

**EPISODE 500**

[INTRODUCTION]

**[00:00:00] AH:** Well, thanks ever so much for taking the time to speak to me today. I wonder, just to start off, could you just give us an overview of the book, Toby?

**[00:00:10] TH:** So the book is called *First Casualty: The Untold Story of the CIA mission to Avenge 9/11*. And it centers on Team Alpha, which was an eight-man CIA team that was the first behind enemy lines in Afghanistan after 9/11. So they arrived in Afghanistan on October the 17<sup>th</sup>. There'd been a previous team called Jawbreaker that had arrived in the Panjshir Valley on November 26<sup>th</sup>, but that was Northern Alliance controlled territory.

**[00:00:42] AH:** This was Jawbreaker?

**[00:00:43] TH:** That was Jawbreaker, yeah. Or the NALTs, Northern Alliance Liaison Teams, it's also called that sometimes, led by Gary Schroen. But Team Alpha was the first team into sort of Taliban territory. So landed south of Mazar-i-Sharif, in the mountains there, and linked up with Abdul Rashid Dostum, ethnic Uzbek warlord who fought for the Soviets against the Mujahideen, which was then backed by the U.S. in the 1980s.

And Team Alpha was joined by ODA 595, who became sort of famous as the Horse Soldiers and were in the movie 12 Strong, depicted in the movie 12 Strong. They arrived three days after Team Alpha. So Team Alpha were like the pathfinders for the Green Berets.

The Northern Alliance with Team Alpha and ODA 595 alongside them also linked up with an ethnic Tajik leader called Atta Mohammed Noor, who was a sort of ally but also a rival of Dostum. And I'm sure guys can talk about that. He got an ODA 534 with him and another agency team, which is just a three-man team, Team Bravo, and actually a member of – Scott Spellmeyer, who was a member of Alpha, became the leader of Bravo. And so the two groups sort of converged just south of Mazar. And Mazar was captured on November the 10<sup>th</sup>, 2001. And that was the first big city in Afghanistan to fall and the beginning of the sort of the dominoes of the Taliban regime falling.

And so it's really a story of the team and what happened to them from 9/11 through to December. I guess the crescendo of the book is November the 25<sup>th</sup>, 2001 when there was a prison uprising at Qala-i-Jangi where Mike Spann, former Marine Corps Officer, a member of Team Alpha CIA paramilitary, was tragically killed. And David Tyson here was with him that day inside the Fort and there was a six day battle that followed to quell the uprising, recover Mike Spann's body and end what was – Again, we can talk about this, really attempt to recapture Mazar-i-Sharif by the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, which was the scheme of a guy called Mullah Muhammad Fazal, who was then the deputy – Sort of commander of the Taliban in the north and the Deputy Defense Minister, and is once again the Deputy Defense Minister of the Taliban in the new regime. The book really covers those really just a few weeks of incredible success, very swift, much more swift than people anticipated in that just early period after 9/11.

**[00:03:34] AH:** I've often thought that Dustum would be very good at musical chairs fighting with the Soviets against the –

**[00:03:42] TH:** Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, he's a survivor. Yeah, I mean, I saw him last about a year ago, less than a year ago, and he was in Cheburgan surrounded by the Taliban. He's now, we believe, in Uzbekistan. I think in between now and we seem he had Covid pretty badly and survived. He's still around too.

**[00:04:02] AH:** Just before we went on air I was saying to David, reading your book reminded me of Steve Coll's Ghost Wars, which many of our listeners will have read. And that's the highest compliment I can really give. I think it's really well-written and it's an incredible story. So congratulations.

**[00:04:19] TH:** Thank you.

**[00:04:20] AH:** And is there a movie planned? Can we get the script here?

**[00:04:22] TH:** If any Hollywood producers are listening. I've tried to be pretty easy to get. There is some talk and no contract signed yet.

**[00:04:31] AH:** Okay. I was just thinking there when you were speaking, Justin, did you have any torn feelings going in with the Alpha, your special forces brothers, coming just behind? Did you find yourself wondering what team to go with?

**[00:04:49] JS:** I guess the answer is really no. I just felt very fortunate to be selected. It's a little bit of timing and luck that came down to it that I was available. Had I been a commander on a team and not in between jobs, I probably wouldn't have been selected. So I knew that it was a little bit of confluence of luck and timing and good fortune. And I was grateful for that.

Incidentally, the way our doctrine worked at the time, I was on what was known as an unconventional warfare team. So our doctrine was that the unconventional warfare team would go in two weeks prior to the actual detachments. Prep the ground for it. Meet with whomever the principles were and do essentially what Team Alpha did.

Well, what happened was Team Alpha ended up performing that function amongst other things. And so I was simply joining a team that was in a broad conceptual sense doing exactly what I'd envisioned we would do. The timeline was a little different. It was more compressed. But in the end of the day the outcome was the same. So it was familiar to me conceptually.

To be honest, and I think I used this metaphor before. It was like there was this tsunami of anger, whatever you want to call in the wake of 9/11, and I just felt like I was surfing that wave and I didn't want to lose it and wipe out. And the one thing that would cause me to wipe out is someone saying we don't like this guy, we don't want this guy. So I was very careful to try to assimilate be quiet and just sort of get along. I mean, quite frankly, because I didn't want to get kicked off. I knew what was going to happen. So I was doing everything I could to just sort of integrate and be part of the team.

**[00:06:34] AH:** I just wondered, for David and Justin, did any of you ever think at any point then or afterwards about some of the historical cadences? I guess, I'm thinking of the OSS. You see the CIA's lineage of the OSS. And maybe the Green Berets are a lineage. But then

after 9/11 they came back together. I just wondered if that's something you have ever discussed with each other or thought about?

**[00:06:59] JS:** I think we discussed it. Maybe Dave and I a little bit, maybe JR. The sort of DNA is the same. It originated out of World War II and then it sort of separated in 47. And then SF was an SF. It was psychological operations, which eventually kind of evolved in what we know as Special Forces. But the term they would use, and it wasn't necessarily in our team, but I heard someone else use it, Greg Vogle was, the tribes have kind of come back together. So it's like you have these different tribes that have separated and now they've reunited for one unifying purpose. I mean, I think that's a pretty good way to look at it.

**[00:07:38] DT:** For me, I obviously knew about the OSS. I knew about – Especially in France, parachuting into France, working with French Resistance. What I didn't know until the museum at the agency sort of set the thing up was seeing photos from the World War II period of OSS men riding horses and mules and using these livestock for purposes that we did. And this I believe was in Burma, or in the Far East. So that was something I really hadn't been aware of until I saw the museum photographs and they looked remarkably similar from 1944 and 2001 sort of doing the same things. Even the faces of the people looked – The looks on the faces of the men were similar in a sense. And that's when my sort of thoughts of the kinship between us and the past sort of hit home.

**[00:08:39] AH:** I'm very, very pleased and we're very privileged to have two of the main actors here with us. But could you, for our listeners, just give them a sense of some of the other characters that are involved?

**[00:08:50] TH:** Sure. So we'll take it briefly from sort of the very top. So Director of the CIA at the time was George Tenet. The Counterterrorism Center Director was Cofer Black. This was really a CTC operation. And Pentagon didn't have a plan, surprisingly. But the agency had been in and out of the Panjshir over the previous two years. And, in fact, David was one of the first people flying into the Panjshir from Dushanbe in 1999 on. Codename for that was Jawbreaker Team.

So the CIA had a plan. It was called the Blue Sky Memo that had been presented to the Clinton Administration and then the Bush Administration. So that CIA was sort of ready and to some extent championing at the bit to go after Bin Laden before 9/11. The person in sort of the day-to-day command of the war was a guy called Hank Crumpton, who, like Cofer Black, was in Africa division. He'd just taken over a Station Chief in Canberra who was recalled. And a new group within CTC called CTC SO, Special Operations, was formed. And Hank Crumpton was in command of all the agency teams. First one was Jawbreaker on September 26<sup>th</sup>.

Team Alpha, so eight people, it was led by J.R. Seeger, who was a case officer near East Division. Diary linguist who had been stationed in Islamabad in the 80s and worked with the Mujahideen. So he had Afghan experience. Former 82nd Airborne Captain. So he had some military experience before joining the agency. The deputy chief was Alex Hernandez who'd had a sort of storied Special Forces career, 25-year career ending up on a special mission unit. Had been Special Forces Sergeant Major, and he was the oldest member of the team. He was 49 at the time. J.R. was 47. Same age as Dostum coincidentally. Then you had Scott Spellmeyer, early 30s, former Ranger, CIA paramilitary. He'd been wounded in Somalia in the Black Hawk Down incident. He was the guy who went over to lead Team Bravo. You had a guy called Andy, who was another early 30s CIA paramilitary who was sort of the de facto communications officer, former Special Forces, enlisted reservist. Still in the agency in a senior position now. The only member of the team still serving.

Mark Rausenberger was the medic, former Army. He'd qualified as a physician's assistant. He later moved over and became a full-fledged paramilitary. And sadly died on CIA duty in the Philippines in 2016. And the details of what he was doing there are still classified. How many people is that?

**[00:11:43] AH:** It's a few.

**[00:11:44] TH:** That's four. So Justin was a Green Beret. So the only non-CIA member. Mike Spann, former Marine Corps officer. Again early 30s. He'd worked in Anglico. So calling in close air support as a marine. And David Tyson, another case officer. I think people often think these were all paramilitaries. There're actually four only four paramilitaries, two case

officers, a Green Beret and a medic. David was a former academic specializing in central Asia. A very gifted linguist particularly in Uzbek. He was actually, strange enough, the only Uzbek speaker in the CIA at the time and obviously crucial given they were working with ethnical specs. Two spells in the army. But of the eight, I think probably the least sort of hardcore military experience. That would be maybe fair to say.

**[00:12:38] AH:** Which is saying something after two spells in the army, right?

**[00:12:40] TH:** Right. True. True. True. True. It was a sort of an eclectic bunch of people with different skills. And there's been some sort of amusement about the photograph. There's a photograph of the eight standing in front of one of the two Black Hawks that took them down south from K2.

**[00:12:57] AH:** And that photo is in the book, right?

**[00:12:59] TH:** Photo is in the book. And there were jokes about they look like a bunch of dads going on a fishing trip and stuff. I mean, they didn't have body armor. Didn't have helmets because they were going to be alongside the Afghans and it's not a good look when you're much more heavily protected than your allies, because it sort of suggests that your lives matter more than theirs. No military gear at all. I mean, I remember Justin telling me that he debated about whether to take even an I.D. card. And so sort of it was camping gear, stuff from REI and places around the D.C. area or wherever. And David had less chance than anybody. He was pulling stuff together in Tashkent. And I think Mike Spann would lend him some of his gear.

It was very sort of improvised. Team was put together. It wasn't like a team – I mean, the core of it was, which was a paramilitary team run by Alex in Special Activities Division. But Team Alpha, many of them barely knew each other before meeting in Uzbekistan before going in. And that was kind of the nature of the mission really. Sort of a lot of adaptability and improvisation.

**[00:14:02] AH:** I was wondering if David and Justin, could you put us in that place in time to be in your shoes? So when the photograph is taken in front of the Black Hawk. Tell us how you learned to know each other and the coming together of Team Alpha, I guess?

**[00:14:20] JS:** Yeah. So incidentally, I actually met Dave at one point a couple months. I don't even know if you remember this, but you're picking some people up at the hotel in Tashkent and I was in the lobby and there were two ladies and I was chatting them up. They were about my age maybe. And I guess I was nice enough to him and they said, "Well, why don't you come with us. You're going to the embassy, right?" So we get in the vehicle and Dave's driving. And I don't think you said much, but we chatted. I chatted with the ladies a little bit. And then we got to the embassy and then that was it. And I went about getting ready.

My team was doing a training, exercise with the Uzbek Spetsnaz down in the Fergana Valley, which was they were doing I counter IMU operations, counter insurgency, whatever you want to call it. So that was like in June, or May, or sometime like that in the spring, early summer. I didn't meet Dave, of course, until we got to Tashkent. But it was all pretty hectic because I didn't really know the guys on the team very well. We met very briefly at headquarters and then we got in a bus or van or whatever and we went to the airport. And then I sort of met Mike and Alex and these guys.

And then when we got to Tashkent, I met Dave. And then I remember Dave from that driving episode, but it was so fast. The next thing you know, Dave, he had to kind of get out of the office too because he was busy. And so we were in the hangar there, whatever, the warehouse. And then we all met and got together and we went down to Karshi-Khanabad. And that's when we were all together day-in and day-out in a tent, which is a good way to get to know people.

And then from there, there was a bit of a false start. So we were supposed to go in I think within 24 hours of arriving in Karshi-Khanabad, That was delayed because the – I just talked to General Mulholland the other day about it. I mean, there was some delay related to General Franks giving approval for the helicopters. And the helicopters were there for

combat search and rescue. They weren't supposed to be doing what they did. And then so they had to get permission to do that. So they did.

