

## ***OPERATION RED WINGS:***

### ***The Complete Untold Story of the Tragic U.S. Navy SEAL Mission***

Ed Darack

Book Sample: Note to Reader and Introduction

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#### **NOTE TO READER:**

Operation Red Wings is one of the most renowned and significant chapters in modern military history due to the tragedy that befell U.S. Navy SEAL and Army special operations personnel in its early hours. Red Wings is also one of the most widely misunderstood and misreported missions in history. This book provides definitive and comprehensive understanding of the Navy SEAL component of Operation Red Wings and addresses the myriad points of misinformation that emerged in its aftermath.

This book first provides a base of knowledge for the reader by examining relevant military history, relevant military theory, and relevant military practices. Over several years of explaining and discussing Operation Red Wings, I have found that creating such a foundation is critical to providing a comprehensive understanding of the Red Wings story. The book then examines SEAL planning and execution of Operation Red Wings using a multitude of information, including interviews and extracts of critical documents. I further provide detailed analysis of misinformation that emerged about key aspects of the mission. To optimize reader comprehension and understanding of Red Wings, I have included nine custom-created maps specific to the operation and dozens of images of the area in which it occurred. I shot these photographs just weeks after Red Wings in September and October of 2005 when I was embedded with U.S. Marines operating in the area. I include my own experiences and commentary in appropriate places, notably about the rigors of

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mountain warfare in eastern Afghanistan and Red Wings misinformation. Together, the components included in this book provide the most comprehensive, in-depth, accurate, and precise understanding of the SEAL aspect of Red Wings possible, inclusive of its overall relevancy in the Global War on Terrorism, its enduring legacy, and the ramifications of misinformation that has emerged about it.

I wrote this book for all those interested in building a high level of understanding of the genesis of Operation Red Wings and the factors that led to its demise, regardless of a reader's military experience or background. Although much of the book is highly technical, I have crafted it to be accessible to a wide audience while remaining deeply relevant to military practitioners. This book further provides a solid base of understanding of modern military functionality in general, with the study of Red Wings providing a broad range of real-world references.

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#### **INTRODUCTION:**

Late in the night of June 27, 2005, an MH-47D Chinook Special Operations Aircraft sped through the dark sky of eastern Afghanistan, bound for a mountain named Sawtalo Sar. Operated by members of the U.S. Army's 160<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) [160<sup>th</sup> SOAR(A)], the tandem-rotor helicopter carried a 4-man Navy SEAL special reconnaissance (SR) team tasked with the opening phase of Operation Red Wings. The mission, originally conceived by U.S. Marines as part of their ongoing campaign plan in the area, sought to disrupt regional enemy activity prior to Afghanistan's forthcoming National Parliamentary Election. A key component of the operation was the interdiction of a group led by a local enemy combatant named Ahmad Shah. Seeing the world around them through night vision goggles, the pilots brought the helicopter to a precision hover and the SEALs fastroped onto the mountain below. As the MH-47 slipped into the darkness, the team readied to maneuver to the first of a series of predetermined overwatch positions to surveil the area for Shah and his men.

Less than 24 hours later, 19 Americans lay dead on the upper slopes of Sawtalo Sar. Shah's group had ambushed the SR team—killing three of the four—and then downed a 160<sup>th</sup> SOAR(A) MH-47 sent to render assistance, claiming the lives of all sixteen onboard. The opening phase of Operation Red Wings resulted in the greatest single-mission loss of life in the war in Afghanistan and in modern U.S. special operations to that point in history.

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News of the tragedy spread quickly throughout the world, propelled by interest in American special operations and the sheer magnitude of the loss, which defied belief to many. After the initial frenzy of reporting, which included names of individuals who had died and that only one SEAL—from the special reconnaissance team—had survived, little information of substance emerged. No media personnel had been on the ground in the area, and none had been embedded with any of the units involved. Officials in Afghanistan and at the special operations units from which the deceased hailed offered virtually nothing following the disaster.

