in mind, Luttrell trains hard. As the days drag on, he and the other recruits learned how to paddle in boats, and they race against each other. Once, near the end of Indoc, Luttrell wins a boat race, and Reno congratulates him by shaking his hand. Luttrell notices that Reno has an incredibly strong grip. Reno is a small man, but Luttrell will always remember him being about fifteen feet tall.

Alberto's advice isn't just a motivational tool—many studies have confirmed the importance of willpower in acts of physical ability. And in many ways, Luttrell's SEAL training is about strengthening his mind: he learns to ignore pain and fear and do his job as a SEAL against even the most daunting odds. If he can survive his own leaders treating him like an enemy, then he'll be better able to survive anything his real enemies might throw at him.

CHAPTER 4

On their last afternoon of Indoc, Instructor Reno Alberto reports that 111 men are left in training; more than 50 have reached a breaking point and left.

SEAL training is incredibly rigorous, as evidenced by the massive portion of recruits who drop out.

Instructor Reno Alberto announces that the recruits are about to enter Phase One of BUD/S. Reno tells the recruits that he wants to shake hands with every one of them at their graduation. Even though Reno works his men hard, the recruits love him—they sense that he wants the best for them.

Reno earns his men's respect—even though he's veryhard on them, he obviously wants them to succeed (furthermore, he's so physically strong that he can do everything he challenges his men to do, so they can't really resent him).

The recruits' new Instructor is a man named Sean Mruk. Mruk is a tough Instructor, and from the very beginning he works his men harder than Reno did. He forces the men to run along the beach and "get wet and sandy"—i.e., lie down in the surf. Luttrell wakes up at dawn every day, and before seven am he's done hundreds of pushups. Every muscle in his body aches.

As Luttrell's physical training proceeds under Mruk, he learns how to strengthen his mind under even more hostil circumstances, preparing him for the experience of fighting in a real battle.

The recruits proceed with "log PT." For this torturous task, the recruits have to move enormous logs while they're "wet and sandy." After the recruits' first soul-crushing morning with log PT, the instructor tells them they've done a "damn nice job" and orders them to go eat. This sudden bit of praise surprises Luttrell. The next day, however, the instructors discipline the recruits for keeping their barracks sloppy.

The instructors are ruthless, but at the end of the day they're trying to make the recruits into the best SEALs they can possibly be. This explains why the instructor pivots so suddenly from harshness to praise—he's only harsh with Luttrell because he wants Luttrell to succeed.

During his time in training, Luttrell meets Captain Joe Maguire, a legendary commanding officer on SEAL Team 2. Maguire later becomes deputy commander of the U.S. Special Operations in Pacific Command. During Luttrell's training, he gives Luttrell and the other recruits some valuable advice: "Don't let your thoughts run away with you, don't start planning to bail out because you're worried about the future and how much you can take … Just get through the day."

Maguire is a hero to Luttrell and many of the other recruits: he already has a distinguished record, and he radiates confidence and decency. Again, notice that Maguire emphasis the mental aspect of training, echoing Reno's advice to Luttrell in the previous chapter.

By the end of the first week, more than twenty men have quit, some in tears. Every time someone quits, the instructors ring a **bell**. Luttrell often wonders if the bell will ring for him.

Luttrell is an ambitious recruit, but he's sometimes unsure if he has what it takes to become a SEAL, meaning that as the days go on, he's afraid that he'll drop out.

In the third week of training, the recruits learn how to paddle and land a boat on rock outcrops. In order to do so, one man on Luttrell's team has to act as "a human capstan" and make sure the boat doesn't drift back into the water. After their first attempt, Luttrell and his teammates succeed in landing their boat on the rocks, but the Instructor tells them they're too slow and orders them to do it again.

Luttrell and his teammates have to perform the same rigorous drills again and again until they can do them perfectly. The stakes of landing a boat are so high that it's imperative that he learn how to do so without so much as a hiccup.

By the end of the first month of BUD/S, many recruits have left. They've spent their entire lives wanting to become SEALs, but they don't have what it takes. Luttrell later speaks to instructors who tell him how hard it is for them to break the news to ambitious young recruits that they're not tough enough. After the first month, there are only fifty-four recruits left.

The instructors genuinely want to help their recruits succeed, which is why it's painful for them to ruin their recruits' dreams of becoming SEALs. The fact that so many ambitious recruits have to give up only emphasizes the immense difficulty of becoming a SEAL.

The recruits assemble to listen to Captain Maguire, who tells them that they're about to embark on Hell Week, the hardest part of BUD/S training. Maguire says he hopes to shake hands with every one of the recruits at the end. Maguire also tells the men to eat as much as they can leading up to Hell Week. In the days leading up to Hell Week, the recruits are quiet. They know they're about to begin the hardest week of their lives.

This passage conveys something like the calm before a storm: Luttrell doesn't quite know what he's about to experience, but he knows it'll be more painful and stressful than anything he's ever done before.

Hell Week begins late at night with a ritual called Breakout. An instructor rushes into the recruits' barracks, firing a machine gun (hopefully with blanks, Luttrell notes). Luttrell wakes up to Instructor Mruk's voice saying, "Welcome to hell, gentlemen."

Hell Week begins with a (literal) bang, emphasizing the harsh, often dangerous nature of the days to come.

Right away, the recruits are informed of the rules of Hell Week: at any time, they can opt out of training by ringing a **bell**. Hour after hour, men ring the bell and leave Hell Week. The recruits proceed with log PT, rock portage, and other backbreaking challenges. During breakfast on the first day of Hell Week, the men look shell-shocked. Luttrell, however, is just hungry. After a couple minutes of eating, the instructors burst into the room and order the men back outside for more training. Hell Week, Luttrell now knows, is every bit as tough as it's supposed to be.

It's crucial that the recruits themselves have to ring the bell symbolizing their departure from Hell Week (whereas in a previous passage the instructors rang the bell). Hell Week is about willpower and personal responsibility. When a recruit leaves, it's because he's given up, not just because Hell Week itself has proven too rigorous for him.

CHAPTER 5

Following the events of the previous chapter, Luttrell and the other recruits rush outside for further training. After thirty hours without sleep, Luttrell's senses get hazy. Like many Hell Week recruits, he begins to experience mild hallucinations. But he continues to push himself hard, since the best performers during Hell Week are rewarded with rest.

Luttrell faces tremendous adversity during Hell Week, but he also has a clear, concrete reason to force himself to succeed hour by hour: if he does well that day, he gets to sleep for longer.

After a particularly challenging session of log PT, the best swimmer in the group rings the **bell** and quits Hell Week—a shocking development. Soon after, Luttrell collapses in the middle of a training exercise with what feels like appendicitis. He's taken away by ambulance. But as soon as he regains consciousness, the instructors order him back to the beach to "get wet and sandy." The recruits haven't slept for three straight days. But nobody has quit in a few hours.

Echoing a scene in the previous chapter, Luttrell experiences a lot of physical pain, but refuses to give up. His desire to become a SEAL (and perhaps, to not be seen as a quitter or a failure) proves more powerful than his natural temptation to ring the bell and spare himself the agony.

By Thursday, the recruits sense that the end of Hell Week is near. Some of them are hallucinating, however. When the recruits are given an hour or two to sleep, some of them are in too much pain to sleep at all. On Friday, the recruits proceed with boat races, followed by breakfast. The instructor then walks into the room and announces that Hell Week is officially over. Some recruits are so relieved that they fall to their knees and weep. There are only thirty-recruits left.

Notice that the soldiers weep when they're done *with Hell Week: they've bottled up so much frustration and pain, and now they're finally releasing their feelings in the first moment of relief that's offered to them. In some ways, this foreshadows the scene toward the end of the memoir when Luttrell, having kept his fear, grief, and pain mostly under control, finally breaks down after being rescued.*

The recruits, having passed Hell Week, spend the weekend eating, sleeping, and treating their injuries. They still have three weeks left in Phase One of BUD/S, but they know that the worst is behind them. Luttrell finishes Phase One and proceeds to Phase Two, where he learns about scuba tanks. He fails his pool competency test, since he's unable to untie a knot in his airline, but passes on the second attempt.

After the stresses of Hell Week, Luttrell feels fairly confident with the remainder of Phase One: he continues to work hard, but he's proven to himself that he has the strength and, just as importantly, the willpower to succeed as a true SEAL.

Luttrell and the other recruits then proceed to Phase Three of BUD/S, during which he trains under Instructor Eric Hall. In Phase Three, Luttrell learns about navigation on land, and passes courses in hiking and climbing. He also learns about assembling and disassembling guns. He trains hard, especially since he now has to carry a gun wherever he goes.

Phase Three of Luttrell's BUD/S training will prove especially important to his later career in Afghanistan, where he has to navigate mountainous terrain.

In March, Luttrell and the recruits move out to San Clemente for a month of training. There he learns how to shoot accurately, and how to use a parachute to survive a jump out of an airplane. He next enrolls in the Fort Bragg medical program, where he studies to become a paramedic. At the end of the month, Luttrell and the twenty men remaining in his group pass BUD/S and become SEALs. Shortly after passing BUD/S, Luttrell learns of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He's furious, and wants revenge on Osama bin Laden. On January 31, 2002, Luttrell officially graduates from BUD/S and becomes a SEAL.

