
— BOOK REVIEWS —

“SPOOKS AND SOF IN AFGHANISTAN: THREE REVIEWS”

FIRST IN: AN INSIDER'S ACCOUNT OF HOW THE CIA SPEARHEADED THE WAR ON TERROR IN AFGHANISTAN

Gary Shroen. Presidio Press: 2005.

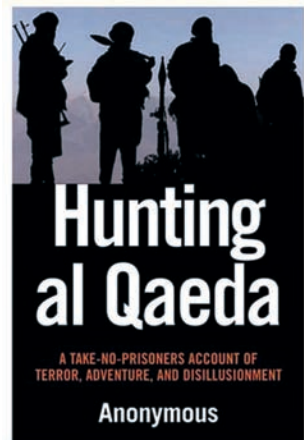
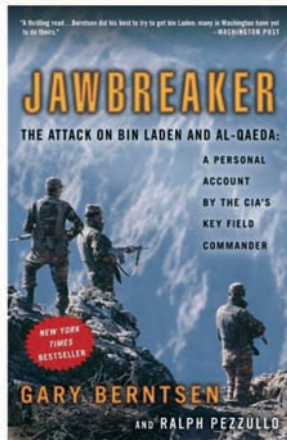
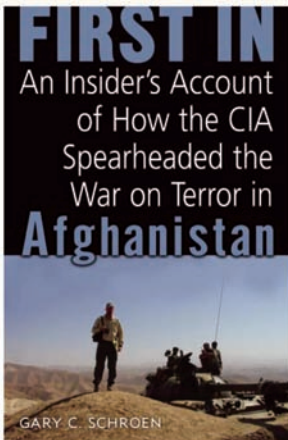
JAWBREAKER: THE ATTACK ON BIN LADEN AND AL QAEDA: A PERSONAL ACCOUNT BY THE CIA'S KEY FIELD COMMANDER

Gary Berntsen (with Ralph Pezzullo). Crown Publishers: 2005.

HUNTING AL QAEDA: A TAKE-NO-PRISONERS ACCOUNT OF TERROR, ADVENTURE, AND DISILLUSIONMENT

Anonymous. Zenith Press: 2005.

Reviewed by Dr. Sean M. Maloney



The secretive world of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Special Operations Forces (SOF) has produced three key memoirs that should be read by anyone seeking insight into the first two years of war in Afghanistan, particularly by members of Canadian Expeditionary Force Command (CEFCOM) and the Canadian intelligence community (hopefully the members of Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) know all this already). In addition to recounting the atmospheric and events on the ground from several personal perspectives, the sum of these works is a superb starting point for a lessons learned process that has applicability to Canadian operations in the region.

Gary Shroen's *First In* handles the first phases of CIA covert operations in support of the Northern Alliance in the fall of 2001. Hampered to a certain extent by CIA censors who would not let him identify such things as the type of helicopter the CIA uses in the region (modified Russian-built Mi-17's with no markings based at Kabul International Airport—seen and photographed by it seems every aviation magazine on the planet), Shroen is still able to give a credible account of what he and his team accomplished in those dark days.

The Northern Alliance Liaison Team (NALT) codenamed JAWBREAKER, was led by this on-the-verge of retirement CIA covert operator brought back by the Agency because of his specialized knowledge of the region and its personalities. The mission was to convince the Northern Alliance to work with American and coalition forces to remove the Taliban regime in northern Afghanistan and to use every means available to track down Osama bin Laden and his immediate advisors to capture or kill them. The Northern Alliance Liaison Team was made up of Special Activities Division (SAD) personnel, a CIA organization consisting of former US military personnel, many from Tier I SOF units. The introduction of SAD personnel instead of American Tier I SOF was done for a number of reasons: Tier I SOF had stringent synthetic aperture radar (SAR) requirements that could not yet be met in-theatre and actionable intelligence was really dependent on human intelligence (HUMINT) sources that could only be gained by building trust with the Afghans.

