

extortion 17 operation red wings

Extortion 17 Operation Red Wings is a name that resonates deeply within military history, often bringing to mind the tragic loss of life and the immense bravery displayed by U.S. Navy SEALs and other Special Operations Forces. While Operation Red Wings is a distinct mission from the events of Extortion 17, the terms are sometimes conflated due to their shared context of devastating losses for elite U.S. military units in Afghanistan. This article will delve into the operational details, the sacrifices made, and the lasting impact of both these critical, yet tragically different, operations, ensuring a comprehensive understanding for those seeking information on these pivotal moments in modern warfare. We will explore the strategic objectives, the tactical execution, the individuals involved, and the profound lessons learned that continue to shape military doctrine and remembrance.

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Understanding the Distinction: Operation Red Wings vs. Extortion 17

It is crucial to clarify a common point of confusion: **Extortion 17** and **Operation Red Wings** are not synonymous. While both are etched into the memory of U.S. military operations in Afghanistan and represent profound losses of highly skilled personnel, they refer to distinct events. Operation Red Wings, which took place in June 2005, was a counter-insurgency mission involving a four-man SEAL reconnaissance team that came under heavy enemy fire. The harrowing events of this operation are famously chronicled in Marcus Luttrell's book and the subsequent film "Lone Survivor." In contrast, Extortion 17 refers to the downing of a U.S. Army Chinook helicopter in August 2011, resulting in the deaths of 38 individuals, including 22 Navy SEALs from SEAL Team Six, along with other Special Operations Forces personnel and Army aviators. Understanding this distinction is vital for appreciating the specific contexts, challenges, and sacrifices of each operation.

Operation Red Wings: The Mission and Its Tragic Outcome

Operation Red Wings was a critical component of the broader U.S. and coalition efforts in Afghanistan aimed at dismantling Taliban and al-Qaeda networks. The mission's primary objective was to disrupt insurgent activity in the Pech River Valley region of Kunar Province, an area known for its rugged terrain and significant Taliban presence. The intelligence gathered indicated that a high-profile Taliban leader, Ahmad Shah, was operating in the vicinity and was responsible for numerous attacks against coalition forces.

Background and Strategic Objectives of Operation Red Wings

The strategic goal of Operation Red Wings was to neutralize key insurgent leadership and degrade their operational capabilities in a strategically important, yet volatile, region of Afghanistan. Kunar Province was a difficult operational environment, characterized by steep mountains and dense forests, which provided natural cover and advantages to the insurgents. By targeting leaders like Ahmad Shah, U.S. forces aimed to disrupt supply lines, interdict attacks, and foster a more secure environment for the Afghan population and coalition efforts.

The SEALs on the Ground: Marcus Luttrell and the Lone Survivor

The four-man reconnaissance team comprised Navy SEALs Marcus Luttrell, Michael P. Murphy, Danny Dietz, and Matthew Axelson. Their mission was to locate and gather intelligence on Ahmad Shah and his network. They were inserted into a remote mountainous area, tasked with observation and

reporting. The team operated in challenging conditions, relying on their extensive training and specialized equipment to carry out their sensitive reconnaissance mission undetected.

The Ambush and the Valiant Fight

On June 28, 2005, the SEAL team's position was compromised. The exact method of compromise remains a subject of debate, but the result was a fierce and prolonged firefight. The SEALs were vastly outnumbered and pinned down by intense enemy fire. Despite being severely outgunned, they fought with extraordinary courage and resilience, inflicting heavy casualties on the attacking Taliban forces. The engagement quickly escalated from a reconnaissance mission to a desperate fight for survival against overwhelming odds.

The Rescue Effort and the Loss of Extortion 17

While the SEALs were engaged, a quick reaction force (QRF) was dispatched to support them. Tragically, the QRF, which included a U.S. Army Chinook helicopter designated as "Extortion 17" during this operation (though this callsign is more famously associated with the 2011 incident), was shot down by a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) as it attempted to reach the besieged SEAL team. The helicopter crash resulted in the loss of all 16 personnel on board: eight U.S. Army aircrew members and eight additional U.S. Special Operations Forces members, including members of SEAL Team 10 and the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR).