Of the well over one hundred talented, highly ambitious recruits at the beginning of the process, less than two dozen make it to the end of BUD/S and become SEALs—a powerful reminder that the SEALs are truly the best of the best. The passage also emphasizes the importance of revenge and personal anger in Luttrell's military career: he sees himself as a modern-day Count of Monte Cristo, punishing the evil people who've harmed his fellow Americans.

The next phase in Luttrell's training is to enroll in Sniper School. There, he studies camouflage, stealth, and, of course, marksmanship. Three months later, he graduates Sniper School with high marks. He notes, "SEALs don't look for personal credit, and thus I cannot say who the class voted their Honor Man."

This passage is humorous, but also a good example of the mixture of modesty and arrogance that Luttrell associates with the SEALs. SEALs are taught to be modest, but they also know they're the best in the military, and they find ways of showing it.

The SEALs, Luttrell admits, can be arrogant. But they pay for their arrogance with blood and sweat. Above all, they love America and are willing to fight for it. They're supremely confident in their abilities and the power of the military. That's what Luttrell believed when he graduated from BUD/S, and he still does.

Luttrell's BUD/S training impresses upon him the importance of sacrifice. He's proud of himself, but only because he knows how hard he's worked to become a SEAL. The same goes for other SEALs: they're proud and even arrogant, but with good reason.

CHAPTER 6

In March 2005, Luttrell and his SEAL team are sent to join SEAL Team 10, led by Lieutenant Eric Kristensen. Team 10 is "top of the line," and so the assignment Luttrell faces is very challenging. He and the other SEALs will fly into the mountains and fight Taliban soldiers, curbing the influx of new terrorists. On the mission, the Taliban fire upon the SEALs. Luttrell returns fire and avoids being hit.

Luttrell and his fellow SEALs immediately embark on a difficult set of missions, reflecting the dangerous conditions in Afghanistan, a country that's full of hostile Taliban soldiers—as the "War on Terror" is still relatively new.

On a second mission, the SEALs proceed through the mountains to continue hunting Taliban. Everyone is in peak physical condition, but the mountains are so hot and unpredictable that it takes hours to move a few miles. In the early hours of the morning, SEAL Team 10 enters a village, interrogates some of the people who live there, and eventually arrests a Taliban fighter. The man stares at Luttrell, and Luttrell senses, "if he could have killed me, he would have."

The SEALs have a huge disadvantage during their time in the Hindu Kush mountains: they're unfamiliar with the terrain, and no amount of SEAL training can prepare them for the experience of marching through the mountains in the scorching heat. This foreshadows the challenges Luttrell faces later.

The ROE (rules of engagement) dictate that SEALs can't shoot unarmed Afghan civilians. Luttrell is angry that SEALs can't shoot other dangerous people, such as spies, and Taliban operatives smuggling chemicals used to make explosives. He quickly becomes frustrated when he realizes that the Taliban know the ROE and know how to manipulate them to their advantage. The Taliban think nothing of murdering innocents, but the SEALs are forced to abide by constraining ROE, or else be "crucified" by the American media. Luttrell concludes, "Any government that thinks war is somehow fair and subject to rules like a baseball game probably should not get into one."

Once again, it seems very disturbing that Luttrell dismisses all ROE as the whining of figures in the American media. While the ROE aren't perfect, and may sometimes endanger SEAL lives, they've been put in place to preserve the moral values that Luttrell professes to believe in (protecting the innocent, sparing women and children from harm, etc.). War may not be a baseball game, but American soldiers do have a moral obligation to uphold at least some rules—otherwise, to put things in Luttrell's own terms, what makes them any better than the "extremist fanatics?"

On one mission, Luttrell remembers, the SEALs are attacked by a group of "Afghan wild men" armed with rockets. The SEALs fire back, and later learn that the Taliban had sent soldiers armed with knives to kill SEALs in their sleep. A liberal, Luttrell thinks, would say that the Taliban soldiers' intentions can't be proven, meaning that they shouldn't be shot. But of course, the Taliban are trying to kill Americans.

Luttrell seems to despise American liberals almost as much as he despises Taliban soldiers: he finds these Americans to be "soft" and unrealistic about warfare. Luttrell's frustration may be understandable, since he's trying to protect himself and his friends, and doesn't want to worry about being condemned in the media—but again, he's a little too eager to dismiss all ethical guidelines in combat, and we might argue what exactly he's fighting for, if not basic human rights and decency.

When trying to hunt down Taliban soldiers, the SEALs know to look for the odd man out—the Pashtun herdsman who doesn't belong. Many Taliban soldiers aren't as "rough" as the other Afghans in the area, and in fact, some of them have been educated in America. Sometimes, Luttrell feels unreal knowing that he's in the place where the plan to destroy the World Trade Center was born.

Luttrell portrays the Taliban soldiers as effete hypocrites who studied in the country they profess to hate—but he also brings up an interesting fact, which is that many Taliban soldiers and officials were indeed radicalized intellectuals who suddenly found power and were corrupted by it (and Luttrell simultaneously shows a grudging respect for the "roughness" of the "true" Afghans, who aren't necessarily enemies to America, and who have also faced lives of great hardship). Luttrell again declares that 9/11 was planned primarily in Afghanistan—a point that, to say the least, not all intelligence reports would support.

The Pashtun dwellings are "primitive with a capital P," Luttrell says. They reek of urine, and some are hundreds of years old. Luttrell and the SEALs go from village to village, searching for Taliban soldiers and photographing various people in the hopes that the images will prove useful later on. In his spare time, Luttrell volunteers in a Bagram hospital, helping wounded soldiers. During his time in the hospital, he cares for many Afghans, all at "the American taxpayer's expense." Luttrell values his time in the hospital, since one day he hopes to be a doctor.

Luttrell's early descriptions of the Pashtuns are dismissive (and a bit ironic, since in America, there's a common stereotype that people from Texas are rough and dirty too). Luttrell clearly doesn't want to take care of Afghans during his time in the hospital, emphasizing that he's wasting valuable taxpayer money (again ironic, since Bush's military intervention was widely seen as a colossal waste of taxpayer dollars, and the cost of healing Middle Easterners was a drop in the bucket compared to the cost of bombing them).

Senior Chief Dan Healy is responsible for assigning the SEALs to their missions. He's also responsible for assembling lists of suspected Taliban terrorists. One prime suspect is named Ben Sharmak (for security reasons, Luttrell will use this invented name). Sharmak is believed to command over a hundred Taliban fighters. He's highly educated, and rumored to be one of Osama bin Laden's closest associates.

Ben Sharmak is the closest thing the memoir has to a main antagonist. Sharmak's real name, which has been declassified since Luttrell's book was published, is Ahmad Shah; he was shot by Pakistani police officers in 2008. (He was also seemingly not as important a figure as Luttrell makes him out to be—he wasn't closely associated with bin Laden, and commanded relatively few soldiers.)

Healy begins to prepare a mission for the SEALs, known as Operation Redwing, which revolves around the capture or killing of Ben Sharmak. Luttrell relishes the thought of putting a bullet through the head of this dangerous enemy of America.

Luttrell is still motivated by revenge, and seems to be relish the thought of violence and bloodshed. Oddly enough, Luttrell gets the name of the operation that killed his three friends slightly wrong—it was actually called Operation Red Wings. *Luttrell has since used the operation's correct name in interviews.*

Luttrell, Mikey, Shane Patton, Matthew Axelson listen to their assignment. The biggest change is that Patton will be replaced by Petty Officer Danny Dietz, a close friend of Patton. Luttrell is glad to have Danny on the team, though he finds Danny "a little reserved." The team's assignment is to stake out the place where Sharmak is believed to live and wait for a clear shot. But later—literally while the SEALs are climbing into the helicopter—Operation Redwing is called off: Sharmak has moved locations.

The SEALs are eager for battle, but they're also extremely cautious—they don't proceed with Operation Redwing until they're sure they can isolate Ben Sharmak and kill him.

On June 27, 2005, military intelligence locates Sharmak again, meaning Operation Redwing is a go. The community in which Sharmak is believed to be residing is small, and Luttrell senses that the SEALs will be unable to land their helicopters without being seen and fired upon. Without a doubt, there will be hundreds of Taliban soldiers scanning the horizon for SEAL helicopters. Nevertheless, Luttrell and the other SEALs prepare for their mission. As they board the helicopter, Luttrell, Mikey, Axe, and Danny all sense that something's wrong.

Luttrell and his friends have a bad feeling about Operation Redwing, foreshadowing the disastrous events of the next couple chapters. In hindsight, it's obvious that Operation Redwing was a horrible idea (at least as Luttrell presents it): if it's known that Sharmak is so important and commands so many men, why aren't more than four American soldiers dispatched?

The helicopter carrying Luttrell and the other SEALs flies over the mountains. It's accompanied by a second helicopter, carrying five other SEALs to the city of Asadabad. Luttrell's helicopter lands at the designated site late at night, and the SEALs jump out of it and rush into the darkness.

Even though the SEALs have some doubts about the efficacy of the mission, they seemingly follow their orders to the letter and proceed. (Mohammad Gulab, Luttrell's savior later in the book, would go on to assert that locals were aware of the SEALs as soon as they left the helicopter—their drop-off wasn't as stealthy as they thought.)

