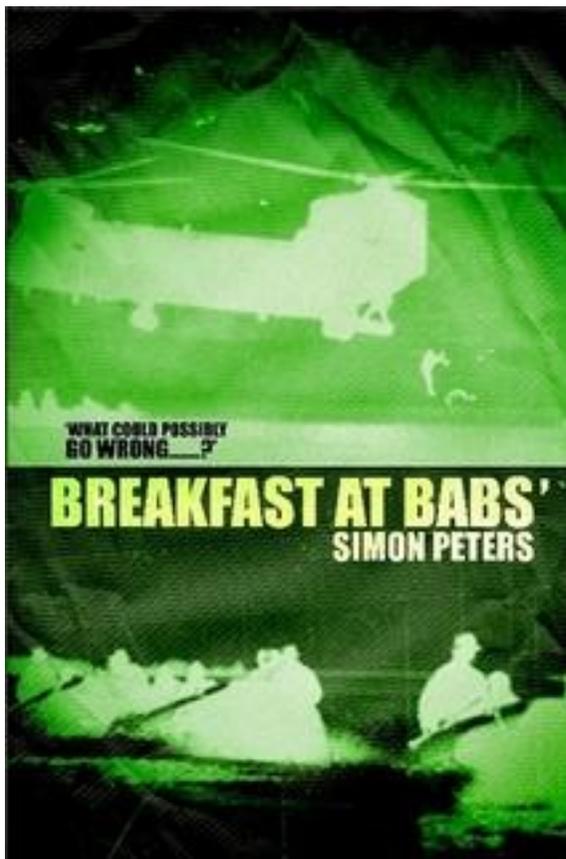


BREAKFAST AT BABS'

SIMON PETERS



Iran September 2004, a CIA team has let a terrorist training cell escape; they are lost into the mountains along with their very young recruits.

Plymouth October 2004, a team of Royal Marine Commando's training in the UK, something is in the air as they train and mentally prepare for the unexpected, the last training mission at sea with a nuclear submarine, the last party, and the last girl, the last Breakfast at Babs.

UK / Iraq October, 2004, the almost comical problems that that the team leader has to face to go to war, the training and planning process he goes through to give his men the best shot at surviving. Being mortared with only a tent for protection, high jinx's on base and in the bar and the seriousness of almost being blown up by a road side bomb.

Basrah October 2004, the team begins its mission in true Commando fashion firstly by high speed craft at night up the Euphrates River, then jumping from a helicopter into a black lake at night into an unknown and hostile environment close to the Iranian border.

Iraq / Iran Border November 2004, Mike watches as he is left behind, the enemy know he's there. Left for dead he experiences a roller coaster of emotions and struggles to stay focused on surviving. Unknown to him his friends fight against the clock, red tape, helicopter and troop shortages to get back to search for what may now be a dead body. Exhausted and out of options Mike is finally cornered by his adversary, now outgunned and surrounded Mike is very much alone, and will have to fight for his life, will be able to survive and once again have the promised 'Breakfast at Babs'

Simon Peters

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In dedication;

**Marine Christopher Maddison, 539 Assault Squadron Royal Marines,
Iraq, 30 March 2003**

Marine Maddison was killed in action after his Landing Craft was hit by an Anti Tank Missile whilst on patrol on the Khawr Az Zubayr River, near Basrah

Landing Craft – Foxtrot Four (LCU F4), Falklands, 8th June 1982

Ignoring orders to await the safety of nightfall, LCU F4 set out in daylight and was sunk by bombs and cannon fire from 4 Argentine Skyhawk aircraft in Choiseul Sound.

6 brave men, Royal Marines and Sailors were lost;

Colour Sergeant Brian Johnston QGM,

Sergeant R.J. Rotherham,

Marine R.D. Griffin,

Marine A.J. Rundle,

LMEM D. Miller,

MEA A.S. James.

They were all **'just getting on with the job'**

In Thanks;

I would like to thank Babs and Carol who play cameo's in this story, they were always there, remembered every name, every girlfriend or Wife, and never forgot an outstanding breakfast chit at the end of the month!

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Prologue

They had been watching the same sun bleached wooden door for 3 days now, its varnish browned, and peeling in long crackled strips. 2 days ago a small white bus had arrived, its paint battered by years of sun and sharp windblown sand, its brakes squealing like a trapped animal as it slowed and came to a halt outside the old door.

They were expecting it, and had been waiting for it. They watched quietly and carefully as a tall well dressed man wearing smart trousers, although a little tight, and a fawn chequered shirt climbed out of the passenger door. He looked a little under 40; his dark hair was long, dry and unkempt, with a few wisps of grey. A pair of gold rimmed Ray Ban Aviators shielded his eyes from the bright afternoon sun.

A white Mercedes saloon passed the bus, and drew up a little way ahead, another could just be seen behind the bus, a little distance down the road. Both were covered in a thick coat of dirt and dust, they seemed to sigh as they settled and rested on their suspension as if they had been driven from across the other side of the world. On further examination the watcher noticed that all the tyres on the vehicles looked abnormally low. Maybe to

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aid grip on the loose and inhospitable terrain that surrounded the small town on every side, maybe that had travelled from much further afield.