This devastating loss compounded the already dire situation for the SEAL team. Despite the overwhelming odds and the loss of their supporting aircraft, the SEALs continued to fight valiantly. Tragically, Matthew Axelson, Danny Dietz, and Michael P. Murphy were killed in action. Marcus Luttrell was the sole survivor of the SEAL team, enduring severe injuries and evading enemy forces for several days before being rescued by Afghan villagers who ultimately aided his return to friendly lines.

The Heroism of Warrant Officer Michael P. Murphy

Warrant Officer Michael P. Murphy displayed exceptional bravery and selflessness during the intense firefight. Realizing their communications were compromised and that his team was in dire peril, he exposed himself to enemy fire to reach a more open position in order to establish a satellite phone link to command. This act allowed him to call for support, but in doing so, he drew the attention of the enemy and was mortally wounded. For his extraordinary heroism and sacrifice, he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military honor.

Aftermath and Legacy of Operation Red Wings

Operation Red Wings was one of the deadliest single engagements for U.S. Navy SEALs since the Vietnam War. The mission resulted in the deaths of 19 American service members: the four SEALs from the reconnaissance team and the 15 U.S. service members killed in the helicopter crash. The

operation underscored the extreme dangers faced by Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan, the critical importance of effective communication and air support, and the unwavering courage displayed by American soldiers in the face of overwhelming adversity. The story of Operation Red Wings, particularly the survival of Marcus Luttrell, has served as a powerful testament to the human spirit and the sacrifices made in the War on Terror.

Extortion 17: The Taliban's Devastating Blow

While Operation Red Wings was a tragic event in 2005, the name "Extortion 17" is more commonly and prominently associated with a catastrophic helicopter shootdown that occurred nearly six years later, in August 2011. This incident represented one of the most significant single losses of life for U.S. forces during the entire War in Afghanistan and a devastating blow to the elite Special Operations community.

The Nature of Extortion 17: A Chinook Helicopter Downing

Extortion 17 was the callsign for a U.S. Army Boeing CH-47 Chinook helicopter. On August 6, 2011, during a mission to extract SEALs who had been engaged in a firefight with insurgents, Extortion 17 was shot down by a Taliban rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) near the village of Jawib in the Tangi Valley of Wardak Province, Afghanistan. The helicopter crashed, killing all 38 people on board.

The Elite Unit Aboard Extortion 17

The loss of Extortion 17 was particularly devastating due to the composition of the personnel aboard. Among the 38 killed were 22 U.S. Navy SEALs, many of whom were members of SEAL Team Six (DEVGRU), an elite unit renowned for its highly specialized counter-terrorism and direct action capabilities. The helicopter also carried:

- One U.S. Air Force combat controller
- Three additional U.S. Army aviators
- Seven Afghan National Army soldiers
- One Afghan interpreter
- One U.S. Air Force aircrew

The concentration of such highly trained and experienced special operations personnel in a single aircraft made this incident an unparalleled tragedy for the U.S. Special Operations Command.

The Mission and the Target of Extortion 17

The mission involving Extortion 17 was a complex operation aimed at responding to a situation where a SEAL team had engaged a Taliban leader. The Chinook helicopter was part of a larger operation to support ground forces and provide extraction capabilities. The Tangi Valley was a known stronghold for the Taliban and al-Qaeda, making it a high-risk operational area. The specific target of the larger operation was to disrupt insurgent activities and neutralize threats to coalition forces and the Afghan population.

The Attack and the Catastrophic Loss

As Extortion 17 approached its objective, it was targeted by enemy forces using an RPG. The missile struck the helicopter, causing catastrophic damage and leading to its immediate crash. The fierce engagement and the subsequent loss of the aircraft resulted in the deaths of all souls on board. The sheer scale of the loss sent shockwaves through the military and the nation, prompting a period of national mourning and a thorough review of the circumstances surrounding the incident.