This void of in-depth reporting led to wild, fantasy-rich speculation about the mission, including the nonsensical propositions that Ahmad Shah had been apprised of the operation prior to its launch and that the SEALs had been tasked with hunting Osama bin Laden, the most wanted individual in the world at that time. Information about the origin and evolution of the operation, the background of Ahmad Shah, and other key aspects of Operation Red Wings remained cloaked to all but a few. The story of Red Wings proved an enigma: immensely famous but with almost all its critical details shrouded in mystery. People throughout the world craved to learn: *How could this happen? What went so terribly wrong?*

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My involvement with the story of Red Wings began before it was a formally named operation—before I or anyone else outside of a small number of military planners even knew about it. In March of 2005, I embedded for two weeks at the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center (MCMWTC, typically shortened to MWTC), located in the eastern Sierra Nevada mountains near the towns of Bridgeport and Coleville, California (the base is often referenced colloquially as “Bridgeport”). The facility, established in 1951 to prepare Marines deploying to the Korean War for cold weather conditions and mountainous terrain, today offers some of the most rigorous combat training in the U.S. military. Throughout the decades since its establishment, activity at the facility waxed and waned based on the outlook of the Marine Corps and greater national strategic policy. With the opening of the War in Afghanistan in 2001, the base became a critical preparatory venue for Marine Corps units as well as those of other services throughout the Department of Defense and foreign ally nations, both conventional and special operations forces.

I embedded at MWTC as an independent author / photographer. I planned, coordinated, and financed the project myself, and then distributed material I created from the embed to and through several media outlets, including the Smithsonian Institution’s *Air & Space / Smithsonian* magazine, Getty Images, Corbis Images, Gannett Newspapers, several specialty publications and specialty agencies, and others. While at the base, I accompanied Marines participating in the

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Winter Mountain Leader course (one of the most demanding training regimens in the Department of Defense), I photographed the MV-22B Osprey tiltrotor aircraft during the high-altitude phase of its operational evaluation, and I spent over a week in the field with members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment (2/3). The infantry battalion had traveled to MWTC from its base in Hawaii to conduct the final stages of training for its upcoming deployment to eastern Afghanistan, where it would RIP (relieve in place) its sister battalion, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Regiment (3/3).

While 2/3 trained at MWTC and at an adjunct facility in the Wassuk Range of western Nevada near the town of Hawthorne, 3/3 was developing a shell of an operation that in the following weeks would be named Stars, after the Dallas Stars hockey team. Stars was modeled after several successful operations that 3/3 had conducted throughout eastern Afghanistan, notably in the country's Kunar Province, in which Sawtalo Sar is located. As part of the RIP, 3/3's senior leadership provided their counterparts in 2/3 with continuous intelligence updates and details of the evolving concept of operation (CONOP) for Stars.

At the end of my two weeks at MWTC, I spoke with 2/3's executive officer (XO) and operations officer (OpsO), Major Robert R. "Rob" Scott and Major Thomas D. "Tom" Wood, respectively. Based on my time with Marines during their training, the two invited me to accompany the battalion for part of their deployment to

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Afghanistan. Both articulated an outlook that I would hear repeatedly in the ensuing years about covering the Marine Corps: They wanted their full story told, regardless of what that story included, be it good, bad, funny, sad, or embarrassing. They wanted their story told without exaggeration, omission, obfuscation, or fabrication. For them, my involvement was an opportunity to have their time in Afghanistan documented by an outside, independent voice. For me, it was a chance like none other—accompanying Marines during combat in the mountainous wilds of eastern Afghanistan. I accepted the offer, tentatively planning to travel to Afghanistan in September of 2005.

After visiting the Mountain Warfare Training Center, I visited the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC), located outside the city of Twentynine Palms in southern California’s Mojave Desert. There, I embedded with TTECG, the Tactical Training and Exercise Control Group, and learned—by watching live fire training at close range—how Marines conduct multi-domain, combined-arms assaults as a Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF, pronounced “mag-taff”), their organic warfighting construct. Unique to the service, the Marine Corps orchestrates, with highly detailed command, control, and communication (C3) protocols, the precision application of “fires”—mortars, howitzers, and Marine Corps aviation assets, both helicopter gunships and jets—around infantry maneuver elements. The experience, combined with my time at MWTC, provided

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an excellent introduction to how Marines operate, as well as a solid foundation of understanding of military operational concepts in general.

