

JOERG H. TRAUBOTH

**THREE
BROTHERS**

Translated by Leanne Cvetan

THREE GERMAN ELITE SOLDIERS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST ISIS

NOTHING WILL BE THE SAME AGAIN

THRILLER

Joerg H. Trauboth

Three Brothers

Translated from the German by Leanne Cvetan

ratiobooks

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For Martina

I WILL!

This thriller is a work of fiction and takes place against the backdrop of the current terrorist activity and threat of danger in Europe and the rest of the world. All characters and references to any persons, places, and events are products of the author's imagination as long as they do not refer to any actual persons, living or dead, real places, or actual events.

Any similarity of the characters to any real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental, as is any similarity regarding the plot to any actual events.

There is a register of characters at the end of this book as well as a glossary of important terms.

*In the end, we only regret the chances
we didn't take.*

Marcus Aurelius,
Roman Emperor and
Philosopher (161 – 181 A.D.)

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Three Elite Soldiers

Chapter 1

Afghanistan

For the last five hours, a group of six men have been trudging through the dark, barren landscape of the vast Hindu Kush Mountains. The distant howling of a lone wolf accompanies them as does the cold wind, but the men don't seem to feel the sting.

One of them stops abruptly. Marc Anderson, captain of the German KSK Special Forces Commando, raises his hand to his neck and decisively whispers into his throat mic.

"George, I see her. The nose of the aircraft is at eleven o'clock, the tail at two."

George, the short, wiry Navy Seal One squad leader from Ohio, folds down the night vision lens mounted on his helmet.

For whatever reason, the fighter jet did not explode, but the debris is still smoldering.

"Copy that, I'll inform Bagram Air Base."

"Charlie Force from Echo Force – over."

"Echo Team – go ahead – over."

"We found the jet – now searching for the crew – over."

"Roger Echo Team – we're waiting for your response – over."

As unorthodox as it is, the Navy Seals insisted on having German elite soldier Marc Anderson with them on the mission. He is one of the few soldiers who knows the area, located deep in the hinterlands of Afghanistan, better than anyone else on account of a number of earlier missions in the region. At only 27 years old, the tall, slender soldier from the southern German town of Calw has already achieved legendary status among the American and British Special Forces. Together with the Navy Seals, he has succeeded in rescuing and retrieving American soldiers from behind enemy lines, securing himself a formidable reputation as both a leader and a team player.

But Anderson refused to do the job on his own: “Only if I can take my commando brothers with me,” he told the commanders at Bagram Air Base. “Only with Thomas and Tim.”

“OK, Marc, agreed.”

The Seals know full well what “Band of Brothers” means. Elite soldiers throughout all the Special Armed Forces are not just comrades, they are brothers. On this mission – the search for a U.S. fighter jet gone missing along with its crew – the Seals have three German brothers. Nationalities play no role, however, only professionalism and unconditional trust. Marc also agreed to the mission since he and George have worked well together on previous missions.

Echo Force, made up of U.S. Seals One, Two, Three, and the German KSK soldiers Marc, Thomas, and Tim, had parachuted in during night. They chose a landing site six and a half miles from the F-15E Strike Eagle’s last known position in the hope of not being discovered by the Taliban. There were no exact coordinates of the crash site. What’s worse, they weren’t able to receive any location transmission from the crew. The pilot had only managed to transmit “No engine – Mayday – Mayday – Bailing out!” at the last minute as they lost altitude. A hasty final message, nothing more. Everything had apparently happened very quickly. The crew must have needed to abandon the aircraft immediately, there would have been no time for discussion. After a successful landing, they spent the next five hours systematically scouring the possible search site of twelve square miles at almost ten thousand feet altitude.