One occupant emerged from each of the Mercedes', from the front car a women in a dull and very dusty black burke her head covered in an equally dirty black Chador, appeared by the passenger door. She walked cautiously around to stand in front of the cars bonnet, the white paint hidden by layers of dust and dirt. They watched her as she continuously inspected her surroundings, she scanned up and down the dust and rubble road, and examined, one by one, the mostly derelict two story buildings that flanked the small kerbs in both directions.

Obviously satisfied that all was clear, she looked back towards the tall man by the minibus, and nodded. He in turn looked down the street at a large stocky man, wearing a dark jacket, his head protected from the sun in a red and white chequered shemagh head scarf. Protruding from his thick beard was a dark coloured cigarette, he had been scanning down the road in the opposite direction, looking back he too nodded.

The tall man approached the wooden door, drawing a large iron key from his pocket, he unlocked the door, and pushed it open, with only dry sand for lubrication the iron hinge screamed with the binding of metal against metal. He turned and stood for a moment with his back to the door and then with an urgent hand ushered to the minibus's as yet unseen occupants.

A flash of white was seen as 2 children rushed forward and in through the door, their shoes could be heard tapping as they raced across the tiled floor, the sound echoing from the open door.

The boots popped open on both of the saloons and the man and the women grabbed several bags from their own cars, they shuttling them to the front door where the tall man threw them into the front entrance.

There were 8 of these small gym bags, all identical in colour, Navy Blue, with red piping, at first the watcher assumed that they containing the

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children's belongings, but why 8 for 2 children? Then from each car a further two bags appeared, they were black, large and heavy gauge hold-alls. They were obviously heavy as they watched the women struggle to haul hers one at a time from the deep boot of the car, once safely on the floor, she half lifted and half dragged them one by one up to the door step, where they too were then dragged inside.

The women and the large man disappeared inside, leaving only the tall man on the step to the house. He took one last look up and down the street, and with a quick waving of the back of his hand motioned the minibus driver to pull away, which was soon followed by the two escorts in a cloud of dust and black exhaust fumes.

As the sound of the vehicles faded the door was closed slowly, screeching in pain as it did so, and even from across the street the watchers heard the heavy bolt clank as it was locked.

They had watched and waited, it had now been 2 days since the children had arrived, no one else had visited and no one had left, the door had not opened not even to go to the local market which was in the next street.

The watchers sat and waited, the observation post was located on the opposite side of the small deserted street, from their covert vantage point in the upper floor of the old, and for the most part, dilapidated building they could see directly in through the second floor windows above the old cracking door.

The small window that the telescope was pointing through was one of the few with some glass left in it. Cut into it, and above a rusting sink, was an old metal ventilator which very rarely span in the hot still air. When it did spin the bearings screeched once every turn, making the occupants wince from the noise. It seemed so loud in the relative silence it would surely give their position away.

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On the other side of the street and above the old door the two large windows of the old apartment were dusty, and streaked with lines of dirt left by the heavy rains that had fallen some months before.

The second and largest window had a large crack in the bottom corner of its single pane of glass, hanging either side was a heavy pair of ancient, and faded curtains, which looked more like an old red Persian rug that had been torn in two. Now the drapes had a new life as they framed a stage, its players not knowing they had an observant audience.

Fortunately for the watchers the curtains were left open during the long hot days, exposing the cracked window, probably to try to catch the wisp of a draft in the dry airless heat.

Through this window a disturbing show was about to be performed. There was more movement now, they watching as two children sat at a long blue and faded vinyl covered table, which had been conveniently placed by the window.

They had decided the eldest, a boy, was around 12 to 14 years old, and the younger girl about 8. The team had taken dozens of digital photos of them both, and after careful examination decided that they were almost certainly brother and sister.

They were receiving another lesson, on what no one was sure yet. The tall man at the door seemed to have a new role as a teacher, the teacher always appeared smartly dressed, and always in a chequered shirt, with his Ray Bans in his shirt pocket.

Today his shirt was blue and white, just as he had appeared in the grainy photograph that they had been given during their brief by a nervous local operative 2 weeks before, the briefing had been exactly that, brief.

They were not given the normal detailed analysis and mission directive, but told only when and where to look, a picture of the main target and to make a snatch as soon as they had anything incriminating, and felt able to do so.

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The only part of the orders that were specific were that once they had made contact, not to lose sight of the principle target. More agents and resources were coming but not immediately and they were on their own with no support for the time being everyone was determined not to fuck up.

The man they had nick named 'the teacher' had spent most of the afternoon pacing up and down the room, only occasionally as he passed the window was he in line of sight of the observers.

Now he was stood at the end of the table in front of the children. In his hands he held out a green faded canvas bag. He spoke first to the girl, her back to the observers they could see only the top of her head and her turquoise head scarf, glittering with sequins. He motioned and she stood up from behind the table and approached her teacher.

They watched as he helped her put the canvas bag over her out held arms, even from this view point they could tell it was heavy as the girl struggled to pull the straps over her small shoulders. She turned around and leant forward as the teacher helped her adjust the load.