The first members of 2/3 began “RIPing out” with 3/3 in eastern Afghanistan in late May, with the main element of the battalion following in the subsequent weeks. 2/3 took the Stars model and continued developing it based on a regularly updated stream of intelligence. 2/3 also gave it a new name: Operation Red Wings, after the Detroit Red Wings hockey team. Like operations that 3/3 had conducted, the goal of Red Wings was to increase security in the region for the forthcoming National Parliamentary Election, scheduled for September 18, 2005. During the planning process, 2/3 sought helicopter support from the 160<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Aviation Regiment due to low lunar illumination conditions at the time the battalion planned to conduct the mission. To receive this support, however, the battalion needed to incorporate Navy SEALs into the opening phases of the operation due to the command and organizational structure in place in Afghanistan at the time. Despite their misgivings, notably of the convoluted command structure required for the incorporation of the SEALs, battalion leadership decided to proceed with Red Wings to maintain the consistent operational tempo that 3/3 had established in the area. The SEALs involved in Red Wings comprised members of SEAL Team 10 and other Naval Special Warfare and conventional Navy personnel.

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Operation Red Wings spiraled into monumental disaster within hours of the insert of the special reconnaissance team. The search and recovery effort, called Operation Red Wings II, lasted several more weeks. Ahmad Shah, emboldened in spirit and finances by the bloodshed that he and his men had inflicted and the massive amount of media attention it yielded, bolstered the strength of his small group. In August 2005, 2/3 unleashed Operation Whalers and crushed Shah's militia, forcing the insurgent leader to flee to Pakistan. The elections in Kunar proceeded with few incidents; the campaign initially established by 3/3 had culminated in U.S. and Coalition forces achieving their goal. Despite this success, the tragedy of Red Wings overshadowed these gains and would grow as its own phenomenon, enduring for decades due in great part to the many unanswered questions related to its evolution and execution.

I arrived in Afghanistan in late September 2005, a few days after the successful elections. The battalion based me out of Camp Blessing, located deep in the Pech River Valley just seven miles from the location of the Red Wings tragedy. In the weeks that followed, I accompanied Marines of 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, Company E (Echo-1), 2/3 on several combat operations, all in the vicinity of Sawtalo Sar. During my time there, Marines explained details of Red Wings to me as I studied and photographed the slopes of Sawtalo Sar from surrounding terrain, including the area of the ambush and helicopter shoot-down.

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Climbing and traversing the mountains of the Hindu Kush with the Marines, experiencing combat—including an ambush like the one unleashed against the 4-man special reconnaissance team—I learned the big picture and critical details of Operation Red Wings and Operation Whalers. I continued my research when I met with members of the battalion at their home base in Hawaii upon their return in early 2006. Because I had accompanied the battalion during combat (an opportunity only afforded due to my time at MWTC), many informational doors opened for me about Red Wings and Whalers. I interviewed, at great length and depth, all key Marine Corps personnel and many sources from other services intimately familiar with the missions to tell the story of Red Wings and Whalers in book form, an intensive process that would span years.

In November of 2006, the *Marine Corps Gazette* published “OPERATION RED WINGS: A Joint Failure in Unity of Command.” Authored by Lieutenant Colonel Andrew R. MacMannis (2/3’s battalion commander during Operation Red Wings) and Major Rob Scott (the battalion’s executive officer), the article was the first published work to provide substantive analysis of the operation. The article focuses on the anfractuous command structure established to accommodate SEALs integrated into Red Wings. It remains one of the most important works, in my opinion, ever published on Operation Red Wings.

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On June 7, 2007, seven months after the publication of the MacMannis / Scott article, the book *Lone Survivor: The Eyewitness Account of Operation Redwing and the Lost Heroes of SEAL Team 10* debuted in a national release. Written in its entirety by Irish military thriller novelist Patrick Robinson, the book provides a narrative about Marcus Luttrell during Red Wings, the only member of the 4-man special reconnaissance team who survived Shah's ambush. Robinson, according to an article he published about the book, based the *Lone Survivor* account on unrecorded interviews of Luttrell. Luttrell was given authorship credit, a common practice for military memoirs written with (or in the case of *Lone Survivor*, entirely by) an outside author.

Marines intimately familiar with Operation Red Wings expressed to me that *Lone Survivor* was filled with stunning errors (beginning with the title, calling the mission "Operation Redwing"), wildly nonsensical fabrications, and inexcusable omissions. Many others, notably those familiar with military operations but with no direct visibility on the background of Red Wings, expressed disbelief at several of the book's claims, many of which can best be described as cartoonishly unrealistic and juvenile.