For the next fifteen minutes, Luttrell and the three other SEALs don't make a sound. In the distance they can see two fires. Eventually, they make their way up a hill toward the flame. As they move, they notice that the helicopter has dropped a big rope, presumably for the SEALs to use. This was a big mistake—had the SEALs not recovered the rope, it would have signaled to Pashtun herdsmen that the Americans were here. The SEALs hide the rope. Using his radio, Luttrell checks in with the AC-130 Spectre gunship (the helicopter), which is hovering miles above him, providing support in case of an emergency. This is the last time Luttrell will speak to the gunship.

The fact that the helicopter drops the rope is (as Luttrell presents it) the first chink in the American military's armor. On a mission where secrecy is key, it's a bad sign that the helicopter team almost gives away (and perhaps does *give away) the soldiers' position within a few minutes of landing.*

The SEALS proceed toward the village, climbing down a steep mountain. Conditions are awful, but it's too cold to rest. In the end, the SEALs find a trail, which the Taliban have been using. After half a mile or so, the SEALs smell goat manure: there's a farmhouse nearby. Luttrell realizes that he and his teammates are clearly visible: the moon is shining so brightly that they cast long shadows on the ground. "Holy shit," whispers Mikey.

Even within an hour of the beginning of their mission, the SEALs sense that they won't be able to conceal their position from the enemy. This is a major problem, since they're badly outnumbered by the Taliban forces, and need the element of surprise.

CHAPTER 7

Recognizing that they're visible even in the dark, Luttrell and the other SEALs back up behind the shadows cast by tall trees in the distance. They proceed down the mountain, led by Matthew Axelson, the best mountaineer of the group. Axelson leads the SEALs down an especially steep part of the mountain, exhausting Luttrell. Finally, the SEALs reach the base of the mountain. They're exhausted by their climb, which has lasted hours. It's almost dawn.

The SEALs have a huge disadvantage: they're not used to navigating up and down a steep mountain (whereas the Taliban soldiers who they're likely to encounter have probably spent a long time in the mountains). Luttrell and some of the other SEALs are uncomfortable with climbing, and expend too much energy during this stage of the mission.

Fog rolls in, and the SEALs are forced to wait before proceeding toward the village. Soon, the sun has risen, drying the sweat on Luttrell's clothes. Luttrell realizes that he and his teammates are in a lot of danger: if the Taliban realize where they are, Taliban soldiers could surround them. However, the SEALs are stationed in a location with a good view of the surrounding area, at least when there's no fog.

Again, secrecy is a crucial element of Operation Redwing: if the SEALs' position becomes known to the Taliban soldiers, they won't have a chance of defending themselves, since they're badly outnumbered.

Suddenly, Luttrell hears a noise. He turns and sees a man wearing a turban and carrying an ax. Luttrell points his gun at the man, who drops the ax. Then, two more men come down the mountain, herding hundreds of goats. The SEALs motion for the two men to fall to the ground. The three men—one of whom appears to be no older than fourteen—mutter "No Taliban … no Taliban."

The three goatherds seem not to mean the SEALs any harm, but it's possible that they could inform the Taliban of the SEALs' presence, throwing the entire mission into jeopardy. (Though Gulab would later claim that locals were already aware of the SEALs at this point, and actually watched *them interacting with the goatherds.)*

The SEALs have a problem. The three goatherds are obviously unarmed civilians. Luttrell writes, "The strictly correct military decision would still be to kill them without further discussion, because we could not know their intentions." The goatherds could be affiliated with the Taliban, or they might tell the Taliban about the SEALs' whereabouts if they were allowed to move on.

Luttrell presents the ethical dilemma the SEALs face: kill the goatherds and protect themselves, or let the goatherds go and risk being massacred themselves. Notice that Luttrell claims that the correct "military" decision would be to kill the goatherds. However, this decision doesn't factor in the moral issues involved with murdering three unarmed people, one of whom is just a teenager. And because there are only four SEALs, it isn't even really a question of numbers—it's basically a question of which lives matter more in Luttrell's eyes.

Axe believes the right thing to do would be to kill the goatherds. Danny says, "I don't really give a shit what we do." Luttrell doesn't give his opinion. Mikey points out that, if they kill the goatherds, the Taliban will find out about it, at which point the Taliban will "sing to the Afghan media." Luttrell senses that it would be insane to let the goatherds go. He wonders what great generals would do in his position—would they kill civilians who pose a "clear and present danger?" Letting the goatherds go would be suicidal: inevitably, Ben Sharmak's men would find out from the goatherds about the SEALs, and then the SEALs would lose the element of surprise.

The SEALs all sense that if they let the goatherds go, they'll face the wrath of the Taliban. However, they're reluctant to kill innocent, unarmed people—even though they know it might be most effective for their mission (although later accounts, even from Luttrell himself, stressed how difficult it would be to hide the goats, *even if they did kill the goatherds). Two very important things to notice here: 1) Luttrell claims the goatherds pose a clear and present danger to the mission. This is debatable: the goatherds haven't shown any intention of harming the SEALS, and any threat they pose in the event of informing the Taliban may be clear, but it's not "present" by any stretch of the English language (and furthermore, the Taliban may have already been aware of the SEALs even before this encounter). 2) The SEALs are afraid of the media fallout in the event that they kill the goatherds. This partly explains why Luttrell is so against "liberal media elites"—he sees them as direct threats to his friends' safety.*

Mikey sums up the options: 1) Kill the goatherds quietly and throw the bodies down the side of the mountain. 2) Kill the goatherds quietly and bury the bodies. 3) Let the goatherds go free. In the event of 1) or 2), Mikey maintains, they'll probably be charged with murder in Afghanistan. Then, Axe says, "We're not murderers. No matter what we do"—suggesting that to kill the goatherds and save their own lives wouldn't truly be "murder."

This is a genuine moral dilemma, for which there's no easy answer. Some would say that the SEALs are justified in preserving their own lives, since there's a very strong possibility that the goatherds will go to the Taliban. Others would argue that taking the life of an unarmed civilian is never the right thing to do—the ends never justify the means.

The men take a vote. They're all hardened SEALs, but they're also Christians. Axe votes to kill the goatherds. Danny declines to vote. Luttrell hesitates, and then says, "We gotta let 'em go." Mikey says, "Luttrell, I'll go with you." The vote is two to one to let the goatherds go free—"the stupidest ... decision I ever made in my life," Luttrell writes. As the SEALs release the goatherds, Luttrell wonders if he's made the wrong decision.

Luttrell allows the goatherds to go, but in retrospect he considers this stupid. Luttrell's experiences in Afghanistan have taught him to consider unarmed civilians almost as dangerous as armed terrorists—which perhaps explains why he's so opposed to the ROE that protect unarmed civilians. (Though some, on the other hand, might consider this decision even more heroic than the firefight that follows, since it shows true moral principle, rather than just violence in the face of other violence.) It's also later been disputed that this "vote" occurred at all—other military officials have said that it would have been extremely unlikely for a commanding officer to allow a "vote" on whether or not to execute unarmed civilians. Instead, the officer (Mikey, in this case), would have just made the decision and the others would have gone along with it.

The SEALs are worried, but they resume their mission. Taking their position on the mountain, they sit and wait for any signs of Taliban. After a while, Mikey notices movement on a nearby hill. To the SEALs' horror, there are at least eighty armed Taliban soldiers running toward the mountain. Luttrell curses himself for letting the goatherds go.

It's implied that the goatherds go to the Taliban and inform them of the SEALs' position. The SEALs have chosen to respect the lives of unarmed civilians—and, tragically, they're now paying the penalty for their decision. Once again, though, it's important to keep in mind Gulab's later assertion that the Taliban already knew the SEALs were there before they encountered the goatherds, and so the goatherds might have been altogether blameless. Luttrell has also been accused of exaggerating the number of Taliban soldiers—his official report, as well as later intelligence reports from Taliban operatives, suggest that as few as a ten or twenty insurgents showed up, armed with RPGs and other lethal weapons.

As the Taliban approach, Luttrell realizes some of the soldiers are pointing their guns at him. Not sure whether they see him or not, and not wanting to wait and find out, he opens fire. The other SEALs follow suit. Suddenly, Mikey yells, "Fall back!" and the SEALs retreat. Luttrell falls down the side of the mountain, but hits a tree on his fall. He hits the ground, hard, and rolls further down the side of the mountain. Somehow, he's survived his fall—"at that moment," he writes, "I knew there was a God." Even more miraculously, his rifle has fallen just two feet away from his right hand.

Luttrell endures tremendous physical pain after retreating from the Taliban soldiers, but he also experiences some almost miraculous good luck (at least as he describes it, from his memories of an extremely traumatic—and therefore possibly distorted—experience), since he doesn't lose his gun. The terrain seems just as antagonistic to the SEALs as the Taliban are.

Luttrell can see Mikey nearby—he's fallen, too. He seems to have been shot during the fall, but he's alive. Suddenly, there's a loud explosion—the Taliban are lobbing grenades at Luttrell and Mikey. The two SEALs grab their guns (Mikey still has his rifle as well) and open fire on the Taliban. Luttrell can tell by the way the Taliban move that they've been trained in tactical maneuvers, probably by Ben Sharmak.