Under the careful direction of the teacher the girl turned slowly and carefully, walking around the room and out of sight for a few seconds. When she reappeared she faced her teacher and smiled broadly, as if she had received a gift. Now facing the window the watcher refocused the telescope and all became clear, the green canvas pockets were bulging with brown lumps that were clearly not school books. Wires ran from the top of each of the 5 pockets across the young girl's chest to her small hand wrapped tightly around the small dark cylinder that was quite obviously the firing device. She smiled down at her older brother her smile beaming with pride.

The teacher motioned with his hand for her to walk around once again. She walked in and out of view, it was obvious that the bomb was very heavy on her delicate frame. She stopped occasionally to adjust the weight

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on her shoulders, then walked out of sight again. A few minutes later she reappeared, the teacher helped her remove the device and the girl sat back down in her original seat.

The watchers looked at each other in disbelief, not able to even find the words to speak. Now it was the boys turn, they watched as the boy went through the same routine, his equipment a little bulkier than the girls, he too strutted proudly around the room, stopping in front of the table he stood like a stallion before his sister proud and virtuous.

The boy turned again with his back to the window, now once again facing his teacher. The teacher seemed to look past the boy, over his shoulder and out through the window, he looked wildly self-possessed as he smiled broadly.

As dusk approached the activity in the flat became more hectic than on previous nights, and all the occupants seemed to be in an anxious state. The children were sat opposite each other at the table; they had been brought food by the female. They had seen her moving around the house as she did the chores, and fed everyone their meals. Inside she no longer wore a Burke but normally something bright. On this occasion she wore a red velvet track suit top, with silver tram lines on the sleeves, and on her head a red and silver scarf, the silver sequins flashing in the artificial light.

The children sat with a large plate of rice and some meat, they ate with metal forks and spoons, and continued to read undisturbed. Often pointing at pages and discussing parts of the text they were so absorbed in. Meanwhile the man with the beard and the women were busy around them, moving from room to room moving bags and collecting belongings. The teacher had stayed in the main room, pacing back and forward, and in and out of view, he had been busy making and receiving calls on at least 3 different mobile phones.

One of the watchers looked around, the soft moonlight reflecting off of her coffee skin, her dark hair short and a little matted with the dust. She

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spoke with a soft American accent, in the back ground of her voice was a slight hint of her Persian roots. 'Hey Toni, they're on the move. It's now or never, get the gear away in the grab bags and wake the others.....quickly.'

The tall dark man was stood back from the window operating the digital camera and the telescope, and watching from a small LCD screen under a black cloth. Toni Marino had only transferred last year from the NYPD, this was his first real field assignment with the CIA, he had spent most of the last year on training courses, cultural familiarisation and learning Arabic, he had spent the last two months as a field and technical data analyst in Baghdad, there to learn the ropes for a year or more, or that was the plan.

It had come as a complete surprise when he was suddenly assigned to a penetration team, he was told it was because of his past experience on a SWAT team, and so he had some of the skills required. He had had plenty of time in the last few weeks and especially the last few days to wonder if it was really a good idea as he had struggled to learn on the job, he had to admit that even the CIA must be seriously short of experienced people, or just had too much work on now!

Exhilarated, and shit scared all at the same time, he was keen to impress his somewhat bossy and arrogant team leader, 'Okay, sure ma'am'.

They had been through the plan several times before, and had already walked the route several times. When they had arrived the door out into the corridor was only just hanging on by the top hinge, the bottom hinge had rusted away. Toni armed with a multi tool had removed one from another door and replaced it, then used gun oil to stop it squeaking, this had won him a few points, but no direct praise.

In the dark the four agents moved quietly back through the door and carefully down the concrete and stone stairs to one of the bottom flats. They moved in two groups, the woman and Toni moved into the ground floor apartment and waited by a large window which like most of the

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others had long since lost its glass. This was the only place where they could clearly see the old wooden door that accessed the terrorist's upstairs apartment, now directly across the street. The only obstacle between them and the other side of the street was an old burnt out taxi, which had ended its career a few meters from their concealed position. Like Taxi's all over the region it was a Mercedes the only clue to its former colour a faded blue door laying on its side some distance away.

The second team moved down the corridor to what would have been the front door, which was now a large hole barricaded up to waist height with assorted junk, including an old TV with the screen smashed, half a rusty bike and various pieces of charred clothes, carpet and wood. From here they could only just see the edge of the terrorist's exit point, but their job was to cut off any escape attempt up the road.

Their earpieces crackled with the sound of a female voice, 'OK upstairs lights have gone out, expect all targets on the move'.

The front door slowly screeched open and after a brief moment the bearded male and then the female, stepped cautiously out onto the street, each observing in a different direction, carefully checking both up and down the street. The female was once again dressed in a black burke and glanced briefly up at the very room the agents had been observing from. She then turned her head and nodded at her partner, he reached now under his clothes and pulled out a lighter from his robe. There was a flash of light as he lit up a cigarette.

'Hold positions, there's the signal' Jo's voice once again crackled over the ear piece.