Infiltrating via Mi-17 helicopters from Tajikistan, Shroen's NALT had to "establish a solid relationship with the Northern Alliance leadership, to secure the cooperation of the Northern Alliance military forces in working in concert with the US military attacking the Taliban, and to arrange for the Panjshir Valley to serve as a base of operations for US Special Operations forces." The NALT conducted basic tasks like global positioning system (GPS) mapping of the battlespace and establishing one of the most critical components in the effort, intelligence liaison with the vast Northern Alliance intelligence system, which for the most part, was based on HUMINT. Shroen also knew from experience that, with enough money, Taliban leaders, units and even formations could be bought off, so NALT deployed cash as much as bullets and JDAMS against the enemy: "Most of the successes of the Taliban had been won not in hard fought battles but by siege and bribery, and most combat engagements had been small, short fights with few casualties." The NALT also brought signals intelligence equipment to the fight, exponentially increasing the flow of information on Taliban and Al Qaeda movements.

First In not only depicts Shroen's coalition-building efforts with the diverse Northern Alliance leadership, which was still in shock after the death of Ahmad Shah Massoud right before the 9/11 attacks, but also between American organizations. The introduction of uniformed US SOF posed additional challenges. How exactly, were NALT and US SOF supposed to coordinate after NALT had facilitated US SOF entry into the theatre? Could NALT pass intelligence derived from Northern Alliance sources to US SOF for targeting? Could NALT personnel working alongside Afghan forces designate targets for American aircraft with Special Operations Forces (SOFLAM) systems or not (the CIA brought their own anyway)? Tier II US SOF such as the US Army Special Forces, were structured to train and support a guerilla force, but the Northern Alliance was a conventional army. And what about Tier I US SOF, such as the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) units? Who handled its targeting? Should US SOF wear uniforms or not?

Shroen and his counterparts established working relationships in the field that addressed these problems. For example, US SOF handled the target designation mission, while JAWBREAKER sub-teams provided intelligence derived from local sources. Both worked together on several Northern Alliance fronts to assist local commanders—efforts which were ultimately successful at breaking the back of Taliban military resistance in northern Afghanistan. Notably, Schroen is critical of those who believe that American air power alone convinced the Taliban to quit the field.

A lack of understanding by those with bureaucratic and organizational agendas back in the United States started to interfere with NALT's mission as Shroen handed over to Gary Berntsen, his successor.

Berntsen (known as "Gary II" in *First In*)'s *Jawbreaker* pre-dates and overlaps with the events of *First In* but moves the CIA story further into early 2002. Edited by a CIA censor, the blacked out bits do not necessarily detract from the story Gary II tells. Indeed, the author has helpfully annotated some bits with general details about what was removed. A picture of a Mi-17 graces the cover.

Berntsen's account takes us from his experiences dealing with Al Qaeda attacks in Africa in 1998, to his leadership of JAWBREAKER in 2001, when he replaced Gary Schroen. Berntsen was confronted with several additional problems. These included the need to reign in Northern Alliance commanders who wanted to get into Kabul as quickly as possible; the requirement to support a JSOC unit tasked with a hostage rescue mission; to gather actionable intelligence from captured Al Qaeda members so that other 9/11-type operations that were in planning stages, could not be mounted; and to ensure that Northern Alliance commanders did not turn on each other and precipitate a repeat of the 1993-96 civil war.

Berntsen is more outspoken than Schroen. His particular pet peeve is the inability of the bureaucratic machine to respond to time-sensitive intelligence. For example: JAWBREAKER had enough verifiable information that Osama bin Laden was extricating himself from Tora Bora, where a combined JAWBREAKER-US SOF team was wreaking havoc on Al Qaeda forces. Calling Central Command (CENTCOM), Berntsen explained that if a US Ranger battalion could be inserted, they could get the Al Qaeda leadership. Delays, civilian versus military interaction and command and control issues prevented the mission from taking place. In another stunning section, Berntsen describes a conversation with a Major General, the JSOC commander, who refused to even look at an agreed-to concept of operations for JAWBREAKER and US SOF: "If things go badly in Tora Bora, he won't have his fingerprints on it. If they go well, they'll have a party for him in the Pentagon." Berntsen and other US Special Forces commanders were forced to rely on informal intelligence-sharing methods to avoid the scrutiny of the Washington and Tampa-based bureaucrats.