And then a couple days later, we went in. And that photo was actually taken a day or two before I think we actually flew, because it was the day that we thought we were going to go, but then it was delayed. And it's a little anecdote there. But anyway, so that's how we met. And I think the couple extra days were good because we got to talk a little bit. And I'll never forget this, Dave. There was this guy who was trying to join our team who's a medic. And there was a need for medics. And I remember he was chatting you up, Dave. And I knew the guy. And it's funny that he was trying to get Mulholland to add him to the team, and it wasn't going to happen. And then later there's a whole back story to that. But that guy ended up getting to know pretty well.

But Dave was probably the friendliest guy on the team. And I know he went to you. And you remember that. He was talking to you and he was like, "Hey, Dave, you need to get me on the team." Because everybody knew this was a big deal obviously. And so there were a lot of people that were really anxious to be part of it. And God bless them. I mean, I just felt lucky that I was one of the few that got to go.

**[00:17:23] DT:** Yeah. For me, we all have different experiences obviously before 9/11 and so forth. But me being stationed in Tashkent, I'd been seeing people come and go. I'd been to Afghanistan before. And I wasn't plugged into the headquarters thing. I was working Afghan issues. And as I said, being in Afghanistan before 9/11 happens. Again, I'm overseas. I just don't understand the gravity of it. The embassy is suddenly inundated with people, agency people, preparing for Afghanistan. And we had a very small presence there and just hundreds of people started to come literally.

And among them, the team, and I was very happy to be part of the team. And I got to know some of them a little bit, but I had known Mike Spann before because he had come to Tashkent to conduct training with the local personnel. So I knew him a little bit. But I certainly didn't grasp what was going on. To me this was another deployment. I was going to places like Tajikistan and other parts of Central Asia on small deployments to acquire stinger missiles or meet with liaison partners and such, or to go into Afghanistan. So to me

this was another deployment into Afghanistan. I never forget talking to the guys down in Karshi-khanabad and people saying, “Hey, everybody did their wills, right? Everybody did this and did that?”

And it started to dawn on me that this was not a normal deployment at least in the eyes of my teammates that they had a very different view of things. One of them, Alex was a very serious guy, and he quizzed me on my qualifications to be there and so forth. He said, “Okay.” And okay sounds good and things like that. But someone said, and it may have been Mike. Mike was a very, very serious professional. He had a good sense of humor, but he was very serious. Always focused on the mission. And I don't know if it was Mike or not. But somebody said we may not be coming back.

And I sort of said to myself, “Wow! I don't know if I signed up for this one.” And it was a little bit strange to have this sort of gradual understanding that this was more than I had sort of expected. And then the sort of kicker came in when we had trouble with the aircraft. Again, as Jason pointed out, we – Or Justin pointed out, we couldn't get the aircraft when we wanted. And the agency being the agency was always thinking about plan B and plan C. And plan C or maybe plan Zulu was parachuting in to Afghanistan. and I had taken the parachutist course in the army like 25 years prior, 30 years maybe.

But when I heard that, again, it sort of hit me again that, “Man, this might be a little bit more than I had bargained for,” because when I did parachute, it never ended well for me in the army. I'd always hurt something or bruised myself. I was not very good at that. So these kind of things just gradually set me up for what was to take place a very, very serious experience.

**[00:20:36] JS:** I was going to say something on the parachuting thing. I distinctly remember there's a whole bunch of different options to get in other than flying in. They actually brought forward this new virtual reality trainer for a SF10 Alpha parachute, which is this adapted smoke jumper rig for high-altitude. And I remember they had it hanging in a tent. And I went in the tent looking for coffee or something and there was this thing. I said, “What's that?” They said, “Oh, that's – If we're going to jump in, you're going to have to go through the virtual trainer to sort of get adjusted to that parachute, because it's similar but

different.” And I thought, “Wow! That's kind of interesting.” But that's what we would have jumped the SF10 Alpha.

**[00:21:15] DR:** I think you would have jumped, yeah.

**[00:21:18] JS:** He's down playing. I mean, he's a parachutist, and he's done it. So it's like riding a bike, I think. I don't know. Maybe.

**[00:21:25] TH:** Well, there was a guy, who's not his true name, referred to as Bob in the book who's on Team Bravo who was a case officer, a Farsi linguist. No military experience. Had never parachuted before, and he was like, “I'll do it.” I mean, people were up for it. I mean, maybe it's already come through a little bit. But people were kind of fighting to get on the team. I mean, there was a guy, Greg, who ended up on Team Bravo who was sort of knocked off Team Alpha to make way for David, because the languages was so important. And I think he was he was gutted.

And Mike, he went with his family to Williamsburg sort of a few days before leaving the U.S. And he spoke to Alex and was like, “Whatever you do, don't leave me.” So nobody wanted to miss this. So even though it was highly dangerous and sort of going into the unknown, people wanted to be there.

**[00:22:23] DT:** I'll just add. I thought about – We talked about coming here and so forth. And I thought about some of the things I wanted to say. And this is one thing I want to say, is we've all worked in different jobs over – I was in academia. I was in the military. And I worked in a paper mill and a steel mill when I was young and so forth. But I've never worked in a place like the agency, obviously. And it is full of, lack of a better word, kick-ass people. People who are unafraid and willing to do anything in the name of completing the mission, and smart, clever, ingenious, and full of surprises in terms of the skill sets they bring. And it's just a great thing to be part of that to be, whatever you have, there's always somebody better. There's always somebody that surprises you with their skill set, their personality, their attitude, their courage. And to be part of these things for 25 years, it's been incredible.

And Team Alpha was perhaps the dramatic epitome of that, but that's what the agency is all about, doing things when other people can't. And the motto is – One of the mottos, the first – I'll let him figure that out. But that's one of the things I want to get across here, is that the agency is extremely special and full of quality people.

**[00:23:53] TH:** Yeah. We are the nation's first line of defense. We accomplish what others cannot accomplish and go where others cannot go, which is a mission statement which is on the wall at CIA headquarters.

**[00:24:05] AH:** I want to get on to how the mission played out. But I was just wondering, did you find any cultural differences working with people from the CIA, Justin? How did you find it on business compared to what you were used to?

**[00:24:20] JS:** Just like with any institution, there's going to be differences. I think, though, because the DNA between Special Forces and CIA are originating from – They have the same origins. There's a lot of commonality there. But the institutional culture has evolved over time. It's a little different. What's interesting, and I think General Mulholland has said it best. So when we went into interview for the job, because it essentially was an interview. There were five of us and he had to pick three. And he asked everybody, “Oh, have any of you worked at the Central Intelligence Agency before?” And I raised my hand because I had in college as a kind of gopher intern filing papers. And he said, “Well, where did you work? I said in leadership analysis. “But that's DI.” And so that he was bifurcating the subcultures of the agency like, “Well, no. This is operational.”

And I will say that the op side of the agency is more akin to SF in kind of culture and mentality, but that was very much kind of the flavor of this thing. And everybody had a military background. And like Dave said, everybody is high-quality. I mean, smart is the norm, right? Being smart is just like baseline. So yeah, I had no issues with that.

I think the big thing is you get used to it. And now it sounds kind of silly, is the military's kind of hierarchical even in SF. And so you get used to calling people sir. And if the guy's a commander or the boss, like I look at J.R. and Alex as kind of like commander XO or team sergeant. There's a certain deference you give to them. But when you start calling

everybody by the first name, I mean, it's not a big deal, but it takes a little time to adjust to that. And even senior people. And that's a small thing, but that's just something you got to get used to.

The other thing too you got to remember is, at the end of the day, they had weapons, Glockes, high-powers, AKs. But that's not their primary mission to be a combatant. They're intelligence collectors and people who do that. And so that is something that's different. And so I always felt like that was something I had to suppress a little bit as this desire to remember that our mission was to be intelligence folks and not to be SF A Team sergeant, which is probably the closest analog to what I was doing in terms of pathfinder stuff and all that. So that was a little bit weird for me to kind of sort through that, because when I saw the ODA arrive, I was like, "Wow! That's kind of what I want to do. But that's not my job and that's not my role."

**[00:26:57] AH:** I want to go on to the mission of the team, what your brief was. But before we get there, I just want to dig a little bit more into the recruiting process. So you were saying you were interviewed, Justin. I'm just wondering, how did it shake out the way that it did? I mean, you have given some indication of it. But from what Toby's saying, there's all of these people that it's like in the cartoons, everyone's at the door trying to get in, but only a small amount of people get in. So help our listeners understand that process. How is it decided who got let in? And, yeah, help us understand that a little bit more.

**[00:27:32] DT:** Justin and I had very different experiences. And I think the team back at headquarters did too. Justin had to go through a selection process and an interview process.

**[00:27:39] TH:** Within Special Forces.

**[00:27:41] DT:** Within the military. And he had General Mulholland as one of his people.

**[00:27:45] AH:** And General Mulholland was the commander of the Special Forces?

**[00:27:47] JS:** He was a group commander. He was a colonel at that time and group commander.

**[00:27:50] TH:** And then became head of Task Force Dagger. So the senior military guy at the K2 base in Uzbekistan.

**[00:27:57] DT:** And so back at headquarters, there was a selection process, which I wasn't privy to. And I only learned later, thanks in part the Toby's and talking to the guys. But Hank and so forth and CTC, they put word out and talking to the special activities division at the time. They had to get teams ready. And there were already teams assembled. And then they moved some people around J.R. was tasked to be or asked to be, basically, the commander of the team. Again, he's not a special activity. He's not a paramilitary officer. But he commands a team basically of paramilitary officers, and myself, case officer and a medic.

So that team was selected back there with a few sort of wrinkles to it. That's what they work in teams to begin with. And there's a sort of a nucleus of a team with J.R. as the chief and Alex as the deputy chief. And, obviously, Alex is a paramilitary guy, which you sort of need as the deputy. And then I was just an add-on out there because of my experience in Afghanistan and in my languages. I was not selected per se. I was just offered. And they said, "Sure. We'll take you."

**[00:29:10] TH:** I spoke to Cofer Black and Hank Crumpton about this and, I mean, it's still somewhat sort of mysterious. But I think very clever, and I think particularly with the with the first teams, they looked very carefully at sort of balance. I think personality, it was important for these people to get on. They were under a lot of stress and pressure and they had to perform.

I mean, I think the relationship between J.R. and Alex Hernandez was a sort of classic military that the officer and the NCO, senior NCO with more military experience, but the officer with the broad outlook. And I think they worked incredibly well together.

Scott Spellmeyer who rose to very senior rank in the agency was sort of seen as somebody who had the – I think J.R., in particular, and Hank knew that the team was going to have to split up and operate in groups of twos and threes at times. And that's what they did. And so Scott was sort of identified as somebody who had good military experience and some CIA paramilitary experience as well and a future sort of leader. And that he was somebody who could sort of lead a team. And he did go and lead Team Bravo.

I mean, the guys can talk to it more than me. But, I mean, I think the amount of friction in this team, and I have spoken to people on other teams and other Green Beret ODAs, was minimal. And that the balance really worked. And that wasn't by accident.

**[00:30:45] DT:** And I'll just say that maybe our ages we're in the 30s and some in 40s, but we were all very young officers in the agency, except for Alex and J.R. I was on my first tour. Justin, I don't know exactly how many tours you had so to speak. But I know Mike was never deployed. And Scott, I think, and maybe Mark Rosenberger were the only people who had combat experience. I may be mistaken. And Alex obviously too. But these were in private previous iterations in the military.

And so as CIA officers, we were very young. We didn't have seasoned guys who had been to Afghanistan in the 80s. The generations had changed. And we were fairly young and technically inexperienced when it came to actual deployments in combat areas as CIA officers. So this was sort of not an experiment, but it certainly wasn't – This is before 9/11, before we were at war on a regular basis. And since then, we've had plenty of experience in different war zones and so forth. But this was the start. And the same with the ODA, the Green Berets, 595, I don't think they had much combat experience at all. So there was a lot of learning done on the job.

**[00:32:09] JS:** There was really no rubric to pick people like you'd think. I mean, it was just put together. Everybody's obviously selected and you go through training to get into Special Forces. But I think, candidly, what happened was each battalion, sort of three battalions, operational battalions and fifth group, Colonel Mulholland got a request for sending detail lease. It was very nascent. Said we need three or five. I can't remember what the number was. I think it was three. It certainly worked out that way. And they need to go soon. So

each battalion commander was asked to submit a candidate. So they did. And I was the one from first battalion.

And in retrospect, I think that I had just come out of training at dive school. I was sort of uncommitted. I had been on a team commander and I was going to be staff or go to another team. And I was perfect for that at that time. And so they sent me up there. But he had five. And most of the three out of the five were senior warrant officers who were probably well in their late 30s, maybe even early 40s. He picked two captains, myself included, and then a younger warrant officer.

So clearly, Colonel Mulholland had this idea of what he wanted. And it was all verbal. It was just a meeting in his office. And he talked to us briefly. And he's big on a lot of people in those really. The big on like they're kind of vibe of whether you're – How they assess you, confidence, whatever, the sniff test. I think that's how he made his decision. And then we went forward.

And then later iterations, it was more specialized. They were looking for medics or they were looking for camo guys and that. But at the end of the day, the way it works in the military is commanders ask commanders to nominate somebody. And then they nominate people and then the commander picks out of that tranche of people. And so that's how I was selected.

And then going forward, then it was once I was at headquarters, I didn't really know what was – Quite frankly, it was in such a state of flux. I didn't know. I didn't know what team I was going to. I was just there. I was going to go forward eventually. And I just awaited instructions and they told me what to do and who to go with. And then that's how it worked.