From further down the street an engine could be heard, shortly followed by some lights, the same small white battered minibus that had first delivered the teacher and two children two days ago came into view. The women held her left arm up to her head to shield her eye's before the

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driver switched the headlights off as he slowed down and pulled up outside the door.

'OK we can do this, no one moves until they're in the open'.

Timing was critical, too soon and all you get is the henchmen, too late and you lose them into the night.

The door opened a little wider, and from Toni's position it was hard to see the two smaller figures as they came through the door, she could just make out the tops of the heads through the minibus windows. Then the man in the chequered shirt came into view.

In the earpiece the woman's voice whispered her orders, 'OK guys this is it three....two....one....go'

Toni followed close behind Jo as she broke from the cover of their hideout, and ran directly toward the mini bus.

In her right hand her automatic pistol levelled and her left arm raised hand extended screaming 'STOP....STOP, STOP NOW'. She shouted whilst pointing at the driver, 'YOU STOP THE FUCKIN BUS'.

It all happened so quickly as these things always did: pick the right target or he'll pick you.

Jo ran forward to the front of the mini bus, a glance at the driver showed that he was terrified, but not an immediate threat. She canted her gun and pointed it directly at him, she was looking up the street for the other women.

To her right Toni now came around the burnt out taxi to cover the terrorist with the cigarette, he was twisting now, his AK47 coming up on aim. Jo, his target was now clearly lit up by the minibus side lights.

Toni already had his target he fired two shots in quick succession which found their target. He watched as the wounded man fell against the wall he dropped his gun on its butt, a single shot rang out from the AK47, a lone green tracer bullet arced up into the night sky. The bearded man staggered down the wall a little way and fell from the curb, rolling behind the bus.

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Toni looked for the wounds but the red side lights of the bus hid any blood escaping from his chest, making him look to the casual observer as if he had fallen asleep on the pavement smoking his black cigarette.

The agent ran forward to confirm his kill, taking up a new position behind the bus next to the dead terrorist. From where he knelt he was able to cover the back of the bus and the apartment door, he was aware that inside the bus were two very frightened children.

To the left the other pair had swung out across the street to cover the female terrorist, shouting at her to put her gun down. She just stared at them as they ran towards her, her weapon fired from the hip initially, automatic fire mixed with the occasional green tracer rained down in their direction. Her aim improved as the weapon was brought up into the shoulder, but luckily for the guys still using automatic fire, and so wasting her ammunition with generally inaccurate fire. She was missing but it still had the desired effect: and they both dove for cover, and this gave her just enough time to dive into a doorway, seeking cover to reload with a fresh magazine.

The driver had frozen, the school teacher was shouting at him from the back of the minibus.

Then Jo shouted again, 'EVERYONE OUT OF THE BUS...NOW!' she didn't think to use Arabic, and didn't give a fuck if they could understand English or not. Indicating with her gun should have made her orders obvious enough to anyone; anyone at least who did not want a bullet in the head. The driver's door slowly began to open. From the rear the teacher in the chequered shirt was shouting at the driver, in an obvious attempt to persuade him to drive on. In a desperate panic he threw himself forward, barging past the two children throwing them down hard against the upholstery. The driver froze, a firm hand was gripping his shoulder, his temple registering the cold hard metal of a pistol, she heard 'Yella Yella', as he screamed at the driver in Arabic.

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Confused Jo switched her aim to the man in the chequered shirt, it was hard to pick him out clearly in dim interior, and she knew there was at least one child in the seat somewhere between them. She hesitated, the van revved and lurched forward, the man in the chequered shirt was staring coolly at her through the windscreen.

The two agents down the street wondered why no more gun fire had come their way. Looking almost simultaneously ahead of them they could see Jo silhouetted by the front lights of the minibus. Her dark hair in a bun she was standing shouting in Arabic at the vehicle. They watched as the minibus lights brightened, and as the bus turned away from the curb and in their direction. Just before the lights blinded them they saw the woman in her black robes taking careful aim with her AK47. The 2 agents jumped up together shouting and raising their pistols, everywhere weapons sang out, both women fell at the same time.

They heard a metallic clunk as the minibus side door rolled back and slammed shut by the sudden forward momentum. They watched Jo spin from the bullet in her shoulder and directly into the front of the bus as it slammed her down, but it was the driver's front wheel slamming over her wounded body that turned a shoulder wound into a fatality.

On the floor the woman in black was clearly wounded, but managed to take aim at Toni laying behind the minibus now suddenly lit up by the tail lights of the escaping vehicle.

Toni was now a sitting duck his only cover the dead body of the cigarette smoking corpse. He raised his gun and fired a couple of rounds in return, but the weight of fire from the automatic assault rifle was too much. Toni knew if he stayed the bullets would find him, but he had frozen, unable to move. He took a breath, and somehow found the courage to persuade his muscles they had a job to do. At that moment he heard his name 'Toni...Toni move now, we got you' and then the sound of rounds being fired to cover him, he made a sudden dash for the cover of the doorway.

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The other 2 agents had put the fire down just in time, they could no longer see past the bus rapidly approaching them, its bright head lights now blinding them. They both now knelt, shooting at the driver as he approached, aware that there were 2 frightened children somewhere inside; the driver swerved the bus erratically as he somehow managed to survive the ambush.