Remembering the Fallen of Extortion 17

The memory of the 38 individuals lost on Extortion 17 is honored through various memorials, ceremonies, and the continued dedication of their comrades and families. The operation serves as a stark reminder of the high stakes involved in special operations missions and the immense courage displayed by those who serve. The names of the fallen are etched into the history of the War in Afghanistan, representing the ultimate sacrifice made in the line of duty.

Lessons Learned from Extortion 17

The downing of Extortion 17 prompted extensive reviews and analyses within the military. Key areas of focus included:

- Aircrew survivability and aircraft protection against RPGs and other threats.
- Intelligence gathering and dissemination regarding enemy tactics and capabilities in specific operational areas.
- Risk assessment for troop movements and the balancing of operational needs with potential threats.
- Coordination and communication between air and ground elements during complex operations.
- The importance of ongoing training and adaptation to evolving enemy tactics.

These lessons contributed to enhancements in aircraft defenses, tactical procedures, and overall operational planning to mitigate similar risks in the future.

Common Misconceptions and the Importance of Accuracy

The conflation of **Extortion 17** and **Operation Red Wings** stems from the shared context of significant U.S. Special Operations Forces casualties in Afghanistan. However, it is vital to maintain accuracy when discussing these events. Operation Red Wings, though it involved a Chinook helicopter call sign that was later used in the 2011 tragedy, primarily refers to the 2005 ambush and the incredible bravery of the SEAL reconnaissance team, including the posthumous Medal of Honor awarded to Michael P. Murphy. Extortion 17, on the other hand, specifically denotes the 2011 Chinook helicopter shootdown that claimed the lives of 38 service members, a large contingent of whom were from elite SEAL units. Understanding these distinct events allows for a more precise and respectful commemoration of the sacrifices made by different units in different circumstances.

The Enduring Spirit of Service and Sacrifice

Both Operation Red Wings and the incident involving the helicopter codenamed Extortion 17 in 2011 represent pivotal moments in the narrative of American military operations in Afghanistan. They highlight the extraordinary bravery, skill, and dedication of U.S. service members, particularly those in Special Operations. The sacrifices made on these and countless other missions underscore the profound commitment of individuals who volunteer for the most dangerous and challenging tasks. The enduring spirit of service, characterized by unwavering resolve in the face of extreme danger, continues to inspire and define the character of those who defend national interests abroad.

Frequently Asked Questions

What was Operation Red Wings?

Operation Red Wings was a counter-insurgency operation conducted by the United States military and its allies in the Kunar province of Afghanistan in June 2005.

What was the primary objective of Operation Red Wings?

The primary objective was to disrupt enemy activity and capture or kill Ahmad Shah, a high-ranking Taliban commander responsible for numerous attacks on coalition forces.

What U.S. Navy SEAL unit was involved in Operation Red

Wings?

The SEALs involved were from SEAL Delivery Vehicle Team 1 (SDVT-1), part of the Naval Special Warfare Command.

What significant setback did the SEAL team face during the operation?

The SEAL team was discovered by Afghan civilians, leading to a firefight with a larger Taliban force. During the engagement, their helicopter, carrying reinforcements, was shot down, resulting in the loss of all passengers and crew.

What is the significance of the movie 'Lone Survivor' in relation to Operation Red Wings?

'Lone Survivor' is a 2013 film based on the book of the same name by Marcus Luttrell, the sole survivor of the SEAL team, detailing the events of Operation Red Wings and its devastating outcome.

How many U.S. military personnel were killed during Operation Red Wings and the subsequent helicopter crash?

A total of 19 U.S. military personnel were killed: three SEALs and one Air Force pararescueman during the initial ground engagement, and 15 personnel (8 SEALs and 7 Army Night Stalkers from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment) in the downed helicopter.

What ethical dilemma did the SEALs face during the operation that became a focal point of discussion?

The SEALs encountered three Afghan civilians, including a young boy, who were not identified as combatants. The team faced the difficult decision of whether to kill them to avoid compromising their mission, a decision that ultimately led to their discovery.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to Operation Red Wings, all starting with "":

1. Lone Survivor: The Eyewitness Account of Operation Redwing and the Lost Heroes of SEAL Team 10
This memoir by Marcus Luttrell is the foundational account of the Operation Red Wings mission. It vividly details the harrowing events of June 28, 2005, from the initial reconnaissance to the brutal firefight that ensued. Luttrell recounts the bravery and sacrifice of his team members and his own survival against overwhelming odds. The book offers a deeply personal and unflinching look at the realities of modern warfare and the bonds of brotherhood.

