

Operation redwing analysis essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

On June 28, 2005 The SEAL team, led by LT Michael P. Murphy and consisting of petty officers Matthew Axelson, Danny Dietz and Marcus Luttrell, were on a mission to kill or capture Ahmad Shah, a Taliban leader who commanded a group of insurgents known as the " Mountain Tigers," west of Asadabad. The initial counter-insurgent mission in Kunar Province, Afghanistan seemed to be running accordingly with a successful infiltration into enemy territories until local Goat herders stumbled upon the teams hiding spot. While very concerned with their own well being the Seal team was unable to verify Hostile intent from the herders.

LT Murphy put the final decision of the goat herder's fate up to vote by the team. Axelson voted to kill the Afghans, stating, " The military decision is obvious," in reference to the near-certainty that the herders would alert the Taliban. Dietz on the other hand simply abstained. It was up to Luttrell to make the deciding vote, a vote which would later be found to be the most crucial decision of the entire mission. In fear of almost indefinite murder charges and the harassment of the US liberal Media Luttrell voted for the release of the herders.

Luttrell to this day has been quoted saying " It was the stupidest, most southern-fried, lame brained decision I ever made in my life. I must have been out of my mind. I had actually cast a vote which I knew could sign our death warrant. I'd turned into a f-ing liberal, a half-assed, no-logic nitwit, all heart, no brain, and the judgment of a jackrabbit. " This extreme passion and hatred against his decision is justified, for only a short while after the goat herders disappearance the SEAL team was confronted by incredible force of

Afghan fighters which has been recorded to be in the numbers of somewhere between 150-200 strong.

One terrible event led to another and before long Luttrell remained the only surviving SEAL lying unconscious behind a ridge. The four members had faced a well organized three sided attack by the Taliban force and finding themselves greatly outnumbered they soon resorted to pretty much running down a Cliffside to escape the incoming fire. After noting the team's radio transmitters weren't functioning properly in the mountains LT Murphy moved into the open and placed the emergency call for support from his cell phone.

During the conversation he was shot in the abdomen and returned to cover to fight for only a short time till his death. After 2 hours of fighting and relentless attacks by RPGs (Rocket Propelled Grenades). Luttrell luckily fell into cover but was knocked out cold. Just as the Army Values states I will never leave a fallen comrade, the naval force also acted accordingly. One MH-47D helicopter, four UH-60 Blackhawks and two AH-64D Longbows attempted to come to the rescue of the team to provide extraction in the mountains of Kunar.

In their heroic efforts for their fallen comrades the MH-47 helicopter, carrying eight Navy SEALs and eight 160th Night Stalkers, was shot down by a rocket propelled grenade shot through the open rear ramp, causing the pilot to lose control of his aircraft. Upon hitting the side of a mountain ledge the aircraft fell to the bottom of a ravine killing all sixteen members inside. With the casualty count now at 19 soldiers this particular operation failure was the largest single loss of the Naval Special Warfare since World War II.

While lying there watching his comrade's attempts at rescue and even their own fate Luttrell tried to hide him as best as he could so not to bring on any more attacks from the Taliban forces. Driven by intense thirst, while still suffering from a gunshot to the leg and three cracked vertebrae from the fall Luttrell traveled 7 miles over the remainder of the day at an attempt for survival. After an accidental fall from a ledge Luttrell was discovered by a Sheppard named Gulab despite his successful attempt to remain unnoticed up to that point.

Gulab summoned his companions to help carry the wounded Luttrell to the village of Sabray-Minah. Here the villagers took care of the SEAL, providing food and medical attention, and protecting him from the Taliban that came to the village demanding that he be turned over to them. With a strong need to quickly find the lost SEAL team the US military had over 300 men working in search and rescue operations. Nearly two days after the initial attack the men had located the downed helicopter and verified that all 16 aboard had been killed.

Despite multiple attempts, the search helicopters were unable to locate the wounded Navy SEAL and he was soon announced MIA. On July 2, the village elder of Sabray, carrying a note from Luttrell, went down to seek help from Camp Blessing, a Marine outpost several miles away. First Lieutenant Matt Bartels was the first to hear of the lone survivor and soon called up to higher for extraction plans. With high hopes the US military drew up extensive plans for Luttrell's retrieval making him a high priority.

As if the Taliban heard of the SEALs new hopes for rescue they were more persistent than ever at getting him as their captive. The rescue teams of the US closed in upon the village when they suddenly ran into Luttrell and some of the villagers who were moving him from one hiding place to another. Six days later the search teams found the bodies of LT Murphy's and GM2 Dietz but STG2 Axelson was never found and is now pronounced KIA. This tragic event in our nation's current War on terror is arguably the worst of the decade.

There are so many aspects of leadership, and relation to Army moral values, that it's hard to narrow down. First off let me explain a couple that stuck out particularly as I was researching. When the goat herders found the SEAL team in the middle of their mission they had to make some sensible yet life threatening decisions. The Code of Conduct for the US armed forces which was made in accordance with the Geneva Convention clearly states, " I will never forget that I am an American, fighting for freedom, responsible for my actions, and dedicated to the principles which made my country free.

The right decision or the " legal decision" in the case of the herders is to let them go as they did. Now it can be argued that according to the Army Values which clearly states, " I will always place the mission first," that the herders were a legitimate threat to the team's success and should have been acted upon. But, since they showed no sign of hostility towards the Team members I myself as a future leader would have let them go, but I would have indefinitely called up to higher on my encounter and strongly considered the furthering of the mission.