He careered past them both; his bolt for freedom was however short lived. The popping sound 10 meters down the road signalled that his tyres had hit the spiked caltrops chain. Thrown by the cut off team as they had initially dashed across the road. The spikes bit into all 4 tyres deflating them quickly, slowing the minibus and making it heavy, and sluggish. They heard the engine roar as the driver pushed down hard on the accelerator pedal trying to keep up the speed. Sparks were now shooting from the rear of the vehicle as a tyre was ripped from the rim, the vehicle was rapidly slowing.

Desperately the driver dropped through the gears to try to keep up some momentum. He turned hard to the left, knowing this was the way back onto the main market street and now his only chance of escape. Struggling to manoeuvre the minibus the turn was too tight and the minibus leant heavily over, it glanced off of the large curb stone, and scraped down a dark disused lamppost, the metal on metal threw out a festival of sparks.

Back at the apartment the gun fight ensued, Toni was now relatively safe, but outgunned, he was backed into the doorway and reloading his pistol. The 2 agents knew that Toni was not going to fight his way out alone, and in desperate need of help, but someone should go after the minibus, that was where the high value target was.

Ignoring the screeching minibus they both began to lay some fire down to give their colleague time. It was obvious to everyone that the woman was a true fanatic and going to fight to the death. Toni was reloaded and the battle ensued. Toni glanced from his cover and saw in the failing light a

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glimpse of black shoulder and quickly shot twice, he missed and concrete splinters sheared off the wall.

In return a hail of Automatic fire showered his doorframe, concrete and wood was splintering in all directions, the sheer noise making Toni cower again. Then the automatic fire ceased, with his heart pounding Toni waited, she must be reloading, shit this is my chance.

Toni emerged from his doorway, his pistol up ready, he watched as she turned and raised her AK47, aiming down the street at the two agents. Just as he had pulled the first pressure on his trigger he noticed that her magazine was missing. She had run out of ammunition, instead of giving up or running and believing her task now complete she was aiming to die. Toni sprang forward shouting at the other 2 agents, 'NO, don't shoot'. He was too late as 8 shots rang out and ensured her place next to her cigarette smoking husband, and her journey to her God as a Martyr.

As Toni stepped forward to check the body, he looked down the road and called to the other two, pointing down the road 'I'm Okay, you fella's get after the bus'

Toni ran over to see if Jo was still alive, he placed his fingers on her neck feeling for the carotid pulse, he was not surprised to feel nothing there.

He then began to search the other bodies, starting with the male body that he had been hiding behind. 100 metres down the street the 2 other agents were running toward the mini bus, now laying on its side with the tail lights still on.

The side door was now where the roof should have been, trying to escape out of it was the man in the chequered shirt. The first agent pulled him down and cuffed him with plastic cable ties, and then they helped out the 2 children who were both screaming, and in tears, both still wearing head scarfs. Still sat in his seat the driver was quite obviously dead, half his head splattered across the driver's window.

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They loosely cuffed the 2 children together by one hand and began to march them back around the corner to meet up with Toni, and hopefully Jo. As they turned the corner they could see Toni in the dim yellow lamp light leaning over the women in black, pulling her over to check her. The street light up with a flash and large explosion resonated through the street, the explosion channelled by the buildings pushed a huge pressure wave towards them. The lamppost in front of them collapsed, and they were all thrown back, and slammed to the ground. Numbed and struggling to their feet leaving their charges they ran back towards the apartment, everywhere ahead was burning. The side of the apartment was missing, rubble strewn across the road. Lying where the female terrorist should have been was Toni's body, and what was left of his torso was on fire.

Driving away in the far distance was a white Mercedes car. Behind them the man in the chequered shirt began to laugh, something was wrong, he now appeared a lot older than he had done in the flat. Smiling at them from the handcuffs were 2 un-familiar small boys of about 10 years old.

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Chapter 1 Cold Wet Nights

It had already been a long year of training and exercises, the year had started during a particularly cold Norwegian winter with nearly 3 months of arctic training.

It was a traditional training ground for the Royal Marines who had first landed at Narvik to fight the Germans in 1940, and the Corps had been back year after year since the 1970's. The training areas were 200 miles inside the Arctic Circle, steep jagged Mountains and deep unforgiving Fjords. The harsh environment taught a soldier to look after himself and his kit, you had to first survive the cold, before you could fight, it didn't suit everyone but it was a unique and extremely demanding training ground. The saying went if you could survive here you could survive anywhere, which was not too far from the truth.

Driving an open boat such as the 8 metre fibre glass Rigid Raiding Craft at 30 knots through the unforgiving Norwegian Fjords was gruelling, but exhilarating. With the wind chill, the temperature would often drop to –

Chapter 2
Jerusalem

It was the usual pre Wedding morning, up too late with a banging hang over, boots still to polish and trying to remember what you'd done the night before.

Mike crawled out of his single bed got his feet tangled and fell over the pink trousers that were laying on the floor. A blurred vision and memories slowly returned to him, piece meal and in small chunks of realisation.