Luttrell emphasizes the Taliban soldiers' numbers and superior firepower, as well as their tactical advantage and their expert military training—in short, the Taliban outmatch the SEALs in virtually every way, even taking into account the SEALs' expert training.

Axe appears beside Luttrell and Mikey, having rolled down the mountain the same way as Luttrell. Luttrell can see someone else falling down the mountain—almost certainly Danny. Danny's body rolls down the mountain, and when it finally stops, he doesn't move. Luttrell remembers the SEAL code: "No SEAL was ever left alone to die on the battlefield."

Even in the heat of battle, Luttrell remembers his SEAL training, and feels a strong sense of responsibility to his fallen friends. Luttrell's close bond to his fellow SEALs makes these battlefield losses all the more poignant.

The three SEALs open fire on the Taliban and rush toward Danny's body. Luttrell, the resident medic, is unable to help Danny, since he's lost his supplies in the fall. Danny's right hand has been shot. Nevertheless, he climbs to his feet and joins his fellow SEALs. They fire back on the Taliban, killing dozens. Nevertheless, they're so badly outnumbered that they have to retreat. For the second time, the SEALs have no choice but to jump down the mountain. They land in "a thicket of shrubs" forty feet down.

Luttrell is the least injured of the SEALs, and he's also the team medic, but he has no way of helping his friends. Furthermore, the constant gunfire from the Taliban means that Luttrell may not have had the time to care for his friends even if he did have his supplies.

The SEALs resume firing at the Taliban. The Taliban have two of the most basic military advantages: they outnumber the SEALs, and they have the high ground. Taliban reinforcements seem to be coming in to replace any soldiers the SEALs kill. Suddenly, Danny falls to the ground—he's been shot in the neck. Amazingly, he climbs back to his feet. Mikey shouts, "The only way's down," meaning that the SEALs need to make their way down the mountain, toward the nearest village. If they can find a safe house, they should be able to fight any army Ben Sharmak sends.

Again, Luttrell emphasizes the large number of Taliban soldiers fighting the SEALs (a detail that's been challenged since the book was published). It's not just that the SEALs are outnumbered, however; rather, it's that they're outnumbered, outgunned, have an inferior tactical position, and lack the element of surprise. In short, they have just about every disadvantage a group of soldiers could possibly have.

CHAPTER 8

In the middle of the shoot-out with the Taliban, Mikey shouts, "Fall back!" Right away, Axe and Luttrell jump down the mountain, while Mikey and Danny provide cover. Luttrell and Axe land safely, but almost as soon as they do, a grenade detonates, blowing them farther down the mountain. Amazingly, Luttrell and Axe are unharmed, although Luttrell has a broken nose. Luttrell writes, "I don't know much about Mohammad, but by all that's holy, I don't think my own God wished me to die."

The fact that Luttrell survives the attack of the Taliban troops is incredible and in some ways almost miraculous, affirming Luttrell's lifelong faith in God (and also, perhaps, some inconsistencies in his narrative). But notice how, even in this moment, Luttrell distinguishes between the Islamic faith of the Taliban and that of the Christian soldiers. In this way, Luttrell suggests that Muslims worship a different god and are fundamentally different from Christians (even though one could argue that Christians and Muslims worship the same God, in different ways).

Luttrell and Axe shoot back at the Taliban. There are at least eighty soldiers rushing toward them. Danny and Mikey, amazingly, have managed to leap down the mountain and rejoin Luttrell and Axe. Mikey jokes, "this really sucks." A grenade explodes, throwing Danny to the ground. Then a bullet hits him in the neck again. Luttrell begins to weep: he's supposed to be a medic, but he has no way of helping his friend.

Even in the midst of a horrifying fight with the Taliban, Mikey manages to crack a joke—describing the battle as if it's a minor irritation, rather than a life-threatening catastrophe. Luttrell feels helpless, since he's unable to help the people he's been trained to help.

The four SEALs manage to move farther down the mountain, with Luttrell dragging Danny. Just then, additional Taliban fighters appear in the distance—the SEALs are even more badly outnumbered than they'd thought. A bullet hits Axe in the chest, and his rifle falls to the ground. But then he picks up his gun and resumes firing—Luttrell writes that this was "the bravest thing I ever saw."

Luttrell is overcome with admiration for his three friends, who fight to the death against a much more powerful foe. In one sense, Lone Survivor *is an act of bearing witness to the heroism of Luttrell's fallen comrades.*

Luttrell realizes that Danny, who he's been dragging down the mountain, is dead. Somehow, this makes Luttrell concentrate on survival: he says, "We have to get down this goddamned mountain or we'll all be dead." In this moment of crisis, Luttrell remembers the SEAL code: be stronger, smarter, and tougher than one's enemies, and never surrender.

The loss of a close friend would cause some people to give up or become hysterical; however, Luttrell, due partly to his training and partly to his natural personality, falls back on his SEAL training and concentrates on the task at hand: saving his life and the lives of his surviving friends.

The SEALs try to move down the mountain, but they're in such bad shape that they can barely protect their position. Knowing he has no other option, Mikey phones military HQ—something he's been warned not to do unless he has no other option, since the call will betray the team's position. He says, "We need help." Just then, a Taliban soldier fires a bullet into his back, and he falls to the floor. Luttrell will never forget the calm tone in Mikey's voice as he makes the call: fearless even on the brink of death.

Ernest Hemingway once defined courage as "grace under pressure," and by that definition, Mikey's calm, measured words to military HQ are the perfect example of courage. Instead of betraying his fear, Mikey controls his emotions, living up to the code of bravery and stoic machismo which he's learned in the course of becoming a SEAL.

Luttrell is the least injured member of the team, but he's running out of ammunition. Mikey falls to the ground and screams out in pain. Then, very abruptly, he falls silent—he's dead, as is Danny. Axe is losing blood fast—within a few minutes, he'll probably be dead too. He says, "You stay alive, Luttrell. Tell Cindy I love her." These are his last words.

In his last moments, Axe utters a simple but poignant request, suggesting that he dies thinking about the people he cares most about, like his wife, Cindy. Axe's last words also seem to act as a kind of charm for Luttrell—he is meant to survive, in part to convey his fallen comrades' sentiments to their loved ones.

Suddenly, a grenade explodes, blowing Luttrell off his feet. He loses consciousness for a moment, and when he comes to, his left leg is jammed with shrapnel. His vision is blurred, and, bizarrely, his pants have been blown off. All he can do is crawl on his belly. And yet, once again, his rifle has landed just a few feet away from him. In this dark moment, Luttrell stops to pray to God for mercy. He also remembers the code of the SEALs, and vows never to surrender to the Taliban soldiers who've murdered his friends.

Luttrell continues to endure horrific pain, and yet he remains focused on the matter at hand. In his time of crisis, Luttrell turns to the two authorities by which he lives his life: God and the United States military. It would be easy to give up, but with the help of his religion and his professional training, Luttrell finds the strength to continue fighting.

Luttrell begins to gather his senses. He can't hear any gunfire, suggesting that the Taliban assume he's dead. But then he hears more gunfire: the Taliban are nearby. However, they can't see where he is, since he's hiding under a rock. Thinking quickly, Luttrell wipes the blood off the rock so that the soldiers won't be able to track him. He has no medical supplies, but he has a gun, some ammunition, and a compass. All he can do is pray that the enemy soldiers don't find him. This is the first time in his career as a SEAL that he's been genuinely scared. He'll later learn that this was "the worst disaster to befall the SEALs" in history.

Even though he's disoriented and frightened, Luttrell has the presence of mind to hide any signs of his whereabouts, a decision that may have saved his life. He also assesses his situation, taking stock of what he has and what he's lost in his fall. In short, Luttrell acts like a good SEAL, keeping his wits about him even in the face of incredible danger.

Back at the U.S. military base, Luttrell later learns, Lieutenant Kristensen gets Mikey's message and sends the entire 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, along with the rest of SEAL Team 10, to recover the SEALs. The primary commander of the recovery mission is Major Steve Reich. The recovery mission flies out to find the SEALs. As the SEALs' helicopter approaches Ben Sharmak's base, however, the Taliban soldiers fire on it. A rocket-propelled grenade hits the helicopter, killing everyone on board. At the time, though, Luttrell knows nothing about this.

The recovery of the four SEALs causes an even worse tragedy, making Operation Redwing indeed one of the greatest disasters in SEAL history. This confirms some of the misgivings that Luttrell had even before he left on Operation Redwing: it's virtually impossible to land a helicopter surreptitiously in a small, remote community, meaning that anyone who does so will be vulnerable to the Taliban.

Wounded, and still hiding under the rock, Luttrell pulls out his radio and tries to make contact. He can hear an aircrew talking, but he's too disoriented to speak. Instead, he activates his emergency distress beacon. Luttrell later learns that the American team was reluctant to respond to the beacon, because the Taliban sometimes use them to lure helicopters into fire.

Luttrell is so shocked and traumatized by what he's just experienced that he can't even speak. This is by no means unusual for people who survive horrific disasters, even those with as much military training as Luttrell.