Marc was a true pathfinder in this unwieldy and perilous terrain. The Americans trusted him whole-heartedly, and with good reason, as he proved once again. He immediately found the wreckage of the F-15 in the pitch-dark of night, and undetected in hostile territory. They operated meticulously together, as though they had done this a million times before: Marc out in front, checking the terrain, giving

signals, the other five men following, step for step, crouched down, secure, silent. The stillness of the dark magnifies every word and any misstep on the gravel is a potential giveaway for the Taliban.

While George now relays the coordinates to the American intervention force standing by, Marc scans the crash site with his telescope. The F-15 was not shot down, but rather crashed due to technical problems. That seemed clear. However, the crash would have been heard all throughout the Hindu Kush Mountains. It was very possible that the Taliban has already taken the crew captive and were now waiting for the Navy Seals. That's how it typically happened at least.

"Thomas, please report."

"Left is clear."

"Tim?"

"Right is clear."

Slowly, and securing all sides, the spotter team moves toward the crash site.

"I'll take it from here, Marc."

"Okay, George, you're in command."

George leads the troop within 300 yards of the wreckage. The aircraft's nose and cockpit are stuck in the ground like a giant arrow. Bent, but incredibly, still intact.

And exactly right there where there's that tiny patch of earth, he thinks to himself.

"Can you see anyone in the cockpit?" asks Marc.

"Negative, can't see anything through the glass, but the canopy is missing."

"Thomas and Tim – the two of you to the wreckage and report back. The rest of you wait here," whispers George into his throat mic.

The two Germans start to move. Just like the old comedians Ole and Axel, or like Laurel and Hardy, Marc thinks. Thomas, a tall, strapping blonde, built like the Hulk. Next to him, Tim, also in excellent physical

shape, only considerably shorter and, with his signature black goatee, looks like an Afghan.

They cautiously approach the front section of the wreckage on both sides. The rest of the group tensely watches every move their two German brothers make. It is absolutely silent, save for that wolf. The cold wind that tirelessly blows in this region goes completely unnoticed as they all lie on the ground and watch. The night is not just dark, it is black. Pitch-black. No stars shine, no light reflects off the ground. Barren cliffs, a few shrubs, no trees at this altitude. They see only whatever appears in their night vision devices. The little bit of light available is electronically magnified as a green image of the area. They are used to this artificial picture.

“Option one:” says George, “they are still strapped to the seats and then it’ll be a mess. Option two: one of them is still there and the other managed to get out. Or option three: they both made it out.”

“The only question is, why they aren’t answering,” Marc whispers in George’s direction. George whispers back, “which means option one.”

Thomas and Tim reach the nose.

“Thomas on Seal One: no one in the cockpit, ejector seats missing, the crew ejected.”

“Understood, good news, do you see their papers?”

They shine a light inside.

From the distance, the three Navy Seals and Marc are blinded as the light from the two KSK soldiers spark in their goggles like bright flashes of lightning.

“Maps and a kneeboard,” reports Tim.

“Okay, take that with you. Thomas, you prepare an explosive.”

First Sergeant Thomas Heinrich, a six-foot tall ball of muscle and the explosives expert takes off his 80-pound knapsack which otherwise seems to have grown attached to his back. His comrades have only

ever seen him with either a heavy bag or on a bench press. And always with a combat knife under his pillow.

While he lays the explosive, his shorter friend Tim secures the immediate surroundings of the jet. Neither of them speaks a word to the other. They don't need to. They know each other better than any old married couple. That's also the reason George sent them to the wreckage site.

In less than four minutes, Thomas prepares the cockpit with explosives for remote ignition.

"Finished, George."

"OK men, now slowly retreat."

A few minutes later, the group is complete again. Six men, two nations, one team.

They hide between some boulders and use their night vision devices to establish any other possible reference points. Cliffs, ridges, gaps. Where could the parachutes be? And the ejector seats? At least the seats are big enough to spot, if they are here.

George waves to Marc to come over.

"What do you suggest?"