On April 7, 2009, Penguin Publishing released my book *Victory Point*, chronicling Operation Red Wings and Operation Whalers. The book details the development of Operation Red Wings, the ramifications of the mission's disastrous outcomes

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(notably the bolstering of the strength of Shah’s militia), and the planning and successful execution of Operation Whalers. I relied on several types of sources to write the book, notably interviews with those involved with the planning and execution of Red Wings and Whalers, after-action reports, other documentation, and geospatial products. I spoke with members of conventional aviation units involved in Red Wings and Whalers, and I also communicated with a member of the 160<sup>th</sup> involved in Red Wings. Although I tried to contact Marcus Luttrell and others in Naval Special Warfare Command several times in the fall of 2005 (both directly and through military intermediaries) for background on certain specifics of the SEAL portion of Red Wings, Naval Special Warfare Public Affairs denied access.

To explain the SEAL portion of Red Wings in *Victory Point*, I relied on interviews of Marines who had worked with SEAL planners, interviews of Marines who were present in a combat operations center receiving communications from the 4-man SEAL special reconnaissance team, information from various joint after-action reports, geospatial products, and two videos of the ambush made by Ahmad Shah’s men. The videos proved extremely valuable as they showed key information, including force size, locations of the SEALs (that could be georeferenced based on key terrain features), how Shah’s men maneuvered and operated, timing, and equipment captured from the SEALs. Marine Corps weapons and tactics experts, mountain warfare experts, and personnel intimately familiar with operating on and

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around Sawtalo Sar carefully analyzed every second of each video, yielding a trove of knowledge of the SEAL portion of Red Wings.

Just under one year after the publication of *Victory Point*, I received a communication from a survivor of one of the deceased SEALs of Operation Red Wings (a member of SEAL Team 10 who was on the downed helicopter). The survivor, a mother, wanted to know the background story of the SEAL's side of the operation to learn the specifics of what led to her son's death. She was dissatisfied with answers Naval Special Warfare had given her and furious at what she felt was a fictionalized version of the story presented in *Lone Survivor*. Furthermore, she explained that several SEALs familiar with Red Wings told her that *Victory Point* provided an accurate depiction of events leading up to, during, and after the ambush. I responded that I included all material that I had about the SEAL portion of Operation Red Wings in *Victory Point*, and that I could provide no further information, notably about the planning of the SEAL component of the operation. A few months later, I received a communication from another survivor of a fallen SEAL of Red Wings (also a member of SEAL Team 10 who had died on the helicopter) asking similar questions and stating similar misgivings.

Other works about Operation Red Wings followed *Victory Point*, some of which included outrageous claims and falsehoods. This led me to create a page on the *Victory Point* promotional website devoted to the most egregious instances of

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errors, omissions, and fabrications: “[Operation Red Wings Misinformation](#),” which I published in August of 2010. The positive responses and popularity of the web page led me to write an article on the topic for the *Marine Corps Gazette*, “[OPERATION RED WINGS – The \(Mis\)Information Aftermath](#).” Published in the Gazette’s January 2011 issue, the editors changed the name to “OPERATION RED WINGS – What Really Happened?” Several [national media outlets](#) posted and discussed the highlights of the article in the months and years that followed.

Within a year of the publication of my *Marine Corps Gazette* article, I was contacted by a survivor of one of the members of the 4-man special reconnaissance team. Like the previous survivors, this person reached out to me to learn the complete background of SEAL planning decisions and actions that led to the disaster. Also like the others, this person expressed strong misgivings about previous media accounts and the accuracy of the answers and narratives provided to them by Naval Special Warfare Public Affairs.