By this time, the sun is setting behind the mountains. Luttrell is thirsty and frightened, but he doesn't move for fear of being shot. He notices a Taliban soldier carrying a gun, some 150 yards away—surely, the soldier is trying to find Luttrell. Slowly, Luttrell raises his gun and fires upon the soldier, killing him instantly. Soon after, two other soldiers rush over to where the soldier has fallen. Luttrell kills the two soldiers in three shots, before they can figure out where the bullets are coming from.

Luttrell manages to defend himself from a small group of Taliban soldiers without attracting the rest of them. In this way, he lives up to his expert training as a sniper, shooting precisely in order to conceal his position. (Although once again it's worth considering later reports of the situation, which suggest that very few—if any—Taliban soldiers were killed at all.)

Luttrell is light-headed from loss of blood, and his backs hurts—he later learns he's cracked three vertebrae during his falls. Knowing he's going to die unless he finds help, he decides to move. He can barely put pressure on his left leg, but he manages to move by taking short strides up the mountain.

Luttrell is slowly bleeding to death, but he summons the strength to move himself away in search of help and water. He's a SEAL, meaning that he's been trained to work through pain.

CHAPTER 9

By the time Luttrell summons the strength to move, it's pitch-black on the mountain. He climbs up the mountain, reasoning that it's better to be high up in the event of another shoot-out. He also thinks that it'll be easier to get help from the top of the mountain—a helicopter would have an easier time landing there.

Even though he's in a lot of pain, Luttrell keeps an impressively clear head, forming a plan to return to an American military base as soon as possible.

Luttrell slips and falls about ten feet. Even though he's in enormous pain, he gets up and keeps climbing. Suddenly, he hears the cracks of twigs. This means one thing: he's being followed, probably by Taliban soldiers, who may have night vision goggles. As the night goes on, Luttrell hears American aircraft flying overhead, and tries to transmit a distress signal. Nobody responds to the signal, however.

Luttrell deduces from the crack of twigs that there are Taliban soldiers looking for him in the mountains—soldiers who are much more familiar with the terrain and much better equipped for night operations. It's almost unbelievable that Luttrell is able to avoid the Taliban that night.

By 2 am, Luttrell is still climbing up the mountain. He can hear Taliban soldiers not far away. He falls again, this time dropping his compass and strobe light (for distress signaling). He's forced to navigate by looking at the North Star. In this moment, he thinks back to Hell Week. He tells himself that, just as he got through Hell Week by "sucking it up," he'll get through this night.

This is a great example of why Hell Week is so important for SEALs. It's painful and psychologically challenging, but it's also the only effective way to prepare soldiers for the real stresses of warfare. Thus, when Luttrell finds himself in a real emergency situation, he's able to stay relatively calm and summon the will to push on.

At 6 am, Luttrell is still climbing up the mountain. He's desperate to find water, and he's so dehydrated that he's beginning to hallucinate. At times, he's in so much pain he crawls on his belly. He remembers the Bible's 23rd Psalm: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." Suddenly, Luttrell sees a small brook and waterfall ahead of him. Stunned, he approaches the brook.

In the previous passage, Luttrell found inspiration in his SEAL training; here, he finds inspiration in Christianity. The 23rd Psalm has inspired countless people with its message of hope and the transcendence of earthly pains. Luttrell then presents the appearance of the waterfall as a kind of miraculous answer to his prayers.

By this time, the American military has concluded that Luttrell is dead. The story of the SEAL team's defeat makes national news, and Holly Luttrell is devastated when she hears that her child has been killed. By the end of the day, dozens of people have showed up at the family's house to offer their condolences to Luttrell's parents, his twin brother Morgan, and his "kid" brother Scottie. Among them is Billy Shelton, who nobody has ever seen in tears before.

For a book about tough, strong soldiers, there are a surprising number of scenes in Lone Survivor *featuring grown men weeping. But this is because of the gravity of the situation that now threatens Luttrell's life—it's seen as appropriate for "real men" to cry when the circumstances are right. Billy Shelton is a "manly man," but he's justified and humanized in weeping for the death of Marcus Luttrell, his pupil.*

Back on the mountain, Luttrell approaches the waterfall, when suddenly a Taliban soldier fires at him, hitting him in the thigh. Summoning all his strength, Luttrell runs away from the brook, knowing that it's harder to hit a moving target than most people would think. He runs, crawls, and rolls down the mountain for the next forty-five minutes.

Even though Luttrell is already wounded and losing a lot of blood, he's able to run away from the Taliban soldier—he explains that this is because it's pretty hard to hit a moving target, even for an experienced soldier. However, some have suggested that Luttrell is again exaggerating the danger he faces.

Luttrell tries to hide in a forest on the mountain, but a Taliban scout approaches him. Strangely, the scout is unarmed. (The Taliban often delegate responsibilities in this way, Luttrell says, with one person carrying the water, one person scouting the terrain, etc.) Luttrell shoots the scout and then lobs a grenade in the direction of the rest of the search party. It explodes, and there's quiet for a moment.

Luttrell continues to defend himself from the Taliban successfully, thanks to a mixture of resourcefulness and sheer luck (had he run into someone other than the water carrier, he probably wouldn't have been so lucky).

Breathing heavily from his running, Luttrell tries to decide what to do. He moves west, perhaps three or four miles, toward the waterfall. No Taliban soldiers seem to be present. Just before he drinks some water, he looks down at Sabray, a Pashtun village in the distance. While looking out at the village, his left leg gives way, and he falls down the side of the mountain once again. In great pain, he forces himself to crawl back toward the water. Amazingly, he still has his rifle.

Luttrell continues to push himself to survive, even after he falls down the side of a mountain once again. As he freely admits, he survives because of his willpower but also his luck.

Luttrell climbs back to the waterfall. Once there, he drinks some more water. Suddenly, he looks up and sees three Afghan men, two armed with AK-47s. At first he thinks he's hallucinating, but then, one of the men begins to shout at him. Luttrell rolls away from the water and raises his rifle. Instead of firing, he decides to retreat as fast as he can. As he runs down the mountain, it occurs to him, "If these guys really wanted to shoot me they could have done it by now."

Luttrell is understandably frightened—the only people with whom he's interacted in the last few hours have been trying to kill him. But he's also smart enough to realize that these men obviously don't want him dead, since they could have shot him while he was drinking from the waterfall.

Luttrell sees three other Afghan men approaching, him, also carrying guns. Nobody fires. One of the men cries, "American! Okay!" Luttrell asks, "Taliban?" And the man cries, "No Taliban!" Luttrell realizes that these men mean him no harm. The leader of the men approaches Luttrell, smiling, and says, "Sarawa," his name. He adds, in rough English, that he's the village doctor. Realizing he has no choice but to trust this man, Luttrell says, "Hospital. Water." Sarawa motions for a man to bring Luttrell water. Grateful, Luttrell shows Sarawa that he's wounded and bleeding badly.

Luttrell has never met these Pashtun men before, and based on his comments in previous chapters, he finds the Pashtuns to be a wild, dangerous group of people. But he accepts their help, since his only real alternative is to remain in the mountains and slowly bleed to death or be discovered and killed by the Taliban.

Luttrell doesn't realize it at the time, but Sarawa and his men take a huge risk by helping Luttrell. Sarawa and his men are Pashtuns, an ethnic group that mostly supports the Taliban. However, Sarawa is a strong believer in the ancient Pashtun principle of *lokhay warkawal*, the law of hospitality. For Sarawa, to help a wounded man represents an unbreakable bond: he must defend the man to the death, from hereon out.

As Luttrell explains it, Sarawa agrees to help him because of an arcane Pashtun custom. This is certainly true in part, but it's not the whole story. At least in part, Sarawa agrees to help Luttrell because of basic human decency—he makes a choice, rather than simply honoring an obligation. By characterizing Sarawa in this way, Luttrell makes him seem more alien, from an American perspective, and less in touch with universal moral values.

Luttrell, of course, has no idea what Sarawa is thinking. From Luttrell's perspective, Sarawa and his friends may have had family who were killed by American soldiers. And yet, Sarawa orders two men to carry Luttrell. As they do so, Luttrell takes his last grenade and pulls the pin, holding it tight. If the Pashtuns try to hurt him, Luttrell will release his grip and detonate the grenade, taking enemies with him.

Luttrell continues to distrust the Pashtuns, even while they save his life. While one could attribute this to prejudice or xenophobia, it could also be argued that Luttrell is just disoriented and, quite understandably, frightened, given what's happened to him in the last day.

CHAPTER 10

Sarawa and his men carry Luttrell down the mountain. They don't attempt to take his rifle. Meanwhile, Luttrell continues clutching his grenade, prepared to detonate it if things go bad. As the men carry Luttrell, they pass other Afghan men, many of whom stare at Luttrell with undisguised hatred.

Although the men are clearly protecting Luttrell from harm, he recognizes that he's not completely welcome in the Pashtun community. This would seem to confirm his original point that Pashtuns are natural allies of the Taliban—or suggest that American soldiers seem like the invasive "terrorists" to many Afghan civilians.