**[00:34:20] AH:** Just out of interest, were you the only member of the team that had been in Afghanistan previously?

**[00:34:27] DT:** Yes, I believe so. Yes.

**[00:34:28] AH:** So did you feel some kind of responsibility as being the kind of the Afghan guy, the guy that had been there before?

**[00:34:36] DT:** A little bit. But J.R. had a wealth of experience dealing with Afghans during the so-called Jihad period. He knew the Afghans pretty well. He knew names of Afghans. And my experience with afghans was there, but it was limited. It was fresher perhaps, but it was limited. Again, I spoke a little bit of Dari. And I'd been to the Panjshir. And I'd been dealing with Afghans for months beforehand in Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan. So I knew them fairly well. But certainly, I did not have a sort of – I mean, there were other people as well. And frankly, the sort of personalities of the guys on the team, it wasn't important that I had that stuff. The cultural thing wasn't that important to them. And I don't mean that as a slight. I mean that they had a mission. It was a paramilitary mission. And they were going to get along fine no matter what.

I just brought a little bit of extra knowledge regarding especially the languages and the Uzbeks. And J.R.'s knowledge of the language was great. And his knowledge of how to understand Afghans and read them was superb. I added a little bit, but these guys were ready to roll no matter what.

**[00:35:53] TH:** Sorry. Just another point that I think it's important on this. There were lots of people clamoring to get on the teams, but there was a shortage of people who were the right people for the teams, because it -9/11 only just happened. And so special activities division was much, much smaller than the Special Activity Center is now.

Again, talking to Hank Crumpton and Cofver black about this. It's one of the reasons why there were Green Berets on the teams. It was partly as a liaison, but it's partly because it's another specialist military person. And some of the subsequent CIA teams had Delta Force people and SEALs on them. So everybody wanted to be on it. But the right people were actually in relatively short supply.

**[00:36:38] AH:** And tell us a little bit more about the mission. Like what was your brief? What were you set out to do?

**[00:36:44] JS:** I've said this before, I think. I don't know, Dave might have a different perspective. But there is really no prescribed mission statement. I mean, to be perfectly candid with you, it was kind of like you showed up. When I got back from training, the next morning I went in to see the battalion commander. He said, "Hey, go see the colonel, Colonel Mulholland and the group commander." And he said something like, "Hey, I'm probably not going to see you for about six months, but we'll see each other in Kabul," or something in that effect.

So I knew by implication what he was talking about. We're going to do some sort of infiltration in advance of the teams to prep the environment and then go forward with the unconventional warfare campaign. I mean, that was kind of obvious. But no one stated that. That was the weird part.

Now the teams that went, they went into isolation. So we have a facility at fifth group where specially designed to isolate people. It's got a dining facility, sleeping area. Mark Nutsch's team went into isolation and they were given a mission, because in the army, you're going to give a team a mission, right? That's the way it works. But I didn't really have a codified mission statement.

Now when we got to the headquarters, I never forget this first day we walked in. We hadn't been – It hadn't been decided the order of march for the teams going forward. That had not been decided yet. So I think, for us, they wanted to keep us kind of occupied, to get us out of the way because we're not – We're adjuncts there, right? So they gave us this joint staff mission statement. And it was a warning order from the joint staff. It was on a fax and they had it to us and they said, "Go do some mission analysis on this." And it was like one or two sentences that said, "Prepare to conduct combat operations in Afghanistan." And that was it. There was no unconventional warfare, direct action, airfield siege or any of that kind of stuff.

And I remember, and I distinctly remember debating this because we had a dry erase board and we're trained to do this and as officers and especially in SF. And I remember turning to the guys going, "Do we have to vanquish the Taliban to destroy Al-Qaeda? Because

destroying Al-Qaeda is the objective, correct?" And we were debating that. And then we got pulled into some other meeting.

So no one ever said, "Justin, this is your mission like you're trained to do." It was just understood tacitly. And then when we got there, it came together. But it really wasn't until we arrived in Tashkent that it became, "Okay, you're going in there to do – Unconventional warfare assessment is your mission." And then you're going to come out, me, maybe by myself or maybe with the team and then you're going to brief the ODAs. And the ODAs are going to go in two weeks later. That was the timeline. And that never came to pass. Everything became accelerated. But that was the only mission statement I got, is you're going to go do an unconventional warfare assessment.

**[00:39:34] DT:** I remember the army, and I remember the operations orders and the paragraphs and all that stuff, and there's nothing like that in the agency, or at least there wasn't in this case. It was very – I'm sure J.R. and Alex and the people at headquarters had a pretty good idea what was going to – Or at least, in theory, what should happen. But that didn't come down to me. And in Karshi-Khanabad, it was all just about preparing physically to get your gear straight and asking questions and briefing others, "Here's what Afghanistan is." We were talking to the ODA groups. And it was very little of that sort of codified preparation. Again, that's what the agency is so good at is just being ready because we're trained to be ready and we're mentally prepared to do anything. And I don't want to say we got lucky in that regard, because we didn't. We're good at doing that kind of stuff. Just landing in an area and sort of conducting the mission.

I really had no idea about – I mean, we're going to work with Abdul Rashid Dustum and the Uzbeks and we're going to take Mazar-i-Sharif and collect intelligence, enable these forces too. And then we'll link up with the military and conduct airstrikes. And that's all you need to know. That is not a rocket science formula. It's very complex on the ground sometimes. And J.R. had to deal with the politics of it between the Uzbeks, and the Tajiks, and the Hazara, and everybody else, and other people. And we had to figure out, "Can we trust these people? When they say we're going to do this, do they do this?" And so forth.

My job was to getting to know these afghans, dealing with them on a personal basis. Trying to understand them what was going on. Trying to understand the truth, the reality and what was being said, which sometimes don't mix. And then paramilitary guys setting up drop zones for our supplies and weapons and so forth. It was a fairly complex thing. But I think as we're talking here, everything really fit together, because paramilitary guys, they're masters of all kinds of skills and they were – I don't think there was anything they couldn't do that was required of them. And I jumped in with the cultural knowledge, some of the linguistic stuff. And then there was J.R. and then Alex. And thanks to Toby's book. I sort of – Or Toby's research and questions. I really got to understand how well of a team we were. How little guys on the team like myself were just these small cogs with a small mission. And then the broader thing, the responsibilities that J.R. shouldered were just tremendous. Complete the mission and don't have people get killed. Don't die in the course of it. Figure out these Afghans. Who should we give support to? Who should we not? How do we tell them? How to not piss them off and get killed by the Afghans? That was never an issue because J.R. made it not an issue. J.R. was skilled like that. And then Alex was a typical sergeant major, I think, in the sense that he was there to protect us and make us do things correctly. By the book, so to speak, in a military manner when it came to security and so forth. And he was always whispering to us or telling us don't do that. And he was always like – You could almost see him sometimes saying, “Oh my God! This is too much. We can't –” The risks were in pretty incredible on a daily basis. Again, we had no body armor.

And guys like me, a commander says, “Hey come out and ride and come see us. And okay, get on a horse with another guy and you go ride out and see this commander and see what happens. Tell us what happens.” And Justin and Mike went on a long trip down south to Bamyán Province. And so managing the risks, J.R. and Alex did that. And guys like me, we just went about our business and not really understanding. At the time, we're appreciating how serious and sensitive some of this work was that was being done around me.

But each person on the team was just incredible in terms of their skill sets and being able to jump in and do all these sort of very demanding things with not a whole lot of sleep, not a whole lot of planning and preparation, but sort of on the fly.

**[00:43:57] AH:** Just talking about Tashkent , it's probably a stupid question, but I assume that the death of Masood and the 10th of September, that must have been felt pretty strongly where you were. Tell us a little bit more about that.

**[00:44:12] DT:** We were banking on Masood literally. I mean, we had gone into the Panjshir.

**[00:44:17] AH:** You had met him, right?

**[00:44:18] DT:** Yes. We had met him several times. And it was clear to us, to the agency. I wasn't making any decisions. It was clear to the agency, the CTC, that Masood was a guy that we could work with. And we had been working with him, gathering intelligence. There was nothing lethal going on. We weren't providing him with weaponry and so forth until the very end. But we were getting our feet wet so to speak via Masood and via the Panjshiris, the Tajiks, and were learning a great deal about the sort of the battlefield so to speak. What we're up against? What he was up against? And he was 95% of Afghanistan was in control of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda at the time. And you had these islands of friendly, so to speak. Dustum was on this tiny island, and the Panjshir Valley was another island. That was free from Taliban and Al-Qaeda control.

So CTC had limited resources, personnel and so forth, and everything was directed to Masood at the time, which is a very logical, that's the way that he was a known quantity. We were working with him. He had produced results in providing intelligence and so forth. When he was killed on September 9<sup>th</sup>, it was a huge shock. Just a huge shock especially to us because we were the people dealing with him out of Uzbekistan directly, and headquarters was also running that show. But that was a huge shock and we had no idea what was it. We thought the collapse of Afghanistan was imminent. And then with that came the repercussions of that, which would – And of course we had no idea 9/11 was coming. So the first shock, which I think affected us out in the field much more than it did at headquarters, was very serious. And I think we were still trying to figure out what we're going to do when 9/11 happened.

**[00:46:13] TH:** One of the fascinating things for me about this, I mean, I feel it's 20 years ago now and there's a generation now that doesn't really remember 9/11 directly. We all

remember exactly where we were on 9/11. And I was in downtown Washington, D.C. going into the newspaper office. And for me, 9/11 is central to this book. It's a 9/11 book and it starts with David on a flight from Tashkent to London to attend a meeting about stinger missiles in the CIA station in London. He's in the air. And while his plane is taking off just as Muhammad Atta getting on a flight that's going to end up hitting one of the World Trade Center towers, and he doesn't find out about it until it's all over. And he's already talked about his perspective being so different from somebody who was actually here on 9/11. Justin was underwater on the Special Forces dive, of course, in Key West. And Mike Spann, and Alex, and Andy were in special activities division inside CIA headquarters. So there are all these people with these different perspectives in different parts of the world. Scott Spellmeyer was in a courtroom thousands of miles away adopting his son with his wife. Another guy, Dave Phillips, from the Jawbreaker Team, he'd been working on the Predator Program in Uzbekistan and was flying back to the U.S. His commercial plane was diverted to Gander in Canada. He had to get back from Canada. So all these people in these different parts of the world with these different perspectives all coming together and the common theme is 9/11.

Again, it's easy to forget. But at the time, and particularly for people like David, as he said out in the field, Masood's assassination was very much part of that. I remember talking to David about his perspective as well. That's it. Afghanistan is going to fall completely to the Taliban. That's going to have spillover effect into Uzbekistan and with IMU. And that's going to directly affect his family. His wife had already been knocked off her feet by an IMU explosion inside Tashkent.

**[00:48:23] AH:** Wow! Help us understand just a little bit more how those opening weeks play out. So you've got the Jawbreaker Team who are in the Panjshir Valley. And then you've got Team Alpha. When do you go down? So you were the first behind enemy lines. And walk us through that opening stage of when you've arrived.

**[00:48:44] JS:** When we first arrived, the task was pretty straightforward. I mean, we had to do the link up and sort of build rapport with the principles and the leadership. So I think the very first thing we did was we're ushered into a meeting. Of course, Dave remembers that.

We all went to that meeting. And Dastum was there, and **[Inaudible 00:49:01]**. And that was midnight. And one in the morning right after we came off the helicopter.

The second bit, and where my role was, is to go out and select and survey these helicopter landing zones, because the decisions have been made. They're going to bring the ODAs in, the teams in one of MH-47. So we came in an MH-60s, but 47 is more longer range, higher altitude, more lift capability. So they had to bring in a whole team with all their equipment, which they had more stuff than Team Alpha did, because they had all the weapons and stuff. So we had to go find a suitable HLZ, and that was my task and right off the bat. And I think the first day after daylight, sometime later that day, Dave and I went forward in that truck to what was – I didn't know at the time, the Town of Dehe. And then, for me, it was fairly simple task. I said, "Okay, here's this field that sufficiently has the parameters to fit the helicopter." You survey it there's a format you use and then you send it up electronically via satellite.

And then the pilots coming in are so good that – I mean, they don't really need that much guidance. And that was it. I think it was fairly straightforward. That's the first couple days. But then as things started to evolve, the politics, and it got more complicated. And then – Anyway, I'll stop there and let Dave – Hand it off to Dave.

**[00:50:24] DT:** Yeah. We all had our roles, as we said. And my role was to get know these guys as much as I could and learn about them and learn what they were thinking and so forth. And I was very, very struck. I had met many afghans before, been to Afghanistan. But these were very different people. These were primarily ethnic Uzbek cavalry horsemen, horse cavalry. Very, very tough people, from a rough neighborhood, rough upbringing, fighting wars forever. Under Dostum's leadership. Extremely loyal to Dostum. Very, very hospitable and friendly towards us. Very eager to get to know us in their own way. But these men had, for the most part, never been out of Afghanistan. Thanks to their being warriors from a young age and horsemen. Not a whole lot of schooling and so forth. And these were just tough, tough cookies so to speak. And I was just very impressed by that, because I had not seen these or experienced these kinds of Afghans before.