Another leadership aspect which I found to be unprofessional was the decision of LT Murphy to take a team vote on the goat herder's future. When I am a leader of men in which I fully plan to be one day, I will never put the decisions of my team's success into the hands of another. I will make a decision that I think is the best for my men and their success and live with it. Now he was a great man and I'm sure wanted to treat all the SEAL's (Special Forces members I might add) as equals in the mission and respect their opinions but, though his choice was justifiable it is inappropriate.

For if you are the officer, you have the education, and you are in control you cannot leave the success of the mission to a vote. Not only did he place his men at risk, one of his men now has to live with what he sees as the survivor guilt of his one vote gone wrong. Criticizing a great man like LT Murphy was not easy for there are many instances he should be acknowledged and honored for. One instance that just purely portrays the Army Values is the brave act of running out into open fire and making an emergency backup call on his cell phone. "I will always place the mission first, I will never accept defeat, and I will never quit," are all very much portrayed in this act of valor.

LT Murphy would have rather died than see his men be put into peril or his mission turn to complete failure. He would have rather died than surrender to the Taliban and undoubtedly be killed as an example to spite freedom. He would have rather died than quit on his mission, quit on his men, and quit on not only his country, but his family and the American way of life. This was a courageous act that every soldier should dedicate their service in his honor.

To defend of the rights that this man so willingly put his life on the line for. Another event that is up for analysis and debate is the rescue team's decision to protect and defend their fellow comrades. From a leadership aspect I would say it's hard to tell what would have been a good decision on their part. For the officers in the fallen aircraft I'm sure they were ready and willing to perform their duties accordingly but for the officers who gave to go ahead for the rescue mission now their actions are at question.

It's easier said than done to execute a proper operations order for a rescue mission because well simply put the men they are going to help are at extreme risk. Though hastily moving into enemy fire is not always the wisest decision for your men either. In my opinion I would have done the exact same thing for no man should be left behind and a quick rescue was their only chance for survival. Their heroic efforts though greatly admirable, it is undoubtedly certain that without the proper rehearsal of tactics and operations you put your men at a much higher risk.

Now considering their time crunch and one of the most important Army Values, " I will never leave a fallen comrade," the Naval Special Forces acted just as I would have, with pride and no care for their own well being. They stood ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the United States and are true soldiers of the highest value. Now one particular aspect of this event that may not be looked at as in depth as the others is the actions of POC Luttrell when he was under the care and protection of the villagers of Sabray-Minah.

Now upon discovery by Gulab and his men Luttrell was at no point willing to surrender or give up just like it states not only in the Army Values but in the Code of Conduct as well. Stated, " I will never surrender of my own free will. If in command, I will never surrender the members of my command while they still have the means to resist. " In fact it has been recorded and stated by Luttrell that he had a grenade at the ready and had removed the pin just in case the men showed signs of hostility.

When it became blatantly obvious that they were not going to hand him over to the Taliban and instead take care of him Luttrell acted as a proper soldier should. Now on the back of my Intro to Leadership handbook it has the Army Values clearly stated. One particular value that is written in bold and everyone usually forgets (myself included) is that, " I am an expert and I am a professional. " Luttrell acted as a guest in the village exactly according to this Value. He obeyed their rules, respected their traditions and way of life, and was humble and thankful.

Despite the obvious fact that they were protecting him and helping him out Luttrell never once ignored the decisions or made his existence a pain. Professionals learn how to both lead and follow and it's these small villages and members of the country who do not appreciate the Taliban that it is most important we win over as a Nation. If we treat them with respect and act in a professional manner we will receive the same in return and such respect I believe is what the US needs to truly win the War on Terror.

On September 14, 2006, Dietz and Axelson were posthumously awarded the Navy Cross for " undaunted courage" and heroism. Luttrell was also awarded

the Navy Cross in a ceremony at the White House. In 2007, Lieutenant Murphy was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during the battle. In April 2008, Ahmad Shah, the original target of Operation Red Wings, was killed during a shootout with Pakistani police in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

When I was first asked to write a topic on major event in military history I was pretty excited because I love to learn about the tactics and honor of past officers and soldiers. Though as I researched I found that most great battles and most great victories did not come without their fair share of bad news. For in any military conflict there will be men who put their lives on the line, sometimes even gave their lives for the furthering of their country and freedom. When I was asked to analyze the leadership aspects of the particular mission I soon became a little apprehensive.

I am just an MS1 cadet, basically the lowest you can get in military experience. Sure I know what good leadership is but I am criticizing men who have donated a majority of their lives in service and career achievement, I mean Medal of Honor recipients at times! What I'm trying to say is I was asked to write my conclusion as an overall assessment of leadership from my experience. Well from my experience all of these men were great leaders in their own way. I mean sure they made mistakes which were sometimes fatal, but who doesn't make mistakes?

Men, in particular Navy SEALs like in my story, have gone through hell and back to become the best soldiers and true guardians of freedom. I have a long road still in front of me, but if there is one thing I learned above all else

in my analysis of leadership is always strive for perfection. Not only physically but mentally as well, because some day you may never know that one simple decision like releasing goat herders can lead to the entire success of your mission and the lives of your men. Sure no one can truly be perfect but like my father would always say, “ you can get pretty dam close. ”