



*Former Acting Secretary of