I could speak their language fairly well, but we had a rift. I knew Uzbek well. I knew Uzbekistani Uzbek, and culturally and so forth. That's a very different country than Afghanistan. Whole different history and legacy, soviet legacy and so forth. Afghans have more of the afghan legacy, the Iranian, Persian influence. So we could speak and understand each other. But culturally, we were very, very different even with a lot of experience of being in Uzbekistan and so forth. But I was just thrilled to get to know these guys. It was like a dream. And although I hated the horses aspect of it, riding them, I was terrible. I was frightened and scared every day, had to get on a horse. It was just not a pleasant experience. And very painful all the time. There was never a good horse riding experience for me, never. And I don't know. I think Justin would lie if he said there was.

**[00:52:27] JS:** Because you're tall.

**[00:52:28] DT:** Oh, yeah. That's it. Yeah. Right.

**[00:52:30] JS:** The stirrups. Remember how short they were? And they tried to extend them to the max extent, but that –

**[00:52:37] DT:** Yeah. I wish it was that simple. Anyway, we can talk about horses until the cows come home as they say.

**[00:52:45] JS:** You know what? I was going to say, people always go, “Oh, were you.” I tell my story and they say, “Oh, were you one of the horse soldiers?” And I said, “Well, actually, no. We were the guys who got the horse soldiers their horses.” And I remember that morning, Dave, because I think I came to you and we were conferring and Dostum said, “Hey, they need to come up to the front line.” And then you were conferring with one of the guys. Maybe it was Sattar Khan, I can't remember, about getting horses. And then we discussed whether they should get donkeys and horses and whether mules, yeah. Or, yeah, donkeys, mules. And then whether they're going to put their equipment on the mules and then ride the horse or how much equipment they're carrying. There's a little discussion about that.

And then Dave, if I recall, you kind of told them, “Hey, this is what we need.” And then sure enough they showed up. And then there was this whole interesting dynamic when they were cross leveling the equipment, because there's a lot of equipment on these horses. And Dostum showed up early. He said he was – Well, the word was he was coming in at eight. He showed up at 7:30. I thought it was a bit of a game where he was going to show, “Hey, is the Alpha here?” He showed up and he acted kind of stressed out that these guys weren't ready to go and they were still getting their stuff cross-leveled. And then he rode off. And the team eventually caught up to him. I thought that was kind of interesting and funny, because they were sort of scrambling and they were trying to secure whatever the equipment was on these mules.

And then they were carrying load-carrying equipment at the time. There's no body armor. Body armor was not proliferated like it is now. But they're load-carrying equipment. Their harnesses were weighing upwards of 70 pounds because they had grenades and Pursuit Deterrent Munitions and a basic load plus of 556 or whatever. And so when they got on the horse, I mean, they were weighing whatever their weight was plus probably 80 pounds.

**[00:54:42] DT:** And I have to say this. This is another sort of prepared statement that I just want to get in. I became enamored by the ethnic Uzbeks and basically all the men we fought with, the Tajiks, the Hazara as well. Most of this was on horseback for the first couple weeks. The toughness of them, their loyalty to their leaders, and the bonding that did take place between us. I was extremely impressed by these men. They made it clear many times that their job was to protect us. And this was writ large. I mean, it was obvious that Dostum said to them, “Don't let these Americans get hurt or killed, because if they do, we're out of luck. This is all we got. We're not getting –” And so the premium pay put on us was very high, and we were protected, and fed well, and taken care of in that local Uzbek Afghan way. And these are tough men. So it was tough. It wasn't easy. But we were really taken care of. And we got to know some of these guys fairly well. And I admire them to this day. I have very strong positive feelings towards them to include Abdul Rashid Dostum himself. He was an incredible, at the time, leader of men who shed blood on our behalf because we asked him to and because he was good at it. And he had his men go risk their lives because we asked him to do that for us, to conduct combat operations against Taliban.

It did mesh with his interests a hundred percent. And he saw us as a vehicle for what we achieved. But I can't say enough about those Afghans. Dostum, if you're familiar with Afghanistan and so forth, is maligned to almost no end. He's seen as this terrible, terrible human being. I can just say that he was an excellent person to know. He has had a great sense of humor. I had a lot of interaction with him. And with me and our team, I think he was very straightforward and very, let's say, honest. He did many, many things that I think were above and beyond what he sort of needed to do. He really banked on us. He bet on us. And we really worked well together. I think the ODA folks would say the same thing, the Special Forces guys. He created a very strong bond with them, especially Captain Mark Nutsch. So it was a very, very positive experience especially for the first weeks of our deployment. The success we achieved was very much a team effort between three entities, the Afghans, the agency and the military.

**[00:57:28] TH:** And I think in terms of the context across Afghanistan, you had a very different sort of picture in the Panjshir Valley. So we talked about Ahmad Massoud being assassinated. So his successor militarily was Fahim Khan, who was the commander of the Tajiks. And he basically didn't want to move. He didn't want to fight until he'd got more money from the U.S. He wanted sort of carpet bombing in front on the Shamali plains between the Panjshir and Kabul. Things were sort of stalled in the Panjshir. Dostum stepped up. Dostum was not stalled. And once the ODA worked out how to coordinate sort of the awesome might of American air power with these cavalry charges, once they got that right, which was not easy and took a week or two, then Dostum, and Alpha, and 595, and Atta, everybody was moving. And that was not the case in the Panjshir.

And so you had Alpha and Dostum and co fighting. And as that was happening, the plan that more teams were being brought in. We talked about Team Bravo that came in I think November the 4<sup>th</sup>. The reason why Justin and Mike Spann and Mark Rausenberger went to Bamyan was to prepare for Team Delta, CIA Team Delta, to come in and under no DA. Team Charlie went into Herat with Ismail Khan. Echo went into Tarancon across the Pakistan border with Karzai.

So as Team Alpha was fighting, this was sort of being replicated in other parts of Afghanistan and the teams were coming in. And before they went in, there was a real push and there was a lot of kind of angst in Washington, particularly from Rumsfeld about, 'Let's get people in quicker. Let's get people in. Let's get people in.' So there's this real sort of sense of the need to sort of build momentum.

**[00:59:30] AH:** Just so that our listeners are clear on this. Can you just help us understand what ODA 595 were doing and how they related to Team Alpha? What they were doing?

**[00:59:41] JS:** So I'll start by saying, first of all, 595 was not the first team in the order of merit. I'll just state that way to go in. I mean, they was another team that had been sort of earmarked for that mission. That team was removed, and 595 moved in, and did a phenomenal job. And it was just kind of emblematic of how hectic things were at the time. I mean, there was zero tolerance for lack of confidence and being ready to do the mission. Like Dave said, you can't have everything. It's not going to be perfect. You need to be ready to do it. You need to be nimble and flexible.

And so when 95 was picked to backfill those guys, it became apparent that Mark was the right guy for the job. And we were very lucky that we had that right dynamic, because he got along well, I think, with J.R. He got along well with me. I mean, he was my peer. I didn't know him that well. But prior to that, he got along well with Dostum. And I knew guys in other areas, other teams in the Panjshir. The guys, they were basically in the air control tower, Bagram, calling in casts on the Talibs from Farhim Khan's side of the house. And that was a much more static battle there and less movement, because Dostum was very much a man of action and all that.

But the dynamic was good. When the team got on the ground though, their mission was pretty clear that they had to go out and they had to support Dostum's – The ground movement piece, the war movement, the ground tactical plan. And they did that principally with close air support. And one thing I think that helped that we didn't get on each other's nerves is we quickly got scattered doing things. So we were broken up. So the ODA is doing its thing. Mark, Mike and I went to Bamyan. And everybody was sort of split into

these three-man elements doing their thing. And we were kind of autonomous for a good part of the time, I think.

And so it was really interesting. And then we all kind of came back together towards the end as you went into Mazar and then the dynamic change there. But all in all, the relationship between the team and Team Alpha, ODA 595 and Team Alpha, was I think quite good. I mean, there were a couple times when there was disagreements particularly when you go into meetings and you're dealing with locals that how you comport yourself and deal with them. But these were minor compared to some of the problems that I think I've encountered over the years in those sort of environments.

**[01:02:12] DT:** I would agree. And I would just add to that by saying I grew up with a Green Beret song as a kid, Fighting Soldiers from the Sky. And I joined the army. I never became a Green Beret. So it was a kid fantasy for me to work with these guys and have them land. And it was funny at times, because they were very serious. I'll never forget when they did land, there was concern on their part that they were in the middle of a hostile place. And they were, but it was just miles away, the hostility. And they were acting all tense and stuff and we had to go out and say, "No, no. These Afghans are good." The Green Berets are great at fighting. In fact, they are the best from my standpoint, in my experience. But they didn't know the Afghans. And that's what we brought to the table. We knew these guys. J.R. knew them. And the team knew them already in just a couple days' time. And that's part of our job as officers is sort of get to know people and sort of understand them.

The Green Beret obviously does that as well. They had a different mission focus. And we had to school them a little bit on here're the Hazara, here's the Tajiks, here's the Uzbeks. There're differences sometimes. And there's political things. There're rivalries and so forth. They had their own mission. Again, to my benefit, I was able to take rides with them, some of the Special Forces guys, and do some other things that they did to ride with Dostum. I could interpret for them and so forth. And so I got to see firsthand what they were doing and calling in airstrikes and so forth and watch that and be part of that. And that was just a thrill for me just to see and to watch how well. Dostum didn't speak a word of English. Mark didn't speak any Dari or Uzbek. But they got along fine and they understood exactly what was going on most of the time without a whole lot of interpretation.

**[01:04:05] TH:** They shared a bit of Russian, didn't they?

**[01:04:08] DT:** Some of them did. Yes.

**[01:04:08] TH:** I think Mark spoke Russian, and Dostum spoke a little bit.

**[01:04:10] DT:** Yeah, a little bit. Yeah. So in any case, it was a perfect marriage of these three elements that we said. It was fun to watch and fun to watch some of the quirks and how we worked them out, because there were some quirks.

**[01:04:23] TH:** I feel also that my kind of understanding of it was that the ODA was focused on assisting the afghans defeat the Taliban. The agency was looking sort of beyond the Taliban to Al-Qaeda. And obviously we're going to come to that. And David has taught in particular about J.R.'s managing that the tribal and ethnic politics, which were considerable. I mean, there was there was a serious possibility of Atta Muhammad Nur, Tajik leader, who was nominally subordinate to Dostum. And that was the view of Dostum and that was the view of the Americans, but it was not the view of Atta. There was a possibility that Atta could have taken military action against Dostum with the Americans caught in between until all that was managed. So I feel that, obviously, the military does the military stuff and the agency does the intelligence stuff. And that was just a sort of like implicit understanding throughout all this.

**[01:05:19] AH:** I'm sorry if I'm not getting this right. ODA 595, they were to stick with Dostum and his warriors and to help them fulfill their mission, but the Team Alpha were there for intelligence and were breaking down into smaller component groups to go and do separate missions to gather intelligence? Is that correct?

**[01:05:41] DT:** Yeah, but we worked hand in hand a lot. I mean, the ODA did break down in many cases as well. And Captain Mark, he sent small groups of guys over here to do their own things. Eventually he sent a group way out without us. And so he was working his own sort of mission, again, with ours and without us, with us and without us. And that was fine. Everybody understood the lanes. In a very brief period of time, I think everybody

understood the lanes. But Mark stuck with Dostum for the most part, but he sent his men out into various places to conduct combat operations or assist other commanders, ethnic Uzbek, or Tajik, or whatever commanders right up on the mountainside. Look for the bad guys calling airstrikes, potentially, and so forth.

**[01:06:35] JS:** Yeah. I mean, so it was necessary to go and assume the configuration of split team ops is what we would call it or what we call it both on the ODAs part and on Team Alpha's part. And other than the initial introduction, Team alpha I think was indispensable in the beginning just to make sure that when the ODA came in that that all went well. But once they were linked up with Dostum and that relationship was established and it was strong and it was fortunately good and it got better and better, then Team Alpha could focus on their primary mission. So sort of like the steward, the ODA, to make sure that they kind of got there and everything was okay. And that was mainly my role. And then once they were established, then, boom! We sort of decoupled from that and then we had other jobs to do, which is to go to Bamyan, for example, and bring in other CIA teams and SF team. And then Scott went to Atta Muhammad. And it got very dynamic and a lot of multiple simultaneous things going on.

**[01:07:40] AH:** That's fascinating. Sorry. I'm just trying to delineate it so that your stories don't get conflated, which is part of the purpose of the of the book, right? Just to disaggregate them, but to see how they link together. So thanks for that. I think it would be interesting now just to walk the story forward up to the 25th of November and get a sense of how it goes from the beginning up until one of the high water marks of the book that you spoke about. Toby, help us understand those connecting events.

**[01:08:13] TH:** Very quick movement. Once the coordination between the Dostum's ground fighters, horse cavalry fighters, and the air power coordinated by ODA 595 and 534 with Atta's forces. Once that meshed, things moved very, very quickly. And there was a lot of doom and gloom and frustration in Washington that things weren't happening. It was another Vietnam that they were going to be bogged down until the spring. I mean, there was a meeting where Rumsfeld cited a DIA analysis that was very gloomy about the prospects of swift victory. And Hank Crumpton said Mazar-i-Sharif is going to fall within the

next 24 hours. And I think even George Tenet turned around to look at him and, “Are you sure?” But he was right.