Eventually, Sarawa, Luttrell, and the other men arrive at a house by the mountain. Inside, Luttrell drinks water, and Sarawa begins cleaning his leg wound. By this time, it's around 6 pm. Suddenly, Luttrell realizes that the men have taken his rifle. The men explain that they're pretending that Luttrell is a wounded doctor—nobody will believe them unless they hide the gun. They feed Luttrell bread and goat's milk.

Luttrell is suspicious that the Pashtuns have taken his gun, even after they give him food and milk. While Luttrell doesn't delve into why the Pashtuns take his gun, one might imagine that they're frightened that he'll try to shoot them (especially considering the way he used his grenade to threaten them). In short, Luttrell gives readers reason to believe that the Pashtuns are as frightened of him as he is of them.

Night falls, and Luttrell falls into a deep sleep. Late at night, however, eight armed Taliban soldiers break into the house and shake Luttrell awake. They attack Luttrell with their fists, punching his leg and upper body. As the Taliban hit him, Luttrell doesn't show any signs of weakness. He considers attacking them with a heavy iron bar lying in the corner of the room. The problem with this option is that it would leave Luttrell with no reliable way of leaving Sabray. Instead of fighting back, Luttrell decides to go along with the lie and say he's a doctor in the army. The Taliban don't believe him—they know that the American army doesn't allow beards, and that only special forces operatives are allowed to grow them. The Taliban also say—again, in broken English—that they've shot down an American helicopter.

Luttrell is tortured by a group of Taliban soldiers. He claims that he was strong enough to have fought back, but that he decided not to because he wouldn't have any way of leaving the village safely. The passage leaves it temporarily unclear why the Taliban don't just kill him, since they recognize that he's lying to them about his identity.

An elderly man enters the room, and the Taliban fall silent. The old man offers Luttrell water and bread. Then, he turns to the Taliban and tells them something. Luttrell can't understand a word of what he's saying, but he senses that the man speaks with great authority, and that nobody dares contradict him. As the elder walks out of the rom, the Taliban soldiers follow him, leaving Luttrell alone, and very confused.

The village elder seems to be protecting Luttrell from the Taliban's aggression—and, furthermore, he has sway over the Taliban.

Later at night, Sarawa enters the room again, accompanied by some friends. They carry Luttrell out of the room—Luttrell later learns they acted on the elder's orders, lest the Taliban break the code of *lokhay*. They carry Luttrell out of Sabray toward a cave by the mountain. They leave him there, with a foul-smelling bottle of water. For the rest of the night, Luttrell lies by the cave, terrified that he's been left for dead. Remembering his favorite movie, he picks up a sharp stone and carves, "God will give me justice" onto the wall of the cave.

As an added precaution, Sarawa and his men move Luttrell to a safer location. The Count of Monte Cristo *again serves as an inspiration to Luttrell. Based on the context of the book, the words "God will give me justice" again seem to allude to the violent revenge Luttrell hopes to enjoy against the Taliban soldiers who wounded him and killed his friends.*


Around 8 am, Luttrell hears the faint sound of bells, signaling that the goatherds are passing by. Suddenly, he sees a gun sticking in his face. To his amazement, the gun belongs to one of the man who took care of him in Sabray—the man is grinning cheerfully. He's brought Luttrell goat's milk and water. Shortly afterwards, Sarawa shows up again. He posts a guard outside the cave, and for the next few hours the guard, whose name is Norzamund, protects Luttrell, feeds him bread, and offers him water.

The goatherds' bells allude back to the events of the previous day, when the chance encounter with a group of Afghan goatherds seemingly derailed Operation Redwing almost as soon as it began. Here, however, Afghan locals risk their own lives to defend Luttrell, rather than betraying him to the Taliban.

Unbeknownst to Luttrell, back home in America, his entire family has come together to mourn his death. Contrary to the reports on TV, however, the American military has declared Luttrell MIA, missing in action—he hasn't officially been declared dead.

Luttrell contrasts the inappropriate hastiness of the American media with the calm, measured thinking of American military commanders. The media declare Luttrell dead, but the military doesn't jump to conclusions.


On Friday, July 1, Norzamund and two other men lead Luttrell back to Sabray. There, Sarawa replaces the dressings on Luttrell's wounds. Luttrell is then taken to stay in the home of a man named Mohammad Gulab, the police chief and the son of the village elder. Gulab and Luttrell genuinely like each other. Gulab teaches Luttrell a Muslim prayer, and when Luttrell recites it, Gulab cheerfully tells Luttrell that he's officially a Muslim now.

This is one of the rare scenes in the book in which Luttrell shows signs of genuine friendship with a non-American in a "hostile" country. While Gulab and Luttrell clearly have some big differences (they have different religions and can't even speak the same language), Luttrell seems to accept their differences, and even find ways to laugh about them, in a way that he doesn't in other parts of the memoir.

Gulab tells Luttrell that there's an American military base two miles away. However, he says, Luttrell is too weak to walk there alone. Luttrell interprets this to mean that he'll be transported to the base as soon as possible. However, Luttrell gradually realizes that the Afghan men don't want to carry him—if the Taliban spot them, they'll be shot. Instead, the elderly man asks Luttrell to write a letter to the military, explaining that they should trust the elderly man. The elderly man plans to walk to Asadabad to contact the Americans.

Luttrell is too weak to walk out of the village on his own, meaning that he's entirely dependent on Afghan men—a situation that Luttrell, a macho and in some ways intensely bigoted man, finds frustrating. His future now rests on the shoulders of an elderly Afghan man who has to walk over the mountains.

During his time with Gulab, Luttrell learns about the al Qaeda networks in Pashtun villages. Jihadists (i.e., Muslim terrorists) are careful to preserve good relations with the Pashtuns, offering them gifts and bribes for their continued cooperation. Children are brought up to worship the "romantic cutthroats" who oppose the United States. However, in Sabray, led by Gulab's father, there's "a sense of law and order and discipline in an essentially lawless land."

This is one of the few scenes in which Luttrell distinguishes between different kinds *of people in Afghanistan. Some, he allows, are good people, who believe in the value of law and order. But many others are murderous villains—or else young murderers in the making. (Again, the bitter irony is that an Afghan man could easily argue that Marcus has been brought up to romanticize murderers, too.)*

Luttrell notes that the American military is forbidden from fighting its enemies in the same way that al Qaeda fights America. But if the American military *were* allowed to do so, Luttrell argues, "we'd probably win in both Afghanistan and Iraq in about a week." But because of the power of American liberals, American soldiers, including Luttrell, have to take extra risks and throw themselves into danger.

At times, Luttrell seems to despise American liberals as much as he despises al Qaeda and Taliban operatives—his sense of tribalistic competition, or "us vs. them," applies not only to non-Americans but also to those he sees as not "real" Americans. He has no patience for the ROE, and, quite disturbingly, seems to wish that he could be as brutal and dangerous as the terrorists he fights. The "extra risks" that he refers to are surely maddening, but they also force Luttrell and other American soldiers to uphold basic moral values and refrain from killing women and children, as the Taliban do.

Gulab arranges for some men to move Luttrell to a different location, since it's too dangerous for Luttrell to stay put. In this new location, Luttrell receives a pouch of tobacco opium for his pain. Luttrell places the opium under his lip, like tobacco—and within minutes, the opium eliminates his pain. It occurs to Luttrell that most of the suicide bombers in the Middle East use opium and other drugs—there's nothing heroic about what they do.

It's interesting that, even when Luttrell's Pashtun hosts treat him kindly (clearly, they go above and beyond the tradition of lokhay *by giving him this painkiller), Luttrell finds a way to use it as evidence for the inferiority of America's enemies—in this case, arguing that suicide bombers (who are very literally dying for their beliefs) aren't brave in the slightest.*

Outside the house, Luttrell hears American helicopters flying low. He rushes outside and waves his shirt, trying to draw attention to himself. But the helicopters fly on. Luttrell assumes that the American military has given up looking for him. However, Gulab informs Luttrell that his father has left for Asadabad: Luttrell's future "rested in the soft tread of this powerful yet tiny old man."

Luttrell tries to alert American planes by any means necessary, but he's too weak to take care of himself—instead, he has to trust that Gulab and the other Pashtuns will protect him from danger.

CHAPTER 11

Luttrell continues to stay with Gulab while Gulab's father walks out to Asadabad to talk to the American military. Gulab informs Luttrell that he has received a letter ordering him to hand over the American to the Taliban immediately—but Gulab has no interest in complying with these demands.

Gulab stands up to the Taliban soldiers, even though he's risking his own life, and probably the lives of his family members, in doing so.

One evening, Luttrell hears local children shouting, "parachute!" Luttrell learns that the American military has dropped supplies near Sabray—presumably to help the fallen SEALs. Shortly afterwards, Gulab and his men give Luttrell his rifle, his ammunition, and his radio. Luttrell knows that he could contact the Americans by sending out a distress signal—the problem, however, is that this signal would also draw Taliban forces into Sabray.

The American military is still looking for Luttrell, honoring its commitment never to leave a man behind. At the same time, Luttrell receives additional proof that Gulab and his friends are on his side: they give him his rifle, presumably assuming that they can trust Luttrell.