2. American Sniper: The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History
While not solely focused on Operation Red Wings, Chris Kyle's autobiography provides essential context about the wider deployment and the mindset of special operations forces in Afghanistan. Kyle was a member of SEAL Team 3, which was deployed in the same general area and time frame as

Operation Red Wings. His experiences offer insights into the enemy, the operational environment, and the psychological toll of war. This book helps understand the broader conflict within which Red Wings occurred.

3. The Red Badge of Courage

Although a classic of American literature set during the Civil War, this novel's thematic relevance to Operation Red Wings lies in its exploration of courage, fear, and the crucible of battle. The protagonist's journey from raw recruit to hardened soldier mirrors the experiences of many who face intense combat. It delves into the psychological transformation that occurs under extreme duress and the definition of true bravery. The book's focus on a soldier's inner struggle against overwhelming odds resonates with the human element of the Red Wings story.

4. Against All Odds: The Story of the Battle of Mogadishu

This book details the "Black Hawk Down" incident, another intense special operations mission that faced severe challenges and heavy casualties. Like Operation Red Wings, the Battle of Mogadishu highlights the dangers of urban warfare, the importance of tactical support, and the immense bravery of soldiers in dire situations. It provides a comparative perspective on the risks inherent in such operations and the critical need for effective logistics and air support. The narrative underscores the high stakes involved in unconventional warfare scenarios.

5. Seal Team Six: Memoirs of an Elite Warrior

This book offers an inside look into the rigorous training, demanding operations, and the elite mindset of Navy SEALs, the same community from which the participants of Operation Red Wings hailed. It provides a broader understanding of the capabilities and dedication of these special operators. While it may not detail Red Wings directly, it illuminates the professional background and skill set required for such missions. The memoir offers a glimpse into the world these warriors inhabited.

6. The Art of War

Sun Tzu's ancient Chinese military treatise offers timeless strategies and philosophical insights applicable to any conflict, including those faced in Afghanistan. Its principles on deception, positioning, understanding the enemy, and leadership are fundamental to military planning and execution. While not directly about Operation Red Wings, it provides the strategic framework within which such operations are conceived and conducted. The book emphasizes the importance of intelligence and adapting to evolving battlefield conditions.

7. Generation Kill: Devil Dogs, Yeagerists, and 1st Recon Marines in Iraq

This book, like American Sniper, offers a gritty and realistic portrayal of modern warfare, focusing on the experiences of Marines in the early days of the Iraq War. It sheds light on the camaraderie, the challenges of combat, and the psychological impact of deployment. While the setting is Iraq, the themes of brotherhood, facing fear, and the complexities of counterinsurgency operations are highly relevant to understanding the environment and pressures faced by SEALs in Afghanistan. The narrative provides a broader context of the "War on Terror."

8. The Outlaw John Wesley Hardin: Paradoxical Hero of the Old West

This biography, while about a historical figure from a different era and context, explores themes of survival, loyalty, and the blurred lines between right and wrong in extreme circumstances. John Wesley Hardin operated in a lawless frontier, making life-or-death decisions under immense pressure. The book's exploration of a man navigating a dangerous world and his personal code of ethics can offer a different, yet relevant, perspective on the difficult choices faced by soldiers in conflict zones. It speaks to the enduring human drama of survival.

9. *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*

The remarkable true story of Louis Zamperini, an Olympic runner whose bomber crashed in the Pacific during World War II, and his subsequent survival as a prisoner of war. This book powerfully illustrates the human capacity for endurance, resilience in the face of unimaginable suffering, and the will to survive against all odds. The themes of hope, perseverance, and the mental fortitude required to overcome extreme adversity are deeply resonant with the sacrifices and struggles of those involved in Operation Red Wings. It highlights the strength of the human spirit.

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