And so Mazar-i-Sharif fell on November the 9<sup>th</sup>. The following day, Team Alpha, and Team Bravo, and the ODAs, and Dostum, and Atta entered Mazar. At that point, the Americans moved into Qala-i-Jangi, the thought of war to the west of Mazar-i-Sharif, which was 19<sup>th</sup> century sort of baked mud fortress that had been used by soviets. And Dostum and the Taliban had fled and left it in a pretty gross state.

And so then maybe David perhaps could speak to this, the situation of the liberation of Mazar-i-Sharif. Scenes of joy and jubilation and people shaving off their beards and women emerging from the darkness, and more than one person's compared it to sort of the liberation from the Nazis in 1945. And then there was a period from – Two-week period up to November 25<sup>th</sup>, which was full of kind of shifting sands and intrigue. And the Taliban had sort of melted away. And was it coming back? And issues with prisoners in different places, and all that in some ways in hindsight sort of led up to what happened on November the 25<sup>th</sup>. And so maybe David could talk to some of that.

**[01:10:26] DT:** The liberation was just that. I mean, there were crowds out waving and smiling. And by the same token, I mean, we took a road up from south of Mazar-i and it was just littered with equipment and bodies of Al-Qaeda and Taliban forces that were destroyed in airstrikes the day prior. The enemy forces had left the city without a fight inside the city. And when we got there, again, it was full of – And there were some people stragglers, mostly Pakistani stragglers who were being caught and sometimes beaten and so forth on the streets. So it was kind of a surreal situation in the sense that we'd been fighting for a while and waiting for this moment. And then it comes, where in we reach our objective.

And within almost two hours, I think I get this call from J.R. and he says, “Something's going on at this place at a school.” And we soon find out that it's inhabited by remnants of Al-Qaeda. We're not exactly sure. But in short, we have to conduct airstrikes on this school complex inside Mazar-i-Sharif. And it was a very messy situation. The Al-Qaeda forces inside the school would not surrender. And we had numerous Afghan emissaries from our friendly forces trying to persuade these guys to quit and surrender. And they're all killed.

And so that sort of initial jubilation and euphoria is tempered by this fighting again in the city. And it's, again, very – We were very, very close to the target when it was struck and so forth. And it was just a very tough situation.

Again, it started this idea, for me at least, that, well, we did achieve this initial objective. But, man, things are still going to be rough, Sutan Razia School. And it was a very tough sort of battle in there. And thanks to American air power, again, we were able to prevail. And the time went on, as Toby said, that we were dealing with local factions of Afghan allies. Some of whom we never had met before. But Dostum would introduce us, or Atta, or Ustad Mohaqiq, the leader, the Hazara Shia leader. And so we're dealing with people trying to understand the situation. Everybody has fled to Kunduz, east of Mazar-i-Sharif. That's where supposedly 10, 000 Al-Qaeda and Taliban forces are hold up. And so everybody thinks the battle is going to move to Kunduz, which it basically does.

However, the countryside is it's sort of pacified, but you have the Pashtun villages, the Taliban. And then, of course, the bad blood is still there. The victors and the vanquished are still not happy. There's no peace so to speak in a classical sense. It's a very tenuous situation. And we're going out trying to capture or get access to Al-Qaeda forces that are still out there. Some of them are prisoners of local militias and local warlords and so forth. So we're very, very active in trying to get a hold. Again, our mission is collect information intelligence. And of course the rumors, this is Afghanistan. There's rumors about Bin Laden he being here and being there and his uncle and his brother and everybody else. And so it was a very, very active period of doing various things. But I personally was more involved in trying to get a hold of people who would be able to provide intelligence or information about the whereabouts of Al-Qaeda forces and their status and so forth. And to try to figure out what the status was in the villages surrounding Mazar. And we're having all these former Taliban forces surrender. Dostum's accepting their surrender. He's introducing us to former Taliban people and so forth. And again, it's a strange situation, because these guys are walking around and they stop fighting. But they still have their weapons in their villages and so forth.

But again, everything moves to Kunduz. And I'm sure Jason can speak to his deployment towards Kunduz and so forth, into other places. And we're left with a small group of people

back in Mazar that, in theory, we will take turns. Some of us will stay in Mazar. Sort of hold down the fort literally. And others will go out to Kunduz and enable further combat operations against the enemy with the ODAs who, for the most part, have gone forward as well.

So when it comes to 24 November, you have most of Team Alpha outside of Mazar in Kunduz or other places trying to prepare the battlefield, collect intelligence about the upcoming battle in Kunduz and what will take place after that. The ODAs are out there, again, calling in airstrikes and such. And then we get word that we are going to receive a large number of Al-Qaeda prisoners and they're coming to Mazar-i-Sharif.

**[01:15:36] TH:** Justin can talk to this. But it's important to sort of remember how few Americans on the ground there were. In the north west, you've got Team Alpha, which is eight, and three from Team Bravo. So 11 CIA. And then you have ODA 595. You have the ODC, the battalion element that's come in, which is another sort of ten or so combat controllers. And you're starting to get some logistics people in. But there's been this victory and you've got most of the Americans moving east to Kunduz. But you've got kind of almost a rare element sort of left behind in Mazar-i-Sharif, because there's this feeling that it's over, but it wasn't over.

And in terms of the CIA, I mean, you've got J.R. who was liaising with Dostum, and Scott Spellmeyer who was liaising with Atta, because he'd been the bravo commander there. They're in Kunduz. You've got another three who were in Kayan and Pul-e Khamri south working with local warlords to try and cut off the retreating forces from Kunduz.

Justin and Mike were returning from Pul-e Khumri. And then you've got the three bravo guys who were in the Turkish school, which was the new base for the Americans in Mazar. So everybody's sort of spread. And Justin's got his own kind of perspective on that 24th because he was returning to Mazar that day.

**[01:17:03] JS:** As Dave said, Kunduz was the main effort. So what you had was the main effort comprising Dostum and ODA 595, which was really one of the few operational units.

Remember, you have battalion headquarters, but that's not a fighting element. They're a fighting element. So they're with Dostum. J.R. and Scott are with Dostum.

Mike and I are tasked to go to Pul-e Khumri where Alex is. But in route, we were trying to shore up or at least get this leader down there, one of the Hazara leaders, to come up and block the southern access point out of Kunduz so that the idea was as they pushed towards condos from the west, that some of these guys would try to escape kind of south and southeast towards Salang or maybe towards Kabul that way. And the idea was to block that and deny that egress point.

Well, while we were there, it became apparent that this individual we were dealing with, he had no interest in doing our bidding. He was sitting there for a reason. And wasn't quite in Pul-e Khumri. It was outside of Pul-e Khumri. So Mike got frustrated and I got frustrated as well that this guy wasn't buying what we were selling him. I mean, we were trying to convince him to do this. He wouldn't do it.

So we went and met with Alex later in that evening I believe, the night before. And then the next day we came back. And on the way back was when we started hearing these rumors at the various checkpoints. Because at the time, these local warlords would put up checkpoints, I don't know how frequently, key points. And you'd have to go through and maybe pay a tax or at least they would check out who you are. And we got to one. It was about halfway between Pul-e Khumri and Mazar. And the guy said, "Hey, there're all these Chechens. I don't know why." There're like 200 Chechens. They're up there and they're about to fight the Americans and Dostum. And we don't know what's going on." And so we heard the rumor again.

And then when we finally got to, I think, what was the outskirts of Mazar, was where the road intersects with the highway one. I think that's where it was. There was Dostum. There was like a Mad Max scene. The ODA was there. There was tanks and everything. We met with J.R. And J.R. and Mike conferred and then said, "Hey, these Toronto prisoners had come out of Kunduz. They're foreign fighters and that they're being moved to Sheberghan. Or they were going to be moved to Sheberghan, but they're being moved to Sheberghan —

And it's getting late in the day. And of course you chronicle that, I mean, in very great detail what happened.

So from my perspective, we were just trying. I wanted to be part of the main effort. So I was a little bit disappointed that I was trying to shore up this guy down there. I wanted to be going to Kunduz. Little did I know that what was going to happen the next 24 hours was going to happen, because everything was focused on Kunduz. And when the prisoner uprising occurred, there was relatively speaking of skeleton crew in Mazar-i-Sharif. You had a limited element from the headquarters, the battalion, and then the UK SBS element had come in just the night before. Because that's not where the action was. The action was in Kunduz.

**[01:20:13] AH:** Help us understand those 24 hours. Walk us up to what happens in **[inaudible 01:20:19]** on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

**[01:20:22] TH:** Well, three Americans, three CIA people. One of them was a Green Beret. But there were three Americans who went to the fort that night on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Was Mike Spann, Justin and David. So I think one of them should describe the night of the 24<sup>th</sup>, because that was significant and a kind of a foretelling of what was going to happen on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

**[01:20:45] JS:** Yeah. Literally, Dave did most of the talking because he spoke the language. So I remember we drove up and it was just around sunset. And they had a checkpoint I guess on the north side of the fort there and they were jabbing around or whatever. And then, Dave, you spoke to them and they said, "Okay, go." And then we went in and entered through where the cannon is on the – I guess, that's the east side of the fort. And they waved us in and then we went into the – I forget where we parked. Maybe I parked – We parked on the north side of the wall. And then we walked in and they were cagey. And I remember you said, "Man, this is weird. These guys are really cagey." And it turned out that a guy had exploded a grenade earlier. I remember, it was really getting dark now. And I remember seeing that guy. I thought it was a guy under that quilt I told you about with the wispy beard and he was sort of lying there. And I kind of looked at him.

And then, Dave, you were speaking to one of the guards and then you said – I think it was almost verbatim like, “He says now is not good. Tomorrow is better. We need to come back tomorrow. They'll have this place sorted out. We'll have these guys. They just put them in the soviet, the bunker, the pink building.” I don't even remember how they described it. “We got control of them, but tomorrow we need to sort them out. We'll have daylight and it'll be better. So if you're going to come, you need to come back tomorrow.” And then that was it. And then we turned around we left, right?

**[01:22:08] DT:** Yeah. I mean, the setup for this was – That's brought out in the book. This is the first group of a large number of Al-Qaeda, bona fide Al-Qaeda prisoners that people we have access to. And of course, there're all kinds of information out there, rumors that very senior Al-Qaeda leaders might be part of this and so forth. A lot of this we looked at with dubious. However, this was a big deal for us. And we were ordered or told by headquarters that we need to do our jobs and figure out who these people are. Collect information on them, their documents. And photograph them as possible and start the process of understanding who they are and what they know about Al-Qaeda and most importantly possible future attacks, terrorist attacks in the United States or other places. And it quickly became clear not only the next day, but that night even that this was the real deal, that there were Al-Qaeda people in the sense that we were told that they all had taken oath to Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, bayat.

So everything that was being said was starting to ring true and we're getting excited. But as soon as there was this suicide bombing with the grenades, and they killed two or three of our allies, our commander friends, in the fort. And so it was clear they had weapons. And when we were told, when I was told that it's not a good time, again, no lights, no electricity. We don't have flashlights and no night vision equipment or any. So nighttime in Afghanistan is not a good time to be. And so for a number of factors we went back and decided to come back the next day.

**[01:23:53] JS:** Yeah. And none of the prisoners were above ground at that point that I saw. We had just arrived after they had kind of put them in the bunker.

**[01:24:03] TH:** I mean, I think the importance of this moment is something that we can't sort of lose sight of. And David has spoken to this. But this is what November the 25<sup>th</sup>. So it's less than two and a half months after 9/11, and these are the first Al-Qaeda guys. And the nation is behind this effort to go after Al-Qaeda to find out who did 9/11 to prevent another attack.

And I remember on the night of 9/11, seeing humvees on the corner of streets in Washington D.C. and there was a sense of is there going to be another attack tomorrow or is it going to be next week or next month? So there's this sort of sense of urgency.

There's no, I mean, waiting a day or two till things are sort of safer or more convenient. That's just not an option and that's not the mindset of Team Alpha or any of these people. And so Mike and David went into that for the next morning to do a job knowing it was extremely dangerous, but wanting to find out who these people were, who these Al-Qaeda fighters were. They didn't go in alone. They went in with their indigenous allies, the people who they placed their lives in their sort of trust every day of this sort of operation. And so there was the northern alliance guard force. It wasn't perfect conditions. There were no perfect conditions in Afghanistan at this point and during this operation. So there has been some kind of lazy sort of analysis over the years, which kind of still persists sometimes of just, "Well, what were they thinking? They were just going into the four without any protection." That's against all procedures and protocols. I mean, to sort of take that view is to just not think about any of the context of all this. So as we now start to talk about November the 2<sup>th</sup>, the day itself, I think it's important to kind of understand the moment that this was.

**[01:26:08] AH:** Just so our listeners understand, where did these Al-Qaeda, the people that are in the four, where have they been gathered from? How do they all end up there? Help our listeners understand that.