A few nights later, the village children bring Luttrell instructions for using a cell phone, which they say they found with the parachute supplies. Later on, they bring a battery and some food. Luttrell notices that the children have been beaten up, suggesting that the Taliban soldiers attacked the children to stop them from getting anything from the parachute. While he's horrified by the Taliban's behavior, Luttrell begins to think strategically: the military has dropped supplies, suggesting it believes at least one SEAL is still alive.

As Luttrell spends more time in the village, he comes to sympathize with the people (and especially the children), who live there, to a degree that he hasn't expressed previously. Here again, his experiences hammer home his hatred for the Taliban, even as he seems to acknowledge that there are more "good people" in Afghanistan than he'd previously thought.

Luttrell wants to leave Sabray his own—he knows he's in danger as long as he's in the village, and he doesn't want villagers to suffer because of him. But his options are limited, and furthermore, Gulab's father may or may not have made contact with the Americans in Asadabad. Luttrell could wait in the village, or he could try to walk to the U.S. outpost in Monagee. He considers walking to Asadabad himself, but decides that it's too far. In the end, Gulab arranges to walk Luttrell into Monagee overnight. Luttrell, Gulab, and a few other men plan to leave late at night, but a heavy storm prevents them from doing so.

Luttrell is healing quickly, but not quickly enough for him to walk all the way into Asadabad safely—apparently, an elderly man is more capable of walking there than he is, suggesting that he's still in bad health as a result of his shootout with the Taliban. Luttrell must continue to lean on Gulab and his friends.

It's the 4th of July weekend, a time of celebration for all Americans. But back in America, Luttrell's parents are grieving, thanks to the misinformation they've seen on television. However, Senior Chief Petty Officer Chris Gothro visits Holly and tells her that Luttrell is MIA, meaning he could still be alive.

Officer Gothro offers Holly some consolation in her time of grief, pointing out that Luttrell may still be alive. Of course, this may torment Holly even more than the news of her son's death, since it prevents her from reaching any kind of closure.

On the morning of July 4th, Luttrell wakes up—the overnight walk was canceled due to the rain. Luttrell is furious and—he admits later—ungrateful to Gulab for looking out for his safety. He realizes that Ben Sharmak is still waiting to kill him—doing so would be a huge victory for the Taliban.

This is one of the few passages in which Luttrell admits that he's not grateful enough to Gulab for saving his life. However, one could argue that Luttrell doesn't fully express his gratitude elsewhere in the memoir, either. (And the story of Luttrell and Gulab's relationship after the publication of the book is a long, interesting, and tragic one as well.)

Later in the day, Gulab cries out, "Taliban! Taliban are here!" Luttrell runs out of the house, but then realizes he doesn't have his gun. Bravely, Gulab runs back into the village to retrieve Luttrell's gun. He gives Luttrell the gun and says, "We fight." Luttrell quickly takes control over the situation, ordering Gulab where to stand and fire.

Even after his injuries, Luttrell falls back on his expert SEAL training, instinctively taking his battle position and ordering Gulab how to do the same. Once again Gulab shows himself to be incredibly brave, and loyal to a man he has no reason to protect.

The Taliban storm Sabray—Luttrell can hear the cries of young children. But slowly, it becomes clear that the Taliban aren't approaching any further. After an hour or so, Gulab tells Luttrell, "Taliban gone." Gulab also tells Luttrell that a helicopter is coming to help him. Luttrell doubts this'll happen.

The Taliban raid ends as suddenly as it begins. Luttrell emphasizes the Taliban's cruelty to the young children in the community, again emphasizing their inhumanity (but also showing how children might not just grow up romanticizing insurgents, but also fearing them).

Though Luttrell doesn't know it at the time, Gulab has correctly guessed that the Taliban have broken into the building where Luttrell was staying, found nothing, and refrained from searching for other houses for fear of alienating the village elders. Surprisingly, the Taliban are very cautious in Pashtun villages, because they need to keep the people on their side.

During the War on Terror, Afghanistan was often described in blanket terms as a "hostile" country. But as Luttrell suggests here, Afghanistan was largely a politically neutral country, in which both the American troops and the Taliban were vying for the "hearts and minds" of villagers like the ones Luttrell describes here.

Back in Texas, the Luttrell family's vigil continues. The media repeat that Luttrell is dead, but Morgan refuses to consider that he's dead.

Luttrell cuts back and forth between Texas and Afghanistan in a suspenseful, cinematic way.

In Sabray, Gulab and Luttrell decide to "make a break for it." They rush away from the village and into the mountains. Moving at this speed is painful for Luttrell, but he manages to keep up. As the two men approach the Hindu Kush, Luttrell looks up and sees none other than Ben Sharmak, "the man I had come to capture or kill," surrounded by soldiers. Luttrell recognizes Sharmak from photographs. Luttrell realizes that Sharmak's men are holding their fire because Luttrell is with Gulab.

In this suspenseful scene, it's clear how great a risk Gulab is taking by offering his protection to Luttrell. Even though the Taliban have the power to murder him and his family, Gulab stands up to Ben Sharmak, not just because of an ancient custom but because of his decency and strong moral code. (Gulab later faced years of assassination attempts from the Taliban because of his actions, and his beloved nephew was murdered.)

While the men hold their fire, Gulab and Sharmak speak in private. Luttrell knows they're talking about him. This is a standoff between two principled men: Gulab the "village cop" and Sharma the "relentless killer."

Surprisingly, Luttrell is willing to admit that Sharmak is "principled," where in previous chapters he's emphasized the corruption and ideological confusion of the opposing side in the War on Terror.

CHAPTER 12

After five minutes, Gulab and Ben Sharmak return from their conversation, and Sharmak walks away to rejoin his forces. Gulab and Luttrell stand by the mountain, staring at Ben Sharmak and his men. Gulab explains that Sharmak gave him a note demanding that Gulab either hand over "the American" or risk the death of every single person in his family.

Even when he's threatened, point-blank, with the deaths of everyone he loves, Gulab stays loyal to Marcus Luttrell, a man he's only just met. Gulab exhibits exceptional bravery, equal to anything Luttrell depicts in his SEAL friends.

Gulab leads Luttrell through a forest in the mountains. They're vulnerable to Taliban soldiers, but they also have backup from villagers stationed in the forest in order to protect Gulab. Luttrell considers his situation: he's alone with the tribesmen, "with no coherent plan," and he's in great pain.

Although Gulab has just saved Luttrell's life yet again, he is hardly safe from danger.

Suddenly, Luttrell sees an Afghan man pointing an AK-47 at his face. To his relief, Luttrell realizes that the fighter is Afghan special forces—i.e., an ally of the American military. Behind the fighter, Luttrell sees two U.S. Army Rangers. Gulab, displaying "unbelievable presence of mind," shouts out Luttrell's BUD/S class numbers: 2-2-8.

At every stage of Luttrell's ordeal, Gulab distinguishes himself as an exceptionally clever, resourceful, and courageous man—and here, he helps the Afghan forces ascertain that they've found their man.

The Army Ranger captain orders a team to move Luttrell out of the forest immediately. They begin fixing Luttrell's wounds, replacing Sarawa's dressings with fresh bandages and antiseptic cream. Luttrell begins to realize what's happened: the Army Rangers have searched hundreds of square miles of mountain and found Luttrell. Luttrell tries to debrief the Rangers as quickly as possible on the danger: Ben Sharmak is nearby, accompanied by a large Taliban army. The captain says he confident he has enough men—twenty—to defeat any Taliban army. He also explains how the Rangers found Luttrell: the emergency signal he activated while he was in the mountains.

A few things to notice here: 1) Luttrell is rescued because of the distress signal he sent out himself, rather than because Gulab's father reaches Asadabad; 2) For not the first time in the book, Luttrell is the beneficiary of some phenomenal good luck, since the Rangers have essentially stumbled upon him in the middle of the forest; 3) The passage once again emphasizes that a small number of American soldiers is more than a match for a large group of Taliban soldiers.

The Rangers lead Luttrell back to Sabray with Gulab. Back in Sabray, Luttrell gives the Ranger captain a full debriefing on his situation. He learns that Mikey, Danny, and Axe's bodies haven't been found. When Luttrell talks about his fight with the Taliban soldiers, he emphasizes how bravely his three teammates fought. As he talks, Luttrell can hear the sound of an American helicopter approaching the village.

Even when he's in great pain and distress, Luttrell fulfills his duties as a soldier, providing his superiors with as much useful information as he can remember.

Suddenly, Gulab shouts, "Taliban!" The American soldiers spring into action. It's clear to Luttrell that the Taliban, knowing that the helicopters are about to take him away, are trying one last time to kill him. The Americans open fire on the Taliban, and Luttrell smiles grimly: after everything he's been through, it's undeniably satisfying to see his friends shoot back at the Taliban. That night, thirty-two al Qaeda and Taliban soldiers die—"not enough," Luttrell writes.

For the final time in the book, Luttrell writes about how satisfying revenge can be. He's been severely wounded by Taliban forces, and the Taliban have also murdered three of his friends. It's perversely satisfying, then, for him to witness the American military shooting dozens of Taliban troops—though, as he seems to suggest, no amount of violence can remedy his grief and regret.