The dance floor of the Academy, the girl who teased him and called him fat then the challenge to exchange clothes, the pink trousers were a tight fit. The only way to get them on was by splitting the seams with a set of keys supplied by Gris, then with Jon's boot laces cut in half, tied together up the sides of his thighs. It had been a real team effort, but what a way to lose a 50 quid pair of jeans and then still wake up alone.

Mike picked up his watch from the top of the telly, 10:30, shit, better have a coffee and try to sober up.

Mike lived in the barracks, near to the city, in a small one man cabin, the size of a child's room, but adequate enough for his needs. It overlooked the car park, and the morning light streamed in through a sash window. Against one wall was a small single bed, with a thick horse hair mattress, and an old Thunderbirds themed quilt on top. Against the opposite wall were beach effect fitted wardrobes with a desk in the middle, above which was a small pin board covered with pictures of his family. His mum sitting on a wooden stile in a field behind her house, next to her sat a black Newfoundland dog, a Polaroid of his younger sister in her first car, a small

Chapter 3

Deployment

Mike pulled through the gates at the base, the security guard smiled a good morning, and waved him through, as he pulled up he glanced over to where the boats were moored. Alongside a floating pontoon there were several Rigid Raiding craft, with their flat hulls and powerful engines they could carry raiding troops at over 30knots. Delivering them swiftly onto a beach, or silently into enemy lines they were painted in a dazzle paint scheme that worked equally well in Norway or Plymouth. Tied to the outside of these, smaller and lower in the water were the black hulls of the inflatable's, Mike looked at them for a moment and wondered if they had never looked so vulnerable to him before.

Mike climbed the stairs that lead to the changing rooms and found the 'tea boat', this was a small room next to the locker room set aside for the lads to relax and take a coffee break. Marco was just sitting down with a coffee on an old red settee. Just like the fridge and the TV it had been rescued from the skip, in the chair next to him one of the other lads, Gris was leaning over polishing his black boots.

Gris was a short stropky blonde haired Gordie, he was one of Mikes 3 Corporals, and so was a section commander, responsible for 5 or 6 boats. Gris had worked for Mike for the last year, and was a young and keen professional who Mike relied on for a lot of the tasking.

Above where Gris sat the wall was covered with flags and photos, all souvenirs of past exercises and operations. Each flag was signed by the guys that had been in the troop for that particular trip, and below most a collection of digital photographs recounting events, some pictures of

Chapter 4

Battle Prep

The camp was built on an old airfield just outside Basrah, it was a huge complex, a labyrinth of many smaller camps.

The first thing Mike and the lads noticed were the ships containers, there were thousands upon thousands, many were used to make up the perimeters of different parts of camps, and some areas were filled with them.

A variety of colours, age and condition they had gradually, multiplied up over the last year since the war. Many were now empty, some full of new equipment, tents, clothing etc, but all were worth exploring. With a burning and excited curiosity the lads opened container after container, they found everything from prefab bunkers, to generators, and paint. Sven was at one of the shabbier looking containers trying desperately to free the handle, Col stepped up behind him, 'come on mate, it's not worth the effort, there's plenty more'

'Yeah but there's something about this one, its calling to me'

Col grabbed the handle, 'yeah right mate, full of Stella and Heineken is this one!

The handle gave and the door fell open, there was a metallic jangling noise as hundreds of thousands of small silver coins fell from the container.

'Fuck me, you were right, hey guys look what Sven Blackbeard, the Pirate of Arabia has found....were rich!'

Iraqi coins covered the floor, and inside the container were hundreds of large brown canvas bags containing thousands more.

Chapter 5

The Long Road to Martyrdom

The white mini bus drove carefully through and over the winding and heavily rutted stone road that was the Gherha Pass high in the Zagros Mountains, which snaked down the western edge of Iran. The rugged terrain, harsh environment and loose stones made it a perilous road for all but the most rugged of vehicles; it was not the best route available for the old minibus. Their final destination was far below in the marshes of the border region, but after the ambush in Arak it was probably the safest route available.

They also had an escort, the two white Mercedes, were accompanying them to their next rendezvous. The occupants of which were all dressed in black robes, their AK 47 s held on their laps and under their dress pistols, spare magazines and knives, these were the 'Galine' an ancient Persian order devote and extreme in their protection of all Holy endeavours. Their order was more than 2000 years old, and had been formed from the Princes of tribes loyal to the Persian King and conceived to protect the Holy artefacts from capture or destruction by Alexander the Great and his all conquering army. Living by ancient decrees their strict devotion and ruthless manner had gone almost unchanged through the centuries. The automatic weapons mobile phones, and GPS equipped Mercedes their only real link with the modern world.

The convoy had travelled all day through the mountains, the children had been talking and playing in the bus, earlier the bus had turned sharply up a small dusty track that wound its way higher up into the mountains, after climbing for nearly an hour the convoy stopped outside an ancient

Chapter 6
The Drop

The camp was more of an outpost, another small area of disused concrete and tarmac airfield that was surrounded by large sandy berms with sandbag guard towers on the corners with barbed wire perched across the tops as if it was growing wild like ivy, and here in this flat barren and isolated piece of desert, a sprawling village of tents had been pitched and become another 'corner of a foreign field'.