**[01:26:20] TH:** Well, they've come from Kunduz. So there was a murky surrender deal struck between Dostum and Mullah Fazl, the Taliban commander of the north, days earlier. It was a surprise to Dostum's people and the Americans, these 400 or so Al-Qaeda turned up sort of almost at the gates of Mazar-i-Sharif. I mean, what we now know is essentially

this was sort of a Trojan horse operation by Mullah Fazl, and it was an attempt to recapture Mazar-i-Sharif. Because at the same time, as a prison uprising happened, there were elements of Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces moving out of Kunduz, moving from Balkh to the north west of Mazar and converging on Mazar. So this was a pretty sophisticated and clever operation. It wasn't some spontaneous revolt. David referred to it as the sort of smorgasbord of Al-Qaeda. All these different nationalities and ethnicities including, well, two Americans, Hamdi, who was born in the U.S, but Saudi parentage. And John Walker Lindh, a Californian **[inaudible 01:27:35]** every type of Al-Qaeda fighter you can imagine. No Afghans amongst these 400. They hadn't been searched properly by Dostum's men. Partly out of Afghan tradition of sort of honor and you surrender, but you just sort of go home or you keep your weapons. But these weren't Afghans.

And also, I think, some of Dostum's guys were terrified of these Arab fighters, foreign fighters. David and Mike began to realize the next day, but a lot of these prisoners have kept grenades, pistol, even rifles on them, a lot of weaponry. And at least some of them were planning an uprising the next day.

**[01:28:21] AH:** And tell us about that next day.

**[01:28:24] DT:** So Mike and I arrived as planned. We speak to the sort of the commander of the effort there in Afghan who we had been working with, a very competent officer so to speak. And he basically gave us a rundown saying you know these are Al-Qaeda men. They all have – At least from what we know, they've all given their allegiance to Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda. We have some that have admitted to working in or being trained in the various terrorist camps, so-called terrorist camps, in Afghanistan making poisons, explosives, biological chemical, all kinds of stuff that, of course, piques your interest.

And, again, this is the words of this commander. Some of them have claimed to know some of the actual terrorists involved in 9/11. And so it was a very, very sort of serious situation for us and that, "Wow! This is the real thing." And I have to stress that, up until that point, we had been dealing with a lot of prisoners. This is not our first time we had dealt with prisoners. Throughout the deployment, we had dealt with mostly Taliban prisoners and debriefing them and so forth. And as Toby mentioned, for the most part, in fact, there were

no exceptions that when they surrendered, they surrendered. And there were some foreign fighters amongst them. And it was a very – I don't want to say laid-back thing, but you got the prisoners, you talked to them, they explained. Or they didn't talk. And we'd move on.

Obviously, this was different. But given our experience in the past and so forth, we had hoped that this would go the same way. We would had first sort of crack at these guys. We would get their documents, passports, I.D. cards and whatever other stuff they had. Take their photos and talk to them as they were willing or able to talk to us. Many were wounded from the battlefield beforehand, meaning, days and weeks, or beforehand in battle. Many had been wounded the night before because there was some altercation inside the basement of this building. And they were very grievous wounds. And guys were coming up out of the basement wounded in bad shape. And we sort of immediately called on Afghan doctors to come, which they did.

And so this process began of taking the people out of this basement area and lining them up in the field so that we could start our process of taking photographs and asking their names, getting documents. And in that process, they were searched and their weapons were taken from them and put into piles. And over time, we got to see some of the piles, and they were substantial. And the weapons were then taken to another location outside the compound area from immediate view. It was a sort of – And you were talking to these guys. And, again, I spoke a couple of the languages of the region. And every language I knew was being spoken.

We had Uyghurs from China. You had central Asians from the former Soviet Union, Tatars from Russia, caucuses areas, every Arab country you can imagine, Southeast Asia, Muslims from Europe, Turks from Turkey, Turks from Germany. You had Australian, Africans. So it was just a wide array of people that you're saying to yourself. And these guys don't speak the same language amongst themselves. Many speak Arabic obviously. Many don't. Many speak Farsi and their native languages. So you're immediately asking yourself questions, “Who are these guys? What are they up to?”

And as you talk to them individually, you're getting all kinds of stories. I'm just a tourist. I came here by mistake. I don't know what's going on. Where am I?

**[01:32:22] TH:** I'm working for Mossad. I'm working for the CIA.

**[01:32:23] DT:** Right. "I'm a CIA agent and I work for Israel." "I'm a Christian. I just ended up here. Can you help me get out of here?" Very odd stories, but everybody's talking almost. We can speak most of the languages. Some speak English. And, "I'm here to conduct jihad. I'm here to do this thing, jihad. It's my religious duty." "Oh, yeah. I'm an Al-Qaeda member. Yeah, I worked in this camp. I did this and did that." So you're getting a whole range of truth and untruths, at least my perception is, and I'm just sort of fascinated by this whole array of different people as they're brought out. And they're asking for things. I need water. I need food. I need help. My brother lives here. Please call him for me.

Then there's the minority number who just don't speak at all. They act like they don't understand you or they don't understand you. My guess is they just choose not to speak. So this process goes on for a number of hours, about two hours. We're near the end. And as they bring the bodies out, some of the bodies, some people had died the night before in this fighting. I'm told by the commander that there is sort of a hardcore group of prisoners left and they don't want to come out. But it's probably be a good idea to see these guys at least and understand and clear them out so we get everybody assembled and we're able to get accountability and some kind of understanding of who's who and where they're from and all that. And, of course, it's only 10:30 or so, and we agree to do that.

And during that process, the uprising starts. When this last number, estimated at 30 to 40, come charging up the stairs with their weapons and they immediately killed the Afghans, our allies, at the top of the stairs. Many of our Afghans, for all the right reasons, did not have weapons on them, because if something happens, they don't want the bad guys to get the weapons in short. But the guard force is up there. And I'm aware of this fighting and explosions, hand grenades are being thrown, screaming and yelling. And this process starts of the uprising. And there's a lot of fire. The Afghan guards start firing at the people coming out of the building and the first casualties are sustained by the friendly forces, to include Mike Spann.

**[01:35:00] AH:** Out of interest, either you or Mike speak Arabic. How do you communicate with the Arabic speakers?

**[01:35:06] JS:** The Arabic speakers, we had other people that spoke Arabic. I did not speak Arabic. Mike did not speak Arabic. But many of the Arabs spoke Farsi or Dari for being there. And some of them spoke English. In fact, a lot of the Arabs spoke English, at least basic English. Where are you from? What are you doing? And again, that's all we were there for that day. And if anybody wanted to talk to us or we thought anybody was special, we'd sort of bring them out and isolate them a little bit and see if they had anything special to say. Some did.

**[01:35:38] AH:** Toby?

**[01:35:39] TH:** So yeah, just a couple of things. And one of the prisoners who didn't speak was John Walker Lindh. And Mike Spann who was sort of leading on speaking to the prisoners who did speak English was sort of particularly looking out for people who might be westerners zeroed-in on Lindh. Now, there was an Iraqi prisoner there who told Mike that Lindh was an Irishman. Lindh had been told at Al Farouq training camp not to identify himself even to fellow Al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters as American, because the information was kind of too hot that he should describe himself as Irish.

Lindh was wearing – I mean, he obviously looked sort of Caucasian. He looked different. He looked dainty and pallid and he had this long floppy hair and heavy beard, but he still looked like he was western. And he was wearing a navy blue sweater with patches on it that Mike thought was like an Irish or also British sweater. So there were a number of prisoners that were sort of taken to one side and were questioned by Mike or David or a combination of the two. And Lindh was taken aside twice. And Mike told him like, “Who are you? You're obviously a Muslim? Do you know that hundreds of Muslims were killed in the attacks on New York?” And absolutely no acknowledgement from Lindh, which was unusual because, as David said, nearly all the prisoners were speaking to some degree even if it wasn't the truth or certainly not the whole truth that they were talking about.

And Dostum had a guy with a video camera. So a lot of this was videoed, and David and himself was videoing some of it at times as well. So we had a pretty good understanding of what happened there both from David's sort of eyewitness account, but also from video, the moments of the uprising. So I was in Afghanistan last year, in Kabul and in Mazar-i-Sharif and Sheberghan. And I managed to, with the help of a local translator, who thankfully was just evacuated from Afghanistan, to track down two doctors as mentioned. Two doctors who were brought in to treat the prisoners who had sort of battle wounds or wounds from the explosions in the basement of the pink house the night before.

And so I met these two guys who were two Tajiks who still working in Mazar. A lot of doctors have been brought to me in the previous weeks and who turned out not to be the doctors. And so it was exciting to meet them. And they described they were very close to the pink house and they were very close to Mike Spann the moment of the uprising started. And they described Mike who'd had an AKMS, like an AK-47 but with a folding stock, and that that was the rifle had been issued to the team. So Mike had it on his shoulder and he sort of swung around to the prisoners who were coming out of the pink house and shot two or three of them. But he was sort of swarmed by prisoners from behind, the prisoners who've been lined up in the field outside the pink house. Most of them still had their hands bound. They sort of jumped on top of him, were sort of wrestling with him. He had a Glock pistol, which he drew and shot probably another two or three of them. And the doctors remember, witnessed all this.

And at that point they see Mike sort of disappear underneath a pile of bodies. And the doctors themselves just sort of hit the deck. And one of the things, I'm sure David will describe, is the sort of physiological things and psychological things that happen to you in a moment of sort of – Or a period of very, very intense stress. I mean, life or death stress. These doctors developed a tunnel vision. At that point they would just concentrating on not dying in the next few seconds as they were sort of lying face down on the ground. David was going through his own processes as he heard Mike shout out, "Dave! Dave! Dave!" And that was a pivotal moment for him that day. Could you tell us a little bit more about that, Dave? And the book, it seems really terrifying the situation you find yourself in.

**[01:40:01] DT:** Yeah, yeah. Sure, I can outline it. Obviously, the book provides a good amount of detail. So you can read about that. I am fascinated by the psychological process that I went through. I had not been through anything like that before or since. And for some reason, it started very, very quickly. When the initial explosions and firing took place, which was about 100 yards away from me. And I'd been in sort of firefights before. Nothing obviously this serious. But I was familiar with gunfire and explosions and so forth. But immediately I drew my pistol, looked at my pistol and said to myself, "Do I know how to use this thing?" And I had been trained on a pistol with the agency years before and I had just a very quick refresher training, I think, in Tashkent. But suddenly I'm bombarded by thoughts that obviously I'm thinking, but they're happening very, very quickly, so quickly that I'm being confused. And some of the thoughts are sort of superfluous. Like what's this guy doing? What's that guy doing? You're asking yourself questions. A guy runs towards me. I look at him. He's holding a notebook. He's a friend. He tells me to flee, in Farsi, "Get out of here," he goes.

And I'm sitting there with my pistol just, again, taking in information. And then I hear Mike's voice. And when I heard Mike's voice – And this could have been two seconds, three seconds or five seconds, I don't know. I immediately start running the Mike. And I want to stress, and I stress to Toby, this is not bravery or courage. It is something to do, because I didn't know what to do. I didn't flee. That wasn't a choice. But when Mike's voice, it made me, again, aware he's there. And that's where I need to be. And it's that simple. Again, it's not a choice. I'm on automatic pilot. And again, bravery and courage are not part of the factor. It's automatic. And I start running the Mike and I fire my pistol as necessary as I'm being sort of attacked by people.

And then I get the Mike, shoot the people on top of Mike, take his rifle and continue on and make it eventually to the northern compound where I sort of decompress. But for that period of 10, to 15, to 17 minutes in that southern compound, I fire five magazines of my pistol, 15 rounds each of a Browning pistol. I fire Mike's weapon and I fire another weapon as well, another AK. And it's pretty muddy in my mind the sequence of events and the exactness, but I remember episodes and so forth of things. I was on automatic pilot for that period of time, which, again, I had never been in before or since. And tunnel vision, loss of hearing, and slow motion time, very slow. My thoughts are coming a mile a minute and I'm

thinking, "Who's this kid? He's coming after. Shoot him." "Why is this kid shooting at me?" And this kid is coming at me and shooting at me. I remember that very clearly. Grenades flying hitting me in the chest, in the thigh, not going off and wondering, "What's going on here?" Just a very strange surreal mental state of automatic decision making not based on deliberation, just automatic pilot. Falling down, getting up, falling down again. A guy hits me in the back with his head as he headbutts me, still tied up, chasing me.

These kinds of things. And, again, I don't know the order. I don't know the sequence. I can't put them in the right. And then I make it to the northern compound where sort of the second phase begins of that day in the combat and so forth. And it's interesting, because I went to Afghanistan subsequent to that and I met some of the people that survived also, the friendlies who survived. And they explained that I did things down there in that southern compound that I have no recollection of whatsoever, none whatsoever.

One kid claimed that I grabbed him by the neck, by his shirt, and dragged him because he said he was sitting there afraid not knowing what to do. I have no recollection of that. I think it might be a little exaggerated, but it just shows that if I do the math, so to speak, that I can remember three to four minutes of a 17-minute period. And the rest of that time is gone for me. It's vexed me for many, many years obviously and it's been very frustrating at times, but that's what it is.

