



Victory Point: Operations Red Wings and Whalers - the Marine Corps' Battle for Freedom in Afghanistan

Ed Darack

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Examines the story of Operation Red Wings and Operation Whalers involving the Marines in Afghanistan in June 2005, the deaths of 19 U.S. military soldiers, the demise of Ahmad Shah, and the impact this incident had on the War on Terror.

Victory Point: Operations Red Wings and Whalers - the Marine Corps' Battle for Freedom in Afghanistan Details

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From Reader Review Victory Point: Operations Red Wings and Whalers - the Marine Corps' Battle for Freedom in Afghanistan for online ebook

Dustin Henson says

“Victory Point is going to remind you that there’s an American man still alive and still strong, preserving the democracy we have enjoyed for the past 223 years. His name is the U.S. Marine . . . just in case you forgot.”
- Semper, J.J. “Konnie” Konstant

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Wow another great book that dives into Operations Red Wings, as well as Operations Whalers. This book, especially the second half, is edge of your seat battle taking you through in depth of what these brave men went through to take down the enemy, the militia leader Ahmad Shah, and his team of fighters up high in the unbearable heat and brutal terrain up high in the Afghanistan Hindu Kush mountains. Operations Whalers was the follow up to Operations Red Wings, when Marines went in and continued the fight to take out leader Ahmad Shah’s cell. A great book for any American. ??

John says

I met Ed Darack at a local kayak store, when he was presenting his first book "Wind, Water Sun". Upon graduation from college, he had taken the credit cards offered in the mail and maxed them out to buy a kayak and gear. He then launched at the Colorado delta (now mud flats) at the top of the Gulf of Mexico and proceeded to kayak to the tip of Baja. He had no prior experience at kayaking. Excellent book and he created detailed and beautiful maps of the coast of Baja, which helped tell the story.

Much of my time in Southern California was spent in Imperial Beach, close to the SEAL training area in Coronado. I have know many SEAL's and always admired their total commitment to the outer limits of physical/mental endurance. The story "Lone Survivor" helped reinforce that belief. Of course, I like Mark Wahlberg and the movie, although sad in the 19 SOF personnel lost in Red Wings, helped to project the bigger than life view of the special ops forces.

Darack was doing some research at the Marine winter training camp in Bridgeport, just north of Mammoth. I have met many of these Marines at Mammoth, where they practice downhill skills on telemark type skis. He asked to be embedded as a writer/photographer in the Third Platoon of the Second Battalion of the Third Marine Regiment. He went to the same area in Afganistan as the setting for "Lone Survivor", in September of 2005. This was only one month after the ill fated Red Wings operation.

Darak's exhaustive detail of the difficulty of mountain warfare is excellent. Also, he gives a more complex narrative of how the various Joint operations have their own set of problems due to conflicting command structures. Red Wings was actually a Marine operation, but to get joint assets, the intel was to be done by SOF command structure. The insurgent leader Ahmed Shah had a very small group of followers, probably less than 12. I've already gone into too much detail, but the book should be read as a testament to a coherent strategy and complex battlefield assets of the USMC. Operation Whalers was the next unheralded success story. When Shah came back from Pakistan with a larger force, he was beaten on his own turf by 2/3 troops

with the use of close air support and taking the fight to Shah's turf.

The list of people who were interviewed for this book was impressive. I give Darak four stars only because I feel he was a bit too "hoo rah" before he told the story that would have left you saying "hoo rah" on your own.

Charles Blumberg says

This book fills in the details of Marine action in Afghanistan at the time of "Lone Survivor" by Marcus Luttrell and good supplement to that story. Chapter 7 is the best chapter as it describes the chaos in the chain of command between the joint action of Navy, Marines, and Army at the time a rescue team was needed to rescue Marcus Luttrell. Overall, the book is about Marines befriending local Afghans and good lessons learned.

John says

Excellent in-depth account of an intense fire fight in Afghanistan known as Operation Red Wings. Told by those who were there.

Matt says

Honestly, I think this was one of the worst books I've read on the War on Terror (I use that term to describe both the war in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan). The story itself is great and this book does provide some insight into an operation that was very significant but the author's writing style is just terrible. Its like a scripted, crappy Disney-style plot that is incredibly one-sided and sometimes just flat-out cheesy. Obviously many of the men described in the book are courageous, patriotic professionals but sometimes the author's writing borders on idolatry.