In December 2013, the movie *Lone Survivor*, adapted from the book *Lone Survivor*, debuted. This led to heightened interest in *Victory Point* and my article “OPERATION RED WINGS – What Really Happened?” Several media outlets featured the book and article, corroborating its key points with their own military experts. Soon after, the survivor of the fallen member of the 4-man special reconnaissance team contacted me again, expressing interest to discuss the matter

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further. This person also stated that a member of Naval Special Warfare had asked them not to contact me about matters related to Operation Red Wings. Later, a second survivor of the fallen member of the special reconnaissance team contacted me. This person, like the others, expressed extreme dissatisfaction with several versions of the story, including that of *Lone Survivor*. This person also claimed that members of Naval Special Warfare had provided guidance not to discuss Operation Red Wings with me. I have never been able to corroborate either claim that members of Naval Special Warfare instructed either of these survivors (or others) not to communicate with me about Operation Red Wings. I would eventually meet with both survivors in person and be provided with several contacts and several informational resources related to the SEAL component of Operation Red Wings.

During this time, I began communicating with a key member of the 160<sup>th</sup> involved in Red Wings, Matt Brady, who held the rank of captain during the deployment and was an MH-47 OIC (Officer In Charge). Matt provided me with information on the 160<sup>th</sup>'s roles in the operation (above which I had learned in my research writing *Victory Point*) and insight into special operations aviation in general. The role of the 160<sup>th</sup> in Red Wings, and as critical support for special operations in general, is often overlooked and little understood. Matt's extensive knowledge provided an important foundation into the aviation component of the operation; he would become an invaluable resource in further work.

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In the years following the publication of *Victory Point* and the *Marine Corps Gazette* article on Red Wings misinformation, several media outlets approached me, asking me to assist with projects about the mission. These projects included a television special for the History Channel and a [Newsweek feature article about Mohammad Gulab](#), the Afghan who assisted Marcus Luttrell after the Red Wings ambush. The author of the *Newsweek* article, Ross Schneiderman, is an exceptional journalist; working with him, I found him to be extremely thorough. I asked him to work with me on an article about one of the fallen members of the 4-man SEAL special reconnaissance team based on information and contacts provided to me. Ross agreed, and he queried the *New York Times*, which contracted us to write a long feature article on the topic. During the research process, both Ross and I leveraged several pieces of information to shed more light on the development of the SEAL component of Red Wings. Based on my work on the History Channel, I established contact with an individual who had been a senior officer in SEAL Team 10 during Red Wings. He would eventually provide me with a large amount of information, much of which would prove critical to understanding the full story of Red Wings.

The research work for the *New York Times* article yielded important professional and personal insight on the individual member of the special reconnaissance team. It also bolstered information about the SEAL component of Red Wings that I had already published in *Victory Point*. However, while I felt that we could write an in-

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depth article about the 4-man team member, more information was needed to adequately answer important questions about the SEAL component of the Red Wings tragedy that remained unaddressed. Ultimately, internal changes at the *New York Times* led to the cancellation of the article. At that time, I felt that my work on Operation Red Wings could progress no further—that it was as complete as it could possibly be.

It wasn't. I've never felt comfortable leaving important aspects of Operation Red Wings cloaked in mystery—especially when I felt that I had been so close to unveiling them. But final pieces of critical information had eluded me for years, and I had exhausted all avenues of finding a source (or sources) that could provide them. Then a source found me—based on the work I had already published. In 2023, the hosts of “The Team House” podcast asked me to appear on one of their episodes to discuss Operation Red Wings and Extortion 17, the latter a story about which I have published extensively, including the book *The Final Mission of Extortion 17*, released in 2017 by Smithsonian Books. While the talk covered both topics, I spent most of the time discussing Red Wings. A few weeks after the release of the podcast, I received an unexpected email that would help tell the complete story of the SEAL portion of Red Wings. More importantly, it reinvigorated my interest in telling the comprehensive story of the SEAL portion of Red Wings, inclusive of building a foundation of relevant military history, relevant military theory, and relevant military practices for the reader.

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The email was sent by Frank Harrar, a retired Special Forces colonel who had begun his military career as an infantry officer in the Marine Corps. During the planning of Red Wings, Frank, a major at the time, was the Joint Operations Center (JOC) Chief at the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A). The position gave him comprehensive visibility of the planning of special operations missions, including those of the SEALs involved with Red Wings. After some communications between us, Frank agreed to assist me—he wanted the story of the SEAL component of Red Wings told definitively to help ensure that the mistakes that led to the terrible outcome are never repeated. Information that he provided, through several extensive interviews, helped me to weave together the troves of knowledge that I had gathered over the previous years about the SEAL portion of Red Wings and craft a comprehensive, in-depth narrative.