But that mental state is a point of fascination for me since. And obviously, again, I want to point out a couple things. Mike Spann was a hero, a patriot. He had two daughters and a newborn son. Just one hell of a guy, as were every other teammate on that team. Really good people, skilled people, strong professionals. And Mike's loss was forever, and his family's loss is forever. And they still – His parents, his sisters, and his children, and his wife of course, still have that loss. And we talk about this. We talk about the success, the great stories that Toby writes about in the book, but we can't forget who Mike was and what he stood for and what the agency and the military does for us. I just wanted to stress that.

Secondly, I just want to stress as well the Afghans who fought with us and died with us during that process, during that deployment, and on that day on 25 November. We lost a

number of very, very close friends, Afghan friends. They're mentioned in the book as well. And sometimes we forget about these Afghan partners as well.

But anyway, I got to the northern part of the compound and we continued to fight, to fire on the enemy. A process ensued whereby a reaction force came to us to try to rescue me and find Mike. That sort of failed. Airstrikes were called in. I thought, for sure, the airstrikes had all missed and hit my location. When, in fact, they did hit the target. Just the power of these airstrikes was incredible.

In this process, I linked up with a reporter, a journalist. He gave me a phone. And with that phone I called my wife, 25 November. Thanksgiving was a couple days prior. And this is the first phone call she had received in a while from me and had no clue what was going on. But she did her job and patched me through and I got through the embassy and reported the situation. So I don't want to end it. I know we want to talk more, but I was just sort of a figure in a large, large situation where all kinds of people were doing their jobs. I can't say enough about my family, my wife, what she did suffering through all this 25 years of me working, all my teammates and everybody else. I really want to focus the attention on some of those folks as well.

**[01:47:22] AH:** And just before we turn a little bit more to those folks, I'm just interested if you could tell us a couple of the other things that some of the survivors told you that you did that you don't recollect that may or may not fill in those other 17 **[inaudible 01:47:37]** 13 minutes or so?

**[01:47:38] DT:** Right. It mostly stemmed from one person, Abdul Latif, who survived obviously. And I met him, and I think it was March 2002. And he explained that I'd come over to this burning vehicle. An RPG had landed near us and he was hiding in the corner. And I told him we need to get out of here. He just wouldn't move. And I grabbed him and we ran a little bit. And he said he made it. I don't remember that at all. And he explained he saw me come out near the entrance of this southern compound and fall down and use my weapon and so forth as well.

**[01:48:16] AH:** What kind of guy was Mike to you, Justin?

[01:48:21] JS: I mean, he was a friend. I mean, the way the team worked, he was a senior guy in the sub-element that we were in. I didn't get to know him until we went to Bamyán. So actually, that excursion, that mission was good in the sense that that's where I really got to know him and Mark as well, because it was just the three of us and we were alone for however long that was, weeks.

He's a quiet person by his nature, but he's fun to talk to and he's a very earnest guy. And he has a good sense of humor. Yeah, he's a pretty low-key guy and he actually is pretty even keeled. So when we got to Bamyán, there was a time when there was some stress because, for whatever reason, we couldn't make comms with the satellite. The antenna, we had a bad antenna that I ended up replacing or fixing. And then we finally made comms. And he, in spite of that, was really pretty calm, cool and collected. So that struck me.

And then we did the initial infills where I went and surveyed HLZ and then we went out and we met who were there when the teams came in. He did a lot of the interactions with – Were all the interactions with Mr. Khalili. And I was there for that to help out, taking notes, etc. And then we'd confer and kind of cross-level information.

So I got to know him pretty well on a personal level, on a professional level. And, yeah, he was a – Yeah, a really serious guy, but a good natured guy. And he was fun to talk to. There was a lot a lot of anecdotes. He would tell you stories and stuff.

But I think a lot of people when they first met him, he's very quiet. So he's kind of hard to know. But after a day or so, you kind of break that down. Very serious professional, and he was always – I remember the first cohort of prisoners that came out were these Taliban guys. And he had set up some sort of – He built some sort of almost like a decision tree where it was sort of like, “Hey, we'll ask them this and that,” and it kind of promulgates from there. And he kind of did that up over the night before. And then the next morning we went and we talked to these guys. And these guys were – They weren't the foreign fighters that Dave encountered. These were the more local Afghans that have been sort of pressed into service. But that struck me as well that he was a very forward-thinking kind of deliberate guy. But when it came to the mission, he was serious. It was black or white. There're good

guys against the bad guys. And I think Dave and I talked about this. I mean, that's the way you saw things. And that is a useful characteristic to have in those kinds of situations.

**[01:50:56] DT:** His focus and his intensity was very impressive especially when he got wound up ready to go. And further to Justin's point, Mike and I knew each other from months before, maybe even a couple years. Now, we weren't in contact, but we had known each other. And Mike was a serious guy. But we get to Afghanistan and we work together a couple times. Then this thing, the prisoners comes up. I speak the languages. So I'll go down and talk to prisoners. And immediately Mike is friendly towards me. Very friendly and nice. And so I'm going, "Mike, what's up with that?" He says, "Dave, I got to go with you tomorrow. You guys are going down there. We got to go talk to these prisoners. I got to be part of it."

And I didn't ask any more questions. I'll take all the help I can get, right? I said, "Sure, Mike. Let's go." And it's not like there's no formal process, but Mike wants to be part of that. And I said, "Go. Make sure J.R. says it's okay." And J.R. says, "Fine. Go." And as Justin said, he came up with this in his script, microscopic script, he has all these questions. And this is the next morning. He had spent most of the night with his little flashlight writing out these questions that we're going to ask the prisoners. And I'm going, "Mike, that's very impressive." He said, "Yes, it is," or something to that effect. And that's the way – Hey, I had nothing written out for questions. I've done this before. So it was sort of an exercise that I had some experience with. But Mike took this extremely seriously. And that's the way he took everything that he approached, very, very seriously. No mistakes, forethought planning. And if it's his responsibility, it's going to be done right. That was sort of one of my first real experiences with Mike that night and day with the prisoners early on in the deployment.

**[01:52:47] AH:** I wonder, Toby, and the research you've done for the book, could you give us a sense of the Mike Spann that you came to know when you were doing the research?

**[01:52:55] TH:** Yeah. And it's funny how well you can feel that you get to know somebody. I mean, I've dreamt about Mike. And I've spent many, many hours talking to every surviving member of the team, and Shannon Spann and both Mike's parents. One of the tragedies

with this is that a person sort of gets frozen in time. Almost it can seem like black and white monochromatic. But I remember speaking to a guy called Brian, who is still serving in the agency. Currently the Head of the Special Activities Center. So very senior officer who was a contemporary of Mike's in the Marines, and he was on the same course at the farm as Shannon and Mike. Mike and Shannon met at the farm.

Mike had second marriage. He just got married in June. His son had been married in June 2001. I mean, it was a moment. This was a great change in his life. Brian told me that Mike has sort of missed – Obviously, he's missed by his family and his friends on sort of deeply personal level. But Brian told me that Mike is so missed within the agency. That he believes that Mike would have been up there at the highest ranks now. And he talked to me about a conversation he'd had with Mike in early 2001. So after the USS Cole had been attacked in Yemen in October 2000 and 17 sailors were killed, I believe, a number injured. But the crew saved the ship.

Brian told me that he'd been on a training course with Mike. And Mike had said to him, “If that ship had sunk, we wouldn't be here.” And out of that conversation Brian told me about Mike sort of understood the Al-Qaeda threat. Even though he wasn't sort of an Al-Qaeda specialist in the agency, but he understood it. And he was sort of ready. And he had the sort of foresight to have a sense of what was happening.

My feeling about Mike is in many ways sort of personification of America after 9/11 really. A person who was absolutely enraged by what had happened. And so on the day of 9/11, he was at headquarters and the word evacuate had sort of flashed on the screens. And all non-essential personnel leave. People who were not in the counter terrorism center basically. Andy told me this. Andy was with him and said, “Mike was like with CIA. We shouldn't be leaving. We should be staying and doing something.”

And Mike was a person who didn't see himself as a non-essential member of government service. And he was a sort of person who was going to do something. And I think everybody on that team had a focus on the mission and the big picture of getting to Al-Qaeda and finding out who did this and stopping happening again. But I think the intensity and the focus that Mike displayed was second to none. It was demonstrated that day that he, at one

point, David was sort of feeling like, “Well, so many of these people is overwhelming. It's a kind of chaotic situation where people are overhearing what others are saying. We're going to need to take a step back and other people are going to have to come in from the U.S. We have to start to separate these people and process them because this is just huge.” And Mike, he wanted to get every last ounce of information that he could.

Another thing throughout this was that he wanted to learn from people like David. Why do you think that these Turkmens can't be members of Al-Qaeda? What is it that makes you come to that conclusion?” So I think it's a personal tragedy, but also a professional tragedy that Mike was killed that day. And he was a great American and a great CIA officer, and also a great Marine. He very much identified as a Marine. Who knows what he would have gone on to achieve had he not died that day?

**[01:56:45] AH:** I was wondering, was there ever any rubbing? Both of you were in the army and Mike was in the Marines. Was there ever any banter or rubbing about different services and so forth?

**[01:56:58] JS:** Not to my recollection. I mean, there's always a joke that – This is my dad. My dad was in the agency, that there's like this Marine mafia there, right? So there's a little bit about that. But no, not really, because Mike was like ANGLICO, Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Officer. And so when I spoke to him it was usually talking about common experiences. Like I had been in the 82<sup>nd</sup>, and I was a scout. And so sometimes we were working in and around ANGLICO during exercises and stuff. And so that was kind of the character of the conversations.

Yeah, there wasn't was a lot of that. I think what we joked about a lot were just stories from maybe like high school or college. Kind of just guy stories, that kind of stuff. That was what we joked about. Or movies quotes. Quotes from movies like pulp fiction or something, things that were funny. That was our kind of sense of humor. Or to an extent, we would sometimes make fun of some people. like I won't go into it because it's probably – There's this guy who claimed to be like an interpreter and he would come in, and he was a good natured guy, but he was horrible, right? And so we would do – I sometimes do imitations.

And we would do that. But it was like Mike, myself and Mark would sort of do these voices and have like a little theater there. So, yeah.

**[01:58:22] DT:** Mike was very irreverent in a humorous way. And he'd do imitations a lot. And he would always ask funny things about the Afghans. I've been dealing with Afghans. And he said, "Why do they eat with their hands? Don't they know about forks and spoons and stuff like that." And I explained things. And he goes, "Oh, okay." They have different toilet habits. And habits like that just – And I'd explain to them, "Well, this is why they squat when they do things."

And he would always sort of make light of stuff especially when he didn't know the answer. But when, "Yeah, that's smart. I guess they look at us and think we're kind of stupid too, I bet." And I said, "Yeah, Mike, they do." Stuff like that. So he's always learning. Great sense of humor. But it was a dry sense of humor and he was always – He gave that serious vibe. And underneath it was a kid learning and having a good time, a curious person who wanted to be a good, strong protector. I think he was a protector. He liked to protect things. That's sort of his mantra. Mike was the only Marine of the bunch. So he'd get quickly piled on by all us Army guys. I think everybody else was Army in the group?

**[01:59:37] JS:** Yeah, pretty much. Yeah, everybody.

**[01:59:38] DT:** Yeah, I think Mike was smart like that. He didn't want to get destroyed because we would have destroyed him if he had done that. It's too much.

**[01:59:46] JS:** Yeah. I mean, everybody had a military background. So it's sort of like not relevant to really rub in anybody. The nature of the jokes went towards imitating other people and stuff like that.

**[01:59:59] AH:** One of the things that I think is quite interesting is Mike Spann, as the title of the book attest to the first casualty. And after that, the CIA has many more stars on their memorial wall. And actually here in this theater we've got four chairs that are dedicated to four CIA officers that have fallen by someone that served alongside them. I guess I'd be interested just to try to think about the death of Mike Spann and then everything that's

happened in the period and between the first casualty, and we're obviously sitting here discussing all of this in the light of what's been happening in Afghanistan in recent months. And I don't want to get too down into the weeds on that, but I guess the question is, Justin and Dave, sometimes when you're living through events, you're just focused on A, and then B, and then C. But reading Toby's book, seeing everything that's happened recently in Afghanistan, the 20th anniversary of 9/11, the 20th anniversary of Mike's death, what are your kind of views looking back on the whole scene now? Do you think about that? Is that something that's been in your thoughts as of late?

**[02:01:12] DT:** Yeah. And I think I mentioned this that Toby helped the process of working with Toby, talking to Toby, has helped me put in perspective and appreciate more my teammates and the Afghans we worked with, and the mission and what we accomplished, and of course Mike. This allows us to think of Mike and put him into a pantheon of heroes that of course we would have done on our own as individuals. But Toby's book does that as well. And it gives us a pretext to talk about Mike. Not only as Mike himself and his sacrifice on a personal basis, and his family's sacrifice, but as a symbol for the sacrifice that I think personifies a lot of people in the military, and government, or whatever, in the agency.

And as I said before, the agency is full of kick-ass people. The paramilitary guys, line case officers, the logistics person, the driver. They're all selected, all patriots and with different skill sets, smart as hell. And I just remember, as I think Toby mentioned, after 9/11 there was a sense of unity and a sense of purpose that everybody in that building, everybody shared that and was trying to contribute to that victory, or our mission success. And it's a shame we don't feel that as much as a society anymore. That was very invigorating to see all these great people so ready and willing to do whatever. It was never like, "No. I don't think we can do that." It was, "Yeah, we can do that. We'll figure a way out to accomplish that."