"According to the radar, the F-15 was flying on an easterly course. That means we need to look for the men to the west. The weapons systems operator shot himself out first, so we should be able to find him to the west of the wreckage, but the pilot should be here closer to it."

George nods in agreement. The person in the rear always activates his seat first, otherwise he runs the risk of getting hit by the seat of man before him.

Marc refers to the digital map with a scale of 1:50,000. Mountains, rivers, nothing else. To these westerners, the unforgiving, cold Hindu Kush Mountain range is a barren and alien landscape.

"I think we should go this way"

"Okay, boy scout, you take over."

“Affirmative.”

These standard procedures are the pre-requisites of a functioning team. One man takes the lead and the others confirm. It is the case in the cockpit and is no different in Team Echo Force, currently led by Marc Anderson.

He speaks softly to the group.

“Seals One, Two, and Three, you take the left side. Thomas, Tim, and I will take the right. I will be in the middle. Keep a distance of no more than 30 meters between you. Everyone has contact with his neighbor.”

They disperse.

“In position,” each of them confirms one after the other. They now stand in a line of approximately 160 yards across. Each one by himself. But they can each see the soldier on either side of them, their brother in times of crisis.

Marc looks at his compass, 270 degrees. They start to move.

After thirty minutes they reach a long, narrow ridge.

“Down,” Marc radios quietly to the others. They lay flat on the ground. Marc slowly pushes himself against a bare cliff. He lifts his head, weighed down by a heavy helmet, ever so slightly to get an overview. In front of him is an open area with large, round boulders and steep cliffs, interspersed with deep cracks that he can barely make out in the almost non-existent light of night. The white glow he sees above it through his night vision device is the snow at twenty thousand feet.

Marc laboriously searches the area. Nothing. No ejector seat, no parachute. Only this sea of rocks and sparse vegetation. A wretched green world of artificial reality through the lenses of his night vision device.

“We can’t take the straight path, gentlemen. There is a rift two hundred meters in. The end of the road.”

The group continues westward, securing the way as they go.

George suddenly stops.

“Do you hear that, Marc?”

Their radios give off a faint screeching that intensifies and then fades again.

“The distress signal, George! Gentlemen, we have contact!”

The troop knows that this is the signal pilots activate upon ejecting and is only transmitted for a few minutes per hour.

“Five minutes past each full hour, that’s right, just as discussed. That’s our man, George!”

“What’s the bearing, Marc?”

“Eleven o’clock. The source is pretty damn quiet. He must be lightyears away.”

The men of Echo Force can feel their pulse quickening. They’ve made contact with one of the pilots! They keep formation and continue their search. They still do not have the location coordinates. Suddenly, they are forced to stop. A dark and terrifying 25 feet wide abyss stretches out before them, like a hungry mouth.

The tone of the distress signal abruptly increases its shrill intensity from one second to the next.

Startled, George turns down the volume.

“He must be right here.”

“Tim to Marc, I see a parachute in the opening, about 20 meters down.”

“Everyone, round up – go to Tim,” Marc whispers into his mic.

“George, you take over!”

“Affirmative!”

They crawl over to him, very close to edge of the rift, and shine a light down. They can see something that doesn’t belong there. The remnants of a parachute hanging from the ledges of two cliffs. The laser device measures 23 meters.

There is something else. George gasps when he recognizes it in the green light. Not that someone was hanging lifelessly from the shreds

of the parachute, but the never-ending depth that continued below. George knows at once it will be a challenge getting that poor chap out of there without him falling completely into the abyss.

But is he okay?

He shines his light at the figure.

“Are you okay down there?”

“Are you Americans?” answers a weak voice from the depths.

George beams. He’s alive!

“Yes, my friend, we will fly down from Heaven and get you out of there.”

“It’s about damn time! I’m freezing my ass off here!”

He seems to be all right, George thinks and calls into the cavern:

“Did you have to pick this one to fall into?”

“I love rifts, but even this is a bit too big for me!”