In the summer of 2024, as I was working on the first draft of this book, Ross Schneiderman contacted me about his continuing work on Red Wings. He had made significant headway with uncovering key pieces of information through several Navy SEAL sources with whom he had maintained contact. He asked me to join his efforts in an in-depth article for *Politico* magazine. I agreed, as this book is technical, historical, and analysis-driven in nature. The [Politico article](#) is a non-technical, human-interest work focused on the outlook of Navy SEALs connected

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to the operation; it is oriented toward a broad audience that includes readers who may not traditionally be attracted to military topics. Ross very graciously agreed to allow me to use some information that he had sourced from the SEALs for this book project. The two of us proceeded to work on the *Politico* article as co-authors. *Politico* released the article on March 20, 2026.

I used material from several sources to write this book, including interviews of key special operations personnel (notably SEALs, including information sourced from Ross Schneiderman), reports, and background material I used for *Victory Point*, among other information. While this book is a standalone work, it also serves a complement to *Victory Point* (I would have included all information found in this book in *Victory Point* if I had had access to it during my initial research in 2005 to 2008). I strongly suggest reading *Victory Point* as it provides context of the greater campaign plan undertaken in eastern Afghanistan in 2005 of which Red Wings was designed to serve as a component. *Victory Point* includes important details pertaining to the Marine Corps development of the operation, the intelligence picture of Ahmad Shah, and history of the region in which Red Wings took place. Most importantly, *Victory Point* chronicles the ultimate victory over Ahmad Shah during Operation Whalers. While I have included some information originally published in *Victory Point* in this book, I have minimized overlap—so I strongly recommend reading *Victory Point*.

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This book provides comprehensive, detailed information for the reader to gain a high-level understanding of the Navy SEAL component of Operation Red Wings. I provide a foundation of military history, military theory, and military practices, all tailored for maximum relevancy to Red Wings. I then provide in-depth analysis of the Navy SEAL portion of the mission based on a constellation of information, including interviews and extracts from key documents. I've found that providing a base of relevant military knowledge for Red Wings gives the reader the ability to maximize comprehension of the story. While much of the content in this book is technical, I've written it to be accessible and engaging to a general audience while remaining useful to military practitioners. I further address the relevance of Operation Red Wings in the War in Afghanistan and the greater Global War on Terrorism and use the mission to give the reader lucid insight to understanding modern military operations in general. I also address all key points of misinformation about Operation Red Wings that emerged in the wake of the mission and discuss their root causes and ramifications. I have included nine maps, each custom tailored to the mission, to provide a graphical element to complement the text's description. The book also includes dozens of photographs I shot in the area in which Red Wings took place just weeks after the operation while I was embedded with Marines in the area in September and October of 2005 to provide an appreciation for the environment. I weave my own experiences of observing mountain warfare in eastern Afghanistan and some commentary about

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misinformation into the narrative where appropriate for context and descriptive purposes.

This book does not delve into personalities, interpersonal relationships, friction between people, or extra-military backgrounds of those involved in the story. The narrative provides a relevant base of understanding of military operations and focuses on the historical background, decision making, planning, organizing, training, equipping, and actions from an objective, technical perspective to provide readers with a clear understanding of the various military factors that led to the Red Wings tragedy.

I wrote this book for anyone interested in Operation Red Wings or modern military campaigns in general, from those with no previous exposure to military topics to those with decades of warfighting experience. Several professional military curriculums, including those of Naval Special Warfare, use Operation Red Wings as an example of the detriments that can befall military operational efficacy. I have given professional military education (PME) talks several times over the years on Red Wings to select military personnel at Marine Corps installations and continue to publish technical articles on the topic; although more than 20 years have passed since the Red Wings tragedy, the story remains eminently relevant in military science and it is an incredibly important story to which all should have access, unencumbered by misinformation.

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Author (right, with camera) during a combat operation in the Hindu Kush mountains of eastern Afghanistan conducting field work on Operation Red Wings. This photograph was taken approximately 3 miles from Sawtalo Sar, in September of 2005, just weeks after Operation Red Wings. Afghan fighter was a member of the Afghan Security Forces (ASF), co-located with Marines of Echo-1 at Camp Blessing. Photograph by Pat Kinser, platoon commander of Echo-1.