That's what this whole process has done for me is sort of reinvigorated me to remember that, to think of Mike, and to think of him as a symbol for something greater. That we were moved to achieve, thanks to that sum, the greater sum of these small parts that we are.

**[02:03:27] AH:** What have you been thinking of late? I know that you're still a serving military officer. So I don't expect you to get into hot water. I don't want to get you in trouble.

**[02:03:37] JS:** I've been thinking a lot. No. So I think the first – So I did a pod. I guess it was a panel discussion a while ago, actually before Kabul collapsed and all that kind of stuff. The Ghani regime collapsed. I look back on it, and I talked about it before too even when I was in the war college a little bit about the '01 campaign. And, really, a couple things stand out. The power of small teams and the power of how important individuals can be. So you're kind of taught in the military that when you come in the army, you come in as a conventional guy. And so you see the army, the big army and all that. But what I realized in '01 is that sometimes less is more, right? And you can have a relatively small number of teams out there doing incredibly important work. They comprise individuals. In our case, eight individuals, and each one is doing, relatively speaking, tremendous work.

And then years later, I see the whole arc of the conflict in Afghanistan. And I was there at one point when I think we had a hundred over a hundred thousand troops there. And you don't feel like you're as impactful then. And you go, "Why?" I think it boils down to that, one, for variety of reasons, we've got it right. We got it right, because it's sort of like working with wood. You work with the grain of the wood. We worked with the Afghan society the way it's set up naturally. And we kind of work with the flow. And we enabled them, but it was their effort. We were enabling component.

But later, we were in the lead. And then we tried to create things that were in our image, multi-ethnic military, that doesn't always conform with the society. And so I think the lesson is you got to work with the way the society is set up. And we did that right in '01 and it worked well. So that's my view on it.

**[02:05:25] AH:** I think that's a good way to put it, the grain of the wood.

**[02:05:29] TH:** Yeah. Yeah. I mean, a couple of sort of thoughts for me. First of all, just briefly on what happened after David reached the northern end of the force and was sort of hold up with the German TV crew and various others in there for several hours. So there was a 15-man rescue team led by Major Mark Mitchell, who was on the battalion staff,

Green Beret. Justin mentioned earlier, 8 SBS, Special Boat Service British Special Forces there. One of those eight was actually a Navy SEAL who was on exchange. Those 15 headed towards the unknown, headed towards danger. Not knowing what they were going to find.

Glen, who's still a serving CIA officer, was a medic. He was the only CIA officer on that initial 15-man team. And they skirted around the fort. It was Steph Bass, who was the SEAL, sort of just it was getting dark, "Move forward," and was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions in identifying what was almost certainly the body of Mike Spann and firing rounds very close to the body to see if there's any flinching or any sort of physical reaction, which there wasn't. So there was then a friendly fire incident, which wounded SBS and killed some Afghans. There were AC-130 gunships came in and there was a sort of six-day battle and just an incredible story.

The second sort of thought is on the context of this, I mean, the stars on the wall at CIA headquarters, which I went to see for the first time recently. Mike's star is the 79th star. Mark Rausenberger who died in 2016, I believe he's the 121st star. And I think the latest count is 137 stars on that wall. Some of whom we don't know who the identity of the people that they sort of represent, or it's not publicly disclosed.

A disproportionate number of those stars have been for paramilitary officers from the special activity center, Ground Branch, Maritime Branch. And it's a very sort of heavy burden. I mean people, like Andy from the team and Scott Spellmeyer spent 20 years or almost at war doing a mission similar to this. I mean, Andy said to me that J.R. had told him after this like this is never going to happen again. And he was like it's happened every year since for him. So this goes on. And I went to an event in one World Trade Center, also known as The Freedom Tower, and Justin was there recently when there was the Third Option Foundation, which is a charity, which not only supports the families of fallen CIA paramilitary officers, but also helps sustain them during their service. That was a collection of incredible people, friends of Mike and serving CIA paramilitary officers, former case officers, a great collection of people. It was very poignant to be on the site of Ground Zero talking about Mike Spann and the CIA officers who've given so much since that day.

**[02:08:46] AH:** One of the thoughts that I had as well was do either of you think to yourself – Justin, you could have been one of the people at the fort that day. Or Dave, you could have been where Mike. And and Mike could have been where you was. Do you think to yourself there, but for the grace of God, go I?

**[02:09:04] JS:** I mean, I've thought about it lot. I think everybody on the team kind of thought about that. I mean, we were where we were when it happened. Yeah, because that morning, at like 7:30, I got a call to deliver a vehicle. And so we were – I think I was originally going with you guys. That was the plan. And then Mike said, "Hey, look, you need to deliver this vehicle to Pul-e Khumri." And so we peeled off to do that. And the last I saw, well, last saw Mike and for a while until later that day, Dave, was when you guys pulled out on the vehicle.

And I was completely ignorant of everything going on until later in the afternoon when I came back. And so, yeah. But I think everybody on the team feels like what could they have done more? What if I had been here in this role or that role? But that's kind of a fruitless kind of exercise, right? But I think everybody has thought about it that way. Certainly, I know Dave has. We've talked about this before. But anyway, that's my view of it.

**[02:10:04] DT:** I would agree that, initially, for me, and for the years that followed, I was thinking about things like that all the time or frequently enough. But that subsided to a degree. I stressed that our whole deployment was fraught with potential disasters, right? Every day was going out and doing something we had no knowledge of how it would end up.

And, again, that's not bravery or courage or and so forth. It's just that's what we do. That's what the agency. Does that's what peer pressure does and so forth. And I would stress that our officers do that. CIA officers do that on a daily basis all over the world. Not in the combat zones necessarily, or just in the combat or war zones. They do it everywhere they're doing things that are just kind of wow. Yeah, they didn't teach us that in the classroom. But that's what we do. We're pretty good at it, and every once in a while things don't go well. But I'm amazed at how many times they do go well in the situations we find ourselves in.

The second thing, as part of my psychological approach to this, is Mike is always with me. He's a shadow that's always peeking around the corner and always – I have little talks with him so to speak. And I'm curious about what he thinks after all these years. So I have to deal with that. And I try to make it a positive thing. And I think I told Toby especially that I think it's kind of corny to some people at least, but there's that thing at Saving Private Ryan where he goes to the site at the beginning. Gets all choked up and wonders if he's worth it, if he's worth the sacrifice made by his buddies. And I think about that too. And that that's a good motivation to try to do the right thing, to be a good person and a good professional and so forth.

So Mike serves his purpose with me, and I'll take that. Again, there're so many questions I used to ask myself and they're always there about what could have happened? What we should have done? What this and that? And that's kind of irrelevant now in the scheme of things. And it's trying to turn all this into a positive for me and to make Mike that very serious guy a positive in my life. And he's doing that for me. He's done that for many, many years and I'll do that for many more I hope.

**[02:12:37] AH:** I think it'd be interesting to know, when did team Alpha's mission come to an end like formally?

**[02:12:45] TH:** Well, very soon after the uprising was suppressed, really. I mean, David returned to Tashkent still clutching his Browning high-power and still in a state of great personal shock. Alex accompanied Mike's body back to the United States. He went to Ramstein first. And then George Tenet had been holding a meeting with President Musharraf of Pakistan in Islamabad. And he diverted it was the plane that was usually used as Air Force Two for Dick Cheney diverted to Ramstein. Mike's body was flown back to Andrews Air Force Base on board that jet with Alex accompanying him. So a member of the team accompanied him back home.

The rest of the team went back into dribs and drabs. And Justin, and David, and Scott, and Andy were all at Mike's funeral in early, I think, December the 7<sup>th</sup>. The team disbursed and everybody went about their lives and careers pretty soon afterwards.

Just one thing I wanted to say about courage that David mentioned. And I've thought about this a lot. And obviously I've talked to everybody associated with this a lot. David talks about acting on autopilot. Not really making decisions. But one of the things I view – One of the ways I view this is if you look at Mike's actions, he didn't turn and run. I mean, he turned and shot the enemy. And he fought and he died fighting. David didn't turn and run. He ran towards danger. He ran towards his comrade.

And in a sense, yes, these actions are sort of automatic. But I think they sort of speak to deeper character and a sort of a courage that's just part of the fiber of your being that you don't know. I mean, I've never been in a situation like this, but you don't know you have that stuff inside you until you're in a situation like this. And most of us will never know, thankfully. But I think there's a sort of a deep-seated courage about David's actions that day and Mike's actions, the actions of the people of the 15 who rushed towards the fort. So we shouldn't lose sight of that. I mean, military people often talk about, "I was just doing my job and it's what I was trained for." I think there's more to it than that.

**[02:15:11] AH:** I think one of the things that I also wanted to ask was just about coming up on the 20th anniversary of Mike dying. Collectively, is there something planned? Or will you go to Arlington? Or is there an event?

**[02:15:29] JS:** Yeah, we've talked about it. I mean, I think it makes sense. I think we just got a – J.R. and I had spoken about it. Now that I know who's retired, and some people are still obviously active. Getting everybody together might be impossible. But maybe we can get most of the guys together and most of the people live in kind of the greater Northern Virginia area. Well, I'm one of the exceptions. But I think we could do that. I think that'd be a good thing to do.

**[02:15:57] AH:** I think I've pretty much covered all the ground that I was hoping to cover. There was a part of me that was thinking when you were speaking there that if you're in Special Forces, I guess, it's par for the course. But there was a part of me that thought, David, did you ever think to yourself, "Goodness sake. Not that long ago I was a case

officer working the diplomatic circuit in Tashkent. And now I'm kind of involved in this. It's kind of quite the shift."

**[02:16:25] DT:** I'm a Central Asian specialist. So I spent a lot of years there as a student before the agency. I spent a lot of the years in Central Asia as an agency officer. So my experiences have run the gamut. I would say from being more like an academic sitting down with books and then being a CIA officer in combat situation in Afghanistan. But they're all very related, I would say. I don't see a whole lot of – I mean, obviously, there's a big shift between one and the other. But for me, it's been a continuum that I don't want to say was expected. But you go out there hoping to be involved in important stuff, adventurous stuff. And obviously this was my most dramatic event that I experienced. But there were plenty others in Central Asia that feed me, I can get in my car and just put on some music or whatever and think about all this stuff and come to tears at times. But also just wide smiles of the great people I've met and how it enriched my life to the point where I can just sit back and think of people, friends, bad guys and try to look on it philosophically from a distance. And, man, just say, "Wow! That's pretty great." From my upbringing all the way to the current time, it's been a great experience. And the agency has been a big part of that. But it's much more than that. It's my upbringing, my parents, and my family. And it's wonderful actually.

**[02:18:03] AH:** I wondered if you had any words of wisdom to close out. Tell us a little bit more about the book.

**[02:18:10] TH:** It's been a great privilege to be able to tell the story. And researching it and writing it has been sort of a journey in itself. I mean, I never knew how incredible this tale would be. And the sort of genesis of it was partly 9/11 and being in D.C. on that day. I vividly remember the news of Mike Spann being killed and Shannon Spann speaking at his funeral and writing about that from Washington at the time. The image, it was caught by German TV of David running across the northern compound having just experienced what we've talked about in this southern compound, clutching a rifle and a pistol and sort of running for his life and at the same time, I guess, not knowing whether he was going to be alive for very much longer.

And I remember thinking like, “What was going through – Who is that guy? What's going through his head?” I first met him eight years ago. Tracked him down. He was living very close to me in Vienna, Virginia, in the suburbs. And that was the sort of – Couldn't say very much then because he was still serving. Piecing it together, I mean, I think it's unique. But it's also sort of representative of what the CIA has done, what Special Forces had done, what the U.S. military and its allies had done. David's point about sort of the unity of the country, the focus. I mean, Bush had 90% approval rating 20 years ago. One member of congress voted against authorizing military force. NATO backed it. The United Nations backed it. We were very successful going with the grain of the wood as Justin described it. And so I think it's sort of a story about those sort of eight people and this particular mission. But also in the much broader context of the start of that 20-year war and what was achieved and that period in 9/11, after 9, 11 which was also obviously a pivotal historical moment.

**[02:20:06] AH:** And I think that really comes across in the book that this is a story and a powerful story, but it's emblematic of something else, something larger, something bigger. Thanks ever so much for your time. I've really enjoyed speaking to all of you. And I feel really privileged to have heard your stories. Thank you.

**[02:20:25] TH:** Sure, thank you. I mean, thanks for taking the time. And I think in a sort of world of sound bites and cable TV hits and everything, to talk about something in depth and let it sort of breathe is a great thing to do.

**[02:20:37] AH:** I think that that's exactly what I wanted to do. I don't want to like take shortcuts. I just wanted everything to unfold. And other than getting rid of some of my garbled questions, I'm just going to release it pretty much as two and a half hours or three hours or whatever so it can live out in the universe forever.

**[02:20:59] JS:** Thank you.

**[02:20:59] AH:** Thank you.

**[02:20:59] DT:** Thank you.

[END]