George proudly looks over to Marc.

“That is one cool dude hanging there. Talks like a real Texan. Let’s get him out!”

George looks at his team. He would likely need two soldiers down there. One to secure against any further falling and the other for the recovery. Navy Seal One knows that Tim and Thomas have the most experience in these kinds of rappelling situations, thus, the German friends are called to take over once again.

“Tim and Thomas, start the descent.”

A few moments later, the inseparable team descend into the darkness of the rift. The Navy Seals secure them from above. Marc and George direct light into the chasm to allow the two as much orientation as possible. But the light is quickly lost in the dark. They need to be careful not to touch the parachute or the straps. Still, the descent lasts less than sixty seconds.

“We have him,” radios Tim.

The Texan is hanging freely. Completely unhindered. There is nothing there he could have grabbed onto to slow down his fall. One false

move and the shreds of his parachute would flutter behind him as he fell to his death at the bottom of this seemingly bottomless pit.

He had cautiously reached for his flashlight with a haunting suspicion. A sharp pain in his upper right arm. What was wrong? He touched his shoulder with his right hand.

Intense pain.

Fear.

No false moves!

It took him a while until he finally had hold of his flashlight. What he saw underneath terrified him. He saw nothing.

The beam of light did not allow him to even faintly guess at the depth of the emptiness below. It was like the secret entrance to Nirvana. Was it 50 meters, 1000 meters? He would try banging against the wall a few times and then... Oh, my God...

He shined the light upward. The parachute seemed to be caught pretty good between two sections of rock. He had only gradually been able to convince himself that he can trust the anchoring above him. He talked to his parachute, gently warning it with loving words to hold strong. Something clipped his head a number of times.

Bats?

Doesn't matter, don't move!

This damn pain. The cold.

His torso felt like it was dying off under the tension of the straps. Would his rescuers even hear his distress signal?

As he looked up through the narrow window-like opening to the sky and saw a few stars, he started to find hope. They had practiced a rescue mission behind enemy lines a number of times. He knew that the CSAR team must be on their way. And here they are! Thank God! They were able to locate him in this godforsaken rift.

“Nice to meet you!” Tim calls to him and grabs his straps to latch him on to his own. But the Texan can only stare at Tim, whose fuzzy, black goatee sprouts out over the chin strap of his helmet.

“You are not an American, you’re a Taliban!”

Tim laughs.

“No, I am your friend Tim from the German Mountain Rescue Team!”

The American looked dubiously at Tim’s face.

Then Thomas joins in. “And I am Thomas, old friend! You can call me Tom, but just for today. Nice place you got here.”

“I’m going to free you now from the parachute,” says the suspected Taliban, “and then I’ll hook you to the elevator going up. Hold on to me. Are you ready?”

The American nods.

He jolts downward and lets out a scream so loud it must have woken up all of Hindu Kush.

“Fuck, something’s wrong with my shoulder, watch out.”

The burly Texan clings to Tim’s slender frame, his face scrunched up in pain.

“Thomas on George, dislocated or broken right shoulder. No blood.”

Tim grabs him by the hips and uses his feet and back to repel off the walls of the cavern.

“Let’s go, Cowboy! Bringing you up to mama!”

The three arrive at the top only a few moments later. As Echo Force secures the area behind them, George and Marc welcome the rescued man.

“I’m George, Navy Seals. You are among friends. Are you the pilot or the weapon systems operator?”

“Les Miller, WSO. Have you found my pilot Buddy already?”

“Negative. How much time was there between you each ejecting?”

“Two seconds at the most.”

George thought for a moment. Buddy was not at the wreckage, at least not in a direct line with Les.

“Then Buddy must be here in the vicinity. We need to search again.”

“Charlie Force from Echo Force. We have Les.”

“Copy, Echo Force – we are standing by.”

“Can you run, Les?”