Daniel says

An excellent well written book. After reading Lone Survivor "by" Marcus Luttrell I felt that there was something off about what happened in the Hindu Kush, after some research I decided to pick up victory point and I am glad I did.

Joshua Greer says

A very well written and researched book that tells the "why" behind the SEAL team that was compromised and killed during the opening phases of Operation Red Wings as well as what the Marine Corps' 2d Battalion of the 3d Marine Regiment did to clean up the mess and carry out the operation afterward.

I highly recommend this book for military officers who will find themselves working in an increasingly joint environment. Arrogant commanders and inter-service posturing led to bad command decisions and a command structure for the mission that doomed the SEALs when they finally managed to call for help. We fetishize special operations forces these days as bearded heroes who are invincible and supermen at every aspect of military operations but the truth is significantly different.

As a military officer with experience working with all branches of the US DoD, many special operations forces, and many foreign forces, I can tell you that they make mistakes just like everyone else. Operator romance novels like Lone Survivor (written by a British fiction writer hand picked by US Navy Special Warfare) gloss over the mistakes and tweak the facts to tell a compelling story but they are toxic to those trying to understand the truth and not make the same mistakes.

Yes, Ed Darack is embarrassingly complimentary of the Marine Corps, almost to the point of sounding like a recruiting commercial at times, but the Marines of 2/3 did some amazing things up there in the Korengal Valley and they deserve to have their story told amid the hero worship undeservingly lumped on Marcus Luttrell and his team mates.

Justin says

Incredible insight on Operation Red Wings, Operation Whalers, the U.S. Marine Corps, and the War on Terror. Fast paced, detailed information (a lot of information - on Afghanistan, the current war, and the Marine Corps as well as joint operations and interservice rivalry).

In terms of Operation Red Wings, the only source out there that gives the full, detailed overview and explanation of what happened. This is a must read.

Walter Mack says

If you are a Marine Grunt, This Book is For You

I am and appreciated it Big Time. No criticism of Marcus Luttrell is evident but if you are a fan and supporter, which I am, of his story, you need to read this book as well for a more complete picture. A bit over the top, even for me, but much of value for those who have 'been there' or want to know why COIN is still a strategy that could have worked in Afghanistan. Too late now.

Curtis says

I found Victory Point to be an excellent commentary on the value of the US Marines and their methods. Though Ed Darack tends to be a bit over-complimentary, maybe even gushing with praise, in the early stages, once he describes the details of the marines' efforts during Operations Red Wings and Whalers, the reader can appreciate his admiration.

This is also an important read for the general public to understand how the policies and methods of the United States Marine Corps serve our involvement in conflicts in regions with such different cultures from our own. Always our expeditionary force, the marines recognize the importance of understanding and

working closely with the local populace to earn their respect and build the intelligence necessary to survive and succeed. The marines of 2/3 showed a tremendous amount of empathy for the people they were there to protect, while also displaying ruthless efficiency in dealing with those who wished to terrorize and subjugate the region.

I recommend this book to anyone who wants to know how our military really worked in Afghanistan, and how the Marine Corps doctrine has developed effectively over the last two centuries.

Renan Critelli says

A mais completa descrição da operação Red Wings, que ocorreu em 2005 no Afeganistão. O autor Ed Darack é um escritor e fotógrafo que ficou junto ao 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment. O livro é excelente e repleto de informações não apenas sobre as operações militares conduzidas pelos Marines à época, mas também sobre a história do Afeganistão.

No início do livro, o autor fornece um background histórico, cultural e político muito bom, que permite ao leitor entender o desenrolar dos acontecimentos num país tão complexo como o Afeganistão. Em seguida, descreve a Op. Red Wings sob o ponto de vista dos Marines. Trata-se de uma descrição cuidadosa do planejamento da operação e da sua execução. Em resumo, tudo o que o livro "Lone Survivor" tem de ruim, "Victory Point" tem de bom. Por fim, o autor descreve a Op. Whalers, conduzida pelos Marines, na qual a célula terrorista de Ahmad Shah foi neutralizada.

Como pontos negativos, o autor muitas vezes exagera nos elogios aos Marines (como se estivessem acima das outras organizações), e tenta criar uma narrativa empolgante para algumas batalhas, mas não consegue. Entretanto, como aparentemente a parcialidade do autor não chega a distorcer os fatos, e a ação não é o foco do livro, são detalhes pequenos em uma obra muito interessante.

Matt says

The author, Ed Darack, was an embedded journalist with my unit during operation red wings. This book reads very much like a Tom Clancy novel. Just like with any war story, there's a lot of background story required for the audience to understand the context. Ed did a great job at covering every element of the battle.