The Army lads here had had a bad time of it in the last few weeks, locally there was a big offensive on, Alamarah town was only a few Kilometres away and the Elections were coming so the insurgents, militias and local groupings were all fighting each other for attention, but as much as they fought between each other there was still a common enemy, and the British forces had bore the brunt of this resurgence in recent weeks.

Mike had been told that one of the local Militant leaders wanted a Warrior as a trophy, the buzz from the lads at the camp was that he was offering a \$1000 bounty, nearly 3 years wages for destroying one of the armoured vehicles, this had caused leaders of other groups to start a bidding war, to be the first to capture one intact, or destroy one. A couple of drivers had already been seriously injured by onslaughts of RPG's and improvised road side bombs, they all knew that at this pace it would only be a matter of time.

The trucks had now arrived and the guys were busy unloading and preparing the kit, the 50 horse power engines needed 2 men to lift them, they were normally just painted black, but the guys had glued hessian, strips ripped from sand bags, over the covers to help improve the

Chapter 7
The Waiting Game

On the satellite photos that Mike had used to conduct his planning the Island had appeared a lot larger and definitely more solid. They had worked it out to be about 70 metres wide, not the best place to set up a covert observation position, but the only place with a good view of the target area. As they approached the boat stopped in the water, Mike looked around at Marco 'we aground?' he whispered.

Marco shook his head, 'don't think so' and leaned over the back of the boat, his hand reappearing with a large chunk of thin spaghetti like black weed, 'shit, OK guys paddles out' Marco locked up the engine, and indicated to the other boat to stop, Mike grabbed a paddle, as did Marco, and together they manoeuvred the boat slowly toward the beach. They nosed the boat gently on what should have been the sand that the colour pictures had shown, but was actually fallen reeds, soggy and rotten, so much for their interpolation of the imagery, Mike hoped he had not got it all this wrong.

Every step was taken carefully, the floor was a carpet of fallen grasses, the older lengths were dark brown and rotten, and the newly fallen ones green and breaking and cracking under Mikes weight, this area of suspended plateau was only about 20 meters wide and 10 metres deep, beyond and where the group needed to go, was a wall of solid reed. They would have to cut a path, very quietly and carefully through the centre and out to the far side of the tiny island so they could observe the objective area. It would be a long night, and they had to be hidden before daylight or the game was up. They had been told in their initial briefing that during the day the lakes

Chapter 8
Alone

It had already been a long night, luckily and to Mike's relief and surprise the round that had throw him from the boat had ricochet off his own gun and the force had been enough to dive the butt of his gun into his shoulder, unbalance him on the wildly manoeuvring Zodiac and throw him over board. When he had come back to the surface the enemy boats were almost on top of him, but they passed him chasing the Zodiacs and Canoe, harassing them as they made for the rendezvous. Mike knew as he watched the chase move away from him, that he had to be left behind.

The last hour or so he had been mad at himself for losing his balance, for leaning too far out, or standing too high to try to get a clear shot. The worst bit had been hearing the Chinook fly directly over him, then seeing it come down and engage the enemy boats, rounds were flying everywhere, the tracer lighting up the night had been too much for the 2 remaining skiffs and they had at first retreated to the reeds. He then heard the two engines roar as the helicopter landed to collect the others, and watched the exchange of gunfire. His heart sunk with a feeling of dread as the grenades exploded and watched in anguish as the boats burned, knowing now his only chance was the Chinook. When it took off again they had searched the area for about 10 minutes but then it had disappeared into the night. He listened as the thud of the rotors had faded and they had left him for dead, after all he had done for them, they hadn't even tried that hard to look for him, fuckers. Mike was angry with himself, and the guys, but he knew he needed to sort himself out, there was no one to blame, he had to survive, the rescue would come and come soon. Once the helicopter had

Chapter 9
On the Run

Mike looked at his watch, it was a little after 5, and the comfort of darkness would soon come. He began to imagine his funeral, who would come, and how long people would remember him. He had lost mates, and sometimes he had to force himself to think of them, to remember them, give them a little of his time. He always felt guilty during the annual remembrance service, during the two minutes silence he would go through the guys he had know and had died, some in conflict, but more often than not on a Motorbike, or from a stupid accident, he would feel terrible when he realised it had been a year since he had thought of them last.

He had hoped to become renowned enough one day to have a space in the Times obituaries. However these days your past successes in life were determined by how quickly you were immortalised by a mobile phone joke, Mike smiled at the thought.

Well he was not going to get in the Times yet, so he would have to get out of this mess. Through the door he watched as the huge orange ball rested momentarily on the horizon, before finally disappearing in one swift movement. It darkened almost immediately, and at last night fell, it was time for Mike to make his move. Mike took the last sip from the sterilised water in the plastic bottle, he must be thirsty as he could not taste the usual iodine aftertaste. Mike checked his equipment and re-secured the chest clips that he had undone earlier to aid venting, trying to keep himself cool. He had one last bottle of water in his kit, 1½ litres, he had to try to get through the cool night without needing too much of it.