“How fast do you think you could run after having your sack crushed for the past 7 hours?” He casts an eye at Tim: “Watch your Taliban there, I don’t trust him!”

He then pulls a clump of something out of his pocket and gives it to his new friend from the German Mountain Rescue Team.

“What is it?”

“Chocolate, Taliban!”

“How’s your shoulder, Les? Do you think you need a shot?”

“Depends on what you plan to do with me. I certainly can’t crawl on the ground.”

Buddy McAllen is not far away. In fact, they almost trip over his ejector seat. The wind fills his parachute, causing it to pull away from the long, slender body of the American pilot and then deflate again. Buddy is shaking. The right side of his head along with his short blond hair is covered in blood. George sees a large dark stain on Buddy’s olive-green flight suit just above his right hip and, underneath him, a rather large pool of dried blood on the ground.

“That doesn’t look good,” George signals to Marc, “he must have hit against the sharp rock in the dark.”

“Buddy, can you hear me?” George jiggles him. Thomas takes a water bottle out of his knapsack and carefully pours a fine trickle of water over his neck. The American does not move. Marc smacks him gently on the cheek and tries talking to him.

“Buddy, we are your friends, can you hear me, you are almost home. I will just take a look at that leg.”

“Charlie Force from Echo Team. We have Buddy – need a medic – pronto!”

George reads off the coordinates from his mobile GPS and waits for confirmation.

“It’s our lucky day, boys! We have both men, secure radio communication, and Charlie Force will be here in fifteen minutes.”

He looks at Buddy, who is badly hurt, then adds: “But we’ve got a real bad situation here.”

The troop is highly-visible from the front. There is no natural protection. Behind them is a hill with an unobstructed view of them from above. Buddy is sitting out in the open, propped up against a large rock as though he were a Thanksgiving turkey. It’s a miracle he hasn’t been discovered already.

The rest of the squad lays flat on the ground while Thomas attends to Buddy’s wounds. He inspects the deep wound on Buddy’s thigh, dresses it with a compression bandage and wraps him in a thermal foil blanket. He’s lost a lot of blood and could suffer a circulatory collapse. Thomas is a medic, but Buddy needs more than Thomas has in his first-aid kit.

“His pulse is very low, George.”

“Buddy, don’t fall asleep. What is your wife’s name?” George asks.

Buddy opens his eyes slowly. For the first time.

“Linda...my girlfriend.”

“Where does Linda live, Buddy?”

“New Jersey.”

George’s face lights up. Buddy is pale, moaning, and breathing heavily.

“Tell her that I love her,” he whispers.

“You can tell her that yourself when you see her at Bagram, Buddy, do you hear? What do you think about that, Buddy? Buddy, say something!”

Buddy looks at George with empty eyes. His lips start to make a shape. George put his ear to Buddy’s mouth.

“Les... is he okay?”

George waves WSO Les to come to him.

“Keep him awake, Les, and encourage him.”

Les’ brawny stature leans over his pilot.

“Buddy, old boy, don’t give up, Linda needs you. I need you in our fucking F-15. You aren’t going to leave me hanging, are you, Buddy? How do you want your hamburger when we get back to Bagram, Buddy? How about a big Texas burger with cheese and peppers and Mexican toppings? Do you want mustard on it, or ketchup?”

Buddy opens his eyes again slightly and softly smiles. After all, Les, who he has been flying with for the past six months just described his absolute favorite dish.

Then his eyes close again. Thomas and Marc nod to each other. His condition is critical. Buddy must get an IV within the next thirty minutes, or that’ll be the end of it.

Tim’s green goggles wander over the horizon from right to left, left to right.

“We are not in a good location, not good at all...”

“We can’t move,” whispers Marc, “Charlie Force is expecting us to be at these coordinates.” Marc additionally scans the area which appears more like the ugly landscape of an alien planet through the infra-red residual light amplifier.