As the Taliban retreat, an American helicopter lands in the Hindu Kush. The Rangers help Luttrell, and then Gulab, into the helicopter. Gulab is uncertain for the journey ahead, both because he doesn't know where he's going and because he's never flown before. The ride to Asadabad is short; for the time being, Gulab will remain in Asadabad, and Luttrell will go on to Bagram. Luttrell and Gulab have a short goodbye. This is painful for Luttrell, because he has no way to express his thanks to Gulab, who's saved his life.

Luttrell and Gulab's friendship comes to a quick and rather poignant end (in the book, at least—in real life they've had many more encounters). Gulab is the only Afghan character in the memoir for whom Luttrell voices clear, unambiguous respect. And yet even in Gulab's case, Luttrell doesn't have the ability to express his feelings of gratitude—perhaps symbolizing the alienation of the U.S. military from the people of Afghanistan they're supposedly trying to protect.

In Bagram, Luttrell receives the medical care he desperately needs. He's lost thirty-seven pounds, cracked three vertebrae, broken his nose, smashed his wrist, and hurt his leg. In the hospital, Luttrell weeps: to be back around people who care about him and want to protect him is overwhelming. The first thing he asks for in Bagram is a cheeseburger.

Even though Gulab and the villagers were literally saving Luttrell's life and trying to heal him, he doesn't perceive them as truly "caring" about him—he only feels this about the Americans back at the base. (Also: Luttrell's request for a cheeseburger inspired a brief, funny scene in the 2008 movie Iron Man*!)*

Back in Texas, Luttrell's parents learn that their son is alive. Holly is so overwhelmed that she faints. Every one of her friends and neighbors greets this news with "a pure outpouring of relief and joy." Soon after hearing the good news, the Luttrell family joins with its friends and neighbors and sings, "God Bless America." Luttrell speaks to his family on the phone, taking great care to be gentle with his mother and to reassure her that he's fine.

The news of Luttrell's survival is greeted with pure joy back in Texas. It's interesting to notice that the Luttrells sing "God Bless America" after they get the good news—rain or shine, happy or sad, the Luttrells affirm their patriotism and their faith in the American military.

During his time in the intensive care unit, Luttrell learns about the practice of *lokhay*, which saved his life. He also begins to have nightmares about Mikey's dying scream.

Luttrell seems to display symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder here: he's haunted by vivid memories of his shootout with the Taliban, and he seems to feel guilty about being the lone survivor of the fight.

In the coming days, the troops recover the bodies of Mikey and Danny (Axe is yet to be found). Luttrell will always remember Mikey as a proud, brave, funny soldier—the best friend he ever had. But Luttrell can't stop worrying about Axe. He tells the soldiers to track down the village elder—surely he, of all people, will know where to find this body.

Luttrell continues to show signs of intense guilt. He senses that, in a way, he's "betrayed" his friends by surviving the shootout. Furthermore, he feels guilty for violating the SEAL code to "leave no man behind."

Shortly afterwards, the military recovers Axe's body. It's discovered that he had only one round of ammunition left—two fewer than he had when Luttrell saw him. This proves that Axe lived longer than Luttrell thought, and fought to the very end.

Axe apparently died as he lived: fighting bravely for the country he loved.

On July 8, Luttrell is moved to a hospital in Germany. For a little over a week, he receives treatment and therapy for his wounds. His longest-lasting problem, strangely, isn't a physical injury, but rather a stomach bug that he contracts from drinking unclean water.

Luttrell continues to recover from his injuries, receiving top medical care. Now that he's escaped immediate danger, he's treated as a hero and a top priority for the American military.

Luttrell returns to San Antonio, Texas, and reunites with his brothers. When Morgan first sees Luttrell, he just says, "Jesus, you look awful. Mom'll have a nervous breakdown." Luttrell laughs.

It's a mark of Luttrell's love and closeness with his twin that they immediately begin cracking jokes about Luttrell's harrowing experiences, rather than being overly serious. For some people, humor is a better "cure" for trauma than exaggerated somberness—but this can also be another example of military machismo.

On the long drive home, Luttrell and his brothers catch up, and Luttrell summons the courage to tell Morgan about the death of Morgan's best friend, Axe. Morgan weeps when he learns how Axe died.

Now that Luttrell is the lone survivor of Operation Redwing, he has to deal with psychological wounds, particularly the guilty fear that he didn't do enough to protect Axe and the other soldiers from harm.

After the brothers arrive at their home, Holly weeps at the sight of Luttrell, who's considerably unhealthier than he looked when Holly saw him last. To Luttrell's surprise, there's now a beautiful stone house on his family's property. The house is a gift from a wealthy Texan named Scott Whitehead who, upon hearing of Luttrell's survival, offered to build Luttrell a house. In the coming weeks, Luttrell and Morgan move in to the house, and receive many visitors, mostly SEALs. Luttrell even receives a call from former president George H. W. Bush. Bush encourages Luttrell to call if he needs help of any kind. Luttrell concludes, "Are Texans the greatest people in the world or what?"

The gifts that pour in after Luttrell is found alive testify to the patriotism and togetherness of Luttrell's Texas community. Luttrell's heroism in Afghanistan has caught the attention of some of the most powerful people in the world, foreshadowing the honors Luttrell will later receive from government elites. Once again Luttrell idealizes "Texan" virtues, and sees the Bushes as quintessentially Texan politicians.

In August, Luttrell is promoted to Petty Officer First Class. Luttrell receives his appointment directly from Admiral Mike Mullin, the Pentagon's chief of Naval Operations. Mullin offers to do anything for Luttrell, and Luttrell has only one request. He removes his Texas "Lone Star" patch, which he's worn throughout his time in Afghanistan, and he asks Mullin to give the patch directly to President George W. Bush. He adds, "President Bush is a Texan. He'll understand."

Luttrell regards George W. Bush as a true Texan, with whom he can speak a private, Texan language. (Although, as many people have pointed out, Bush the great Texan was born in Connecticut, attended Andover, Yale, and Harvard, couldn't ride a horse, and lived in a "ranch" with no cattle—not exactly a great résumé for a "real Texan.")


On September 12, 2005, Luttrell makes the decision to deploy back to the Middle East. He's the only member of his original SEAL team left alive. He serves in Bahrain until late October, at which point he returns to Hawaii. After this visit, it's time for Luttrell to make the most arduous journey of all: visiting the deceased SEALs' families.

As in many a Hollywood film, we've come "full-circle"—we now understand why Marcus was visiting his friends' loved ones in the first chapter.

The bodies of the deceased SEALs (including those killed in the helicopter) are flown back to the SEALs' hometowns under special circumstances. For the SEALs who hail from small towns, as Axe does, the town itself is effectively closed down: the streets are closed to make way for the funeral, and nobody goes to work. The people in Axe's town are proud Americans: they respect Axe for his sacrifice. "No amount of poison about our alleged brutality," Luttrell adds, "is going to change what most people think."

Luttrell makes one of the quintessential right-wing American arguments: the "real" America can be found in small towns, where people respect America and the military, rather than in big coastal cities where liberals criticize the troops. Luttrell's comments about America's "alleged brutality" haven't aged well, and were offensive even at the time. In 2004, news broke of the torture and abuse perpetrated by the American soldiers in charge of Abu Ghraib prison, showing that the abuse Luttrell mentions here was real and brutal.


During his visits to the SEALs' families, Luttrell travels to New York, D.C., Los Angeles, and many other smaller cities. Shortly afterwards, he returns to Coronado, where he conducted his BUD/S training. He finds the **bell** that recruits were permitted to ring during Hell Week. Seeing this bell makes him realize that any number of SEAL recruits would have acted exactly as he acted in Afghanistan. He wouldn't trade his experiences in the Navy for anything—he was, and is, "a United States Navy SEAL."

In this important scene, Luttrell seems to come to terms with some of his guilt and trauma. Even though he's been hurt, both psychologically and physically, by his experiences in Afghanistan, he's proud to have fought for his country. Many victims of PTSD suffer from the crippling feeling that they're all alone in the world. Luttrell, however, seems to take comfort in the fact that he's not alone at all: he's surrounded by other SEALs who've received the same training, would've behaved the same way he did in Afghanistan, and understand what he's going through.

EPILOGUE

On July 18, 2006, Luttrell receives the Navy Cross for his heroism in combat. There, he shakes hands with President George W. Bush. Bush smiles in a way that seems to say, "We're both Texans, right?" Bush shows Luttrell the Lone Star patch Luttrell sent him, and says that it'll be in his future museum. Finally, he tells Luttrell to give him a call if he needs anything at all. Luttrell is awestruck to meet this "very great United States president."

The memoir ends with a scene conveying Luttrell's Texas roots, his pride in his own military service, his idolatry for Bush (and, more implicitly, the Bush administration's policies)—in short, all the major themes of the book. Luttrell is a talented, undeniably brave soldier. Whether he's right to condemn ROE, say that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, or praise America for its aggressive foreign policy during the War on Terror, though, is much more debatable.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Arn, Jackson. "*Lone Survivor.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 25 Jul 2017. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Arn, Jackson. "*Lone Survivor.*" LitCharts LLC, July 25, 2017. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/lone-survivor.

To cite any of the quotes from *Lone Survivor* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Luttrell, Marcus. Lone Survivor. Little, Brown, and Company. 2013.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Luttrell, Marcus. Lone Survivor. New York: Little, Brown, and Company. 2013.