Two US Special Forces members wrote *Hunting al Qaeda* based on their team's experiences in Afghanistan throughout 2002. *Hunting al Qaeda* follows the adventures and misadventures of BEAST 85, a reserve US Special Forces team deployed as part of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM's Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF). The freewheeling spirit of CIA operations as portrayed by Schroen and Berntsen comes to a shuddering halt as BEAST 85 got caught in the bureaucratic quagmire of a US Army that was trying to "conventionalize" the war in Afghanistan.

Hunting al Qaeda moves the action from the north in 2001 to Kandahar and surrounding provinces in 2002. Before getting into the fight, BEAST 85 had to manoeuvre through a US Army bureaucracy that was prejudiced against reserve personnel, even though they were Special Forces. Initially, BEAST 85 was supposed to deploy to Somalia or the Sudan, but after much to-ing and fro-ing, they wound up in Afghanistan. Then, it was unclear how they would be employed: at first, it looked like the team would take over a forward operating base in the north, but then the CIA needed a training team to build special bin Laden hunting units that were made up of motivated Afghans. When this task fell through, BEAST 85 was employed in a firebase in the south. The task was to react to missions demanded from higher headquarters, to develop local intelligence and act on it as necessary.

In situations reminiscent of those faced by Gary Berntsen's team in *Jawbreaker*, BEAST 85 developed intelligence on several Taliban high value targets, including Mullah Omar, but higher headquarters refused to act on it in a timely fashion. On another

occasion, signal intelligence (SIGINT) discovered on-going conversations from the Bin Laden party on a cell phone but there was no “kinetic” response from JSOC.

Frustrated with having to file “haircut profiles” and watch paint dry, BEAST 85 developed its own intelligence in its operating area. Higher headquarters insisted that any contingency operation be approved: on average a concept of operations (CONOP) took 24 hours to approve—in effect, permitting the target to get away while resources were “deconflicted.” Working alongside Afghan units of questionable reliability was another hazard, as was the superb Taliban spotter network in the south. Consequently, BEAST 85 had to deceive its commanders and allies by pretending to be conducting route reconnaissance missions, while they were in fact conducting direct action missions. BEAST 85 team leaders also noted that the Tier I JSOC unit did not catch a single high-value target during the time they were deployed. Using informal and unauthorized methods, BEAST 85 snared three, including Mullah Osmani. Subsequently, a military police investigation was conducted to determine where BEAST 85 was getting its information, in part because staff officers in US CENTCOM weren’t getting enough glory.

In terms of physical production, I would especially commend the staff at Zenith Books for their creative approach to *Hunting al Qaeda*. Most publishers eschew maps and photographs in order to save money, but Zenith chose to use colour photos (which are useful to get a sense of the terrain and operating environment). More importantly, the book jacket, when unfolded, has a 1:100 000 map of the BEAST 85 operating area printed on it, making following the operations much easier. Other publishers need to understand that military history needs maps; they can learn from the Zenith approach. Crown did not scrimp either: terrain sketches and colour photos also added to understanding the trials and travails of *Jawbreaker*.

Because we lack public access to lessons learned information on American covert and special operations, I would recommend all three works as a good starting point. They are more useful than the plethora of exploitative journalistic works on SOF that are more readily available in Chapters or Indigo bookstores. It is a truism that personal opinion permeates all three books, but this can be more a strength than a weakness when it is identified and taken into account. In any case, there will be no documented historical-analytical work on these operations available to the reading public for decades. Given the close working relationship that exists between CANSOF and its American counterparts, I would not be surprised to discover that similar problems have emerged in the hills and valleys of Afghanistan for Canadian soldiers.

DON'T GIVE UP THE SHIP! MYTHS OF THE WAR OF 1812

Hickey, Donald R., Robin Brass Studio: Toronto 2006. 464 pgs. \$39.95

Reviewed by Captain Zane Piekenbrock

Canada and the United States have not always maintained a close relationship. Over the course of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the United States fought two wars against the British forces in North America. The first was the American Revolutionary War and the second, the War of 1812, is the subject of this book. In *Don't Give Up the Ship! Myths of the War of 1812*, Donald R. Hickey focuses on the “mythology of war” and addresses some of the misconceptions surrounding the war of 1812. While the book is scholarly in nature, it is also entertaining and readable, accessible to both the scholar and recreational reader. *Don't Give Up the Ship! Myths*