Marc is not interested in the regular green hue of his night vision device. He is looking for a glaring green, the white of clothing, and black. People.

“Oh man, we are not in a good location, not at all. Like sitting ducks,”

Tim repeats himself.

Marc shivers.

“Taliban at ten o’clock!”

In the telescope he could see the outline of a group of men approaching. Five, six? They seem to be searching for something and were gradually coming closer.

The faint lull of voices could be heard through the hazy early morning sunrise.

“Charlie Force – Tangos in the area,” George radios quietly to the approaching troop.

“Roger – Five minutes to go – Stay where you are.”

The Echo Force lies as flat on the ground as possible, partially protected by a handful of small boulders. Thomas pulls Buddy down, he groans loudly. It can start at any minute. The Americans are individually equipped with rapid-fire weapons from the Navy Seals’ secret weapons arsenal, the Germans with G 36KA2s. Encounters with the enemy are practiced a thousand times. But it still causes their blood to race through their veins, and their pulse to increase, the adrenaline runs high.

George sees one of the Afghans throw his arm in the air. A sign? Now loud shouts. More Afghans!

George contemplates when it’s the right time.

“Fire only at my command!”

He doesn’t like long-distance fighting. The others don’t either. They all nod to their leader.

“Two Tangos at three o’clock, behind the rock, thirty yards,” Seal Two radios.

“Okay, I have him.”

“Four Tangos at ten...,” adds Seal Three.

Suddenly, the cracking sound of a missile being shot from a rocket-propelled grenade breaks the silence. It misses Echo Team by only a few feet. George studies the situation. That was close. Really close! A moment later, Taliban fighters abandon their concealment positions and charge the men.

“Fire!”

The elite soldiers systematically take aim at each individual enemy fighter.

Bull’s eye! A direct hit!

Dark, black blotches appear in Marc’s night vision goggles 20 meters out.

Blood. Blood is black.

Aim. POP!

Tango at three o'clock! The information is conveyed through hand signals and head movements.

Precision shots.

Short drumfire. The casings rattle out the right side like a waterfall.

Targets to the front, on the side, upright, crouching, jumping.

Just like in the training room. Only now with short screams. The team acts with clockwork precision.

The distance between them and the enemy fighters is becoming shorter and shorter. There are too many, many too many...

"Gentlemen, they want us use up all our ammunition," Marc says. But a guy like Marc always has enough.

He, along with Tim and Thomas, are regarded as best sharp shooters in Calw, the hometown of the German Special Forces. And he never wastes magazine cartridges with sustained fire. Even if thirty men were attacking him. That would cause his G36 to overheat and lose accuracy.

Marc does not like inaccuracy.

One of the Taliban kneels on the side of a rock. He's looking for a target. Through his night filter 80 attachment, Marc only sees the warhead of the bazooka. An ugly, spiked, green tube. About a hundred yards out.

Short artillery fire from the bar magazine. Directly to the head. The Afghan whirls through the air. In the green visor, black blotches. His head is gone.

George nods to him. He knows that killing people is a very disconcerting legal problem for the Germans. Germans do not shoot to kill suspects. But this is a fight for survival! The rules of engagement are fulfilled... And they are alone among themselves...

Buddy groans and tries to sit upright. Thomas forces him back down.

"He needs an IV, George, or he's gonna die!"

"Tell him he'll be on his way home to Linda in five minutes."

Shots scream over their heads.

“Did you hear that, Buddy? We’re gonna be on our way in a few minutes, just hold on. Linda’s waiting for you.”

George and his two Seals fire to the front, the Germans cover the hill behind them.

They are surrounded. It’s getting pretty damn close!

George feels fear creeping up inside of him that his troop won’t make it out of this goldfish bowl. He has no solution. They need help immediately.

“Charlie Force – Echo Team is under heavy fire!”

“Roger Echo Team – we are...”