A key piece of info for those who are total "Special Forces" buffs; at the time this book was written, only so much of the information available had been declassified. Therefore, the story is somewhat locked in time. My point being, this can be used as a prelude to the famous, "Lone Survivor" book & movie. When Marcus Luttrell wrote his story a couple of years after Darack's, "Victory Point," much more information was, not only declassified, but the Lone Survivor story was straight from the horses' mouth. So, if you're interested in what all went down in the Korengal/Chowkay/Waterpor valley(s) during Red Wings, and the follow-up mission, Whalers, I would pair the two books.

Victory point covers my former platoon commander most of the time; if you could pick a central character in the story. Military leaders highly recommend ROTC cadets, and any junior ranking infantry officer to read. It includes a lot of information on the locality, and the logistics and cultural barriers the Platoon Commanders and NCOs came up against when engaging with the tribal elders.

I let a ROTC buddy borrow my hardcover copy, I'll probably never see it again, but at least it went with the future of America's warfighters.

Ed Darack did a great job at telling an incredibly complex scenario. Many of my Marine buddies from 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines do our best to keep in touch with Ed; thank God there was someone there to be able to write it all down.

-rah.

David says

A very good history of the June and July 2005 battles of the SEALs in northeastern Afghanistan. In this series of conflicts, the young local Taliban leader Ahmad Shah led a few dozen fighters and caused dreadful effort and about 25 US deaths in the brutal Hindu Kush mountain range.

I wanted to see whether this 2009 coverage was more detailed and accurate than the popular "Lone Survivor" by Marcus Luttrell, a book which I found to be a self-publicizing biographical rant, and a very bad book as the authoritative military history of the Red Wings fight of a week with another week or ten days required to extract Luttrell to safety and medical treatment.

So Darack did a fine job with slight overlap with the Red Wings treatment of Luttrell. Darack does not state any evaluation of Luttrell's book of 2007 and does not include "Lone Survivor" in his three pages of published "reference" and I take that to be an implied severe criticism of the Luttrell book.

Darack does not speak of Luttrell's stating that Shah had several dozen soldiers fighting him, however Darack on page 121 states the Shah force was before the battle judged as 6-12 fighters, then right after the battle the SEALs officials thought it may have been "10 strong", and US military intelligence later thoroughly analyzed and authenticated the Shah force as being 8 fighters.

Another discrepancy is that Luttrell describes in a full page his facing Shah in the home of Gulab, describing Shah, and pointing his rifle at him; Darack states on page 160 "After threatening the lives of Gulab and his family Shah departed, having come just feet from Luttrell; only an earthen wall separated the two." The Darack version would have been true, based on after-battle interviews with witnesses. Luttrell boasts and exaggerates, certainly at times writing fiction rather than nonfiction.

Chris says

A typical dispatch from the front with its adrenaline ride of combat action and the luxury of hindsight to critique the friction and fog of war as well as a tutorial on how we fight. A good primer for the public on what the USMC is all about and what type of war was/is taking place in Afghanistan. It's a window as well into the parochial corridors of interservice rivalry and ego of commanders, who asserted their rights into fights that were unnecessary as well as disrupting great joint working relationships set in place by lower level commanders. We see another side of the story of the Navy SEALs whose team was compromised and the team leader was posthumously awarded the MOH. Marines set up the conditions for the rescue of the lone survivor but were denied the opportunity to rescue him by the special ops command. I cringed when it was described how the SOC guys treated an Afghan man who, at considerable risk to himself, came to them with a handwritten note from the lone survivor; he was hooded and flex-cuffed. So much for hearts and minds. Gripping personal narratives of the Marines on patrol. Nothing can prepare one for the ass-kicking terrain that is Afghanistan. Maps could have been better but great pics of Marines in action. Thanks to Ed for being there and telling us about it. Now if we would only read and draw the right lessons from this account.

Atar says

One of the great books of American military in Afghanistan. It takes the reader through the events leading up to the Navy special forces "Seals" ambush in the Korangal valley. In which Marcus Luttrell's four man team were killed and himself seriously injured. Also the shooting down of a helicopter with many special forces and aviators sent to rescue the Seals. To the operation to deny those very same anti coalition forces the interruption of elections that were to be held. People may have heard about operation Red Wings with the Seals but many don't know about operation Whalers which was the follow up mission with the United States Marine Corps. Probably the least known of all major operations.