Chapter 10

Closing In

Gris was first off of the Chinooks rear ramp as it touched down at the RV that was closest to where the ambush had taken place 2 nights ago, the Chinook was going to make a sweep of all the villages and roads, and check out all the Land RV's. Help was coming, Gris just hoped it wasn't too late, he had banged on every door all the way up to the Area Commander. Unfortunately with the fact that the whole area had erupted in riots and chaos because of the elections, and no one really believing Mike could really still be alive it had taken 36 hours to redeploy on a search and rescue mission. Now though a company from the Black Watch was on its way in Land Rovers after being relieved in place by the Scots Guards around Al-Amara, they had had a bad night of it, now they were extremely pissed off that there had been a friendly out on the ground and they had been too tied up to help.

There were also 2 Scimitars on the way, the Scimitar was a small agile 8 tonne reconnaissance tank equipped with a 30mm Rarden cannon and a 7.62 mm machine gun. The Black Watch were going to provide some extra fire power if it was needed, and that would be on the scene in 30 minutes or so, the Vehicles would cover the levee that bounded the lake, centred on the bridge and overlooking the main village where unknown to anyone Mike had escaped from earlier that night.

The main problem was that movement by road in an area predominantly Marshland was that there were very few tracks that were negotiable at any kind of speed, so progress was very slow. Another major problem was that since the end of the war all the interlinking bridges, built over the numerous canals and irrigation ditches by Saddam to carry his Tanks along

Chapter 11
Hortons' Light Foot

'all secure.....roger....clear left.....clear right.....tail clear.....wheels light.....OK coming around large sweep to Port.....vehicle and people in the field south.....Roger seen.....'

The chopper flew around in a long arc, then back over the camp,
'.....look at that lot down their.....its Lawrence of Basrah.....'

There below were the Light Foot, fallen in and marching down the line was the Colonel, a long thick red feather protruding from his beret. As the Puma flew over the feather began to quiver, a hand lifted on top of his beret but the inspecting officer never faltered.

'...OK....how are the Marines today?'

He thumbed the small press to talk switch 'yep good thanks, where are you taking us?'

'that's what I was going to ask you, we are on an admin run, between Basrah and Al-Amarah.....the Colonel we just dropped off said to take you where ever you wanted to go'

'great, you got enough fuel for Bangkok?'

'not quite, how about Basrah logs base'

'that was going to be my second choice, Paris of the South!'

Chapter 12

Dutch Courage

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‘ah now, don’t be too hasty, we’ve got to wait for the 2 delectable ladies to call last orders then we go, I’ve even got us a driver and green limousine organised, and you’ll never guess who the driver is, remember the Irish Nurse from the Herc?’

As usual the bar was shut exactly on time and an army Staff Sergeant came strolling in to ensure everyone left and the place was locked up. The guys walked out of the pub, and over to a single porta-cabin that housed a small ‘Subway’ and a ‘Peppe’s pizza’

Marco was stood on the steel steps at the bottom of Peppe’s ‘Gris we got time for some scran before the Limo arrives’

Just as Gris was about to answer when a soft Irish voice called over, ‘only if I get a slice’

Marco looked over there was the nurse leaning on a long wheel based Land Rover, her blonde hair was in pig tails,

Sven was just audible, ‘fuck me....please!’

Marco waved the menu at her, ‘not sure about a slice, but I’ll give you a portion!’

Everyone cringed not sure whether to laugh at Marco’s quick double-entendres, but you never risked upsetting the driver until you had arrived at the destination, so there was only a little sniggering.

But the Irish whit was quick in reply, ‘No I only want a slice from you, and no Sausage!’ and everyone breathed a sigh of relief, and laughed at Marco instead.

Breakfast at Babs'

Chapter 13 Breakfast at Babs'

Brize Norton was not the hive of activity it had been on the way out, there were a few guys and girls in the green and brown of temperate patterned uniform in the departures lounge as they walked through, probably off to Europe, a few were travelling with their families. The guys walked through, the look and feeling of elation must have been obvious to the onlookers. Mike saw a little girl about the same age as the little girl in the sheep shed, sat with her Dad. Mike caught her eye and he smiled a big happy smile at her, the smile was returned, and then the girl went all shy. Mike felt uplifted by the encounter, and bounded through and onto the hire car desk.

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The Pub was only 200 meters from the gate, it overlooked the camp and was one of 3 in the small village, but this one was theirs, the walls were adorned with memorabilia and photographs, and the landlord always made them welcome, he also managed to employ a few charming barmaids.

The squadron Christmas piss up was well under way and as the lads walked into the lounge, cheers went up, hands were shaken and pints of beer thrust into their hands.

Most of the lads were dressed up, fairies, Father Christmas, angels, Mother Christmas, and even 3 guys in old brown kit bags spray painted as cans of Fosters, Guinness and Bud, with only arms and faces showing, Mike laughed as he watched them struggle to reach their mouths with their beer glasses.

Simon Peters

Thank you for reading these extracts...why not read;

BREAKFAST AT BABS'

SIMON PETERS

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