The sentence gets swallowed by noise. The sound of a helicopter! The most beautiful noise an elite soldier can ask for in a desperate situation. From out of nowhere, two AH-64 Apache attack helicopters appear in the sky over the valley. They are rather more heard than seen. Air-to-ground missiles whoosh out of the missile pods on either side of the helicopters at the small groups of Taliban fighters, followed by bursts of fire from the 30-millimeter aircraft cannon. George’s anxiety from a moment ago instantly disappears now that his fire-spewing dragons have arrived.

Special night vision sensor, target acquisition system – don’t look directly at it or you’ll go blind!

A new roar of thunderous noise.

The long silhouette of a monster appears and comes closer. The Chinook transport helicopter hovers heavily some feet above the ground. Rattling bullet fire percolates from the behemoth. Fifty life-saving meters away from the elite soldiers. Each meter is one too many! There are still too many Taliban. The pull of the tandem rotors kicks up stones and dirt in the air.

Why always these huge machines? Marc wonders, I hope this works out.

The leviathan lowers itself to the ground, first landing on its rear wheels, then the front.

It hits the ground, bounces, and finally comes to a halt on the lightly sloping, rocky ground. Charlie Force fighters immediately jump out of the Chinook equipped with their night vision devices.

They kneel on one leg and take aim.

The Apaches rotate toward the target like remote-controlled robots to provide Echo Force cover from the fire.

Marc flips onto his back and assesses the situation for the forces. Next comes the most dangerous endeavor among all this pandemonium for them and the helicopters as this is a potentially perfect opportunity for an extraordinary ball of fire from only one of the Taliban rocket launchers. Three Seals carry Les and Buddy, who in the meantime has lost consciousness, to the Chinook amidst the fire from the Apache helicopters.

Mission accomplished!

The medic rushes to Buddy with an IV and oxygen mask in hand. Buddy now has a chance of survival. Hopefully.

One of the Americans outfitted with a wire waves hectically at the door of the Chinook.

“Get in, get in!”

“Tim, Tango behind you!” Marc can’t help him, his brother is standing directly in the line of fire.

As sprightly as a cat, Tim shoots from the hip. The Taliban throws up his arms as he falls to the ground. His AK-47 flies into the air like some grotesque circus act.

“Thanks, Marc.”

Tangos on all sides. Echo Force runs, bent over, toward the helicopters.

Look, assess, shoot, new magazine, go!

Each of them secures a radius of sixty degrees.

Six times sixty. No sector is left unsecured. One for all and all for one.

Only more ten meters to the Chinook.

Charlie Force and Navy Seals One and Two are in and give cover to George and the three Germans, with assistance from the two death machines hovering nearby.

Thomas kneels down under the protection of the helicopter and activates the mobile device. In the distance they hear a massive explosive and the entire valley quakes. The echo reverberates for a long time as though the entire Hindu Kush is about to burst.

Mission accomplished. Anything that was hidden must be destroyed now. The U.S. jet fighter would be reduced to only a heap of metal shards.

“Hurry up, hurry up!” one of the Americans was still waiting in the door of the Chinook, wildly waving his arm. The giant monster is in danger. It wouldn’t be the first time soldiers had to be left behind.

Tim and Thomas make it in with a powerful leap, George and Seal One are right on their tails.

Marc is still on the ground. As always. First his troops, then him.

The monstrous helicopter starts to ascend. George waves to him in desperation.

Marc throws his weapon over his shoulder and sprints to the door, George grabs hold of his arm and pulls him in. Half hanging in the doorway, Marc shoots his last rounds of ammunition in the direction of the muzzle flash from the ground.

The three helicopters with Echo Force and the rescued F-15 crew disappear through the hazy valley.

Seal One proudly slaps his German friend on the shoulder from behind in acknowledgment.

Marc Anderson is currently at the zenith of his career, albeit unaware that his biggest challenge still lies ahead of him and that his luck as an elite soldier has now, as of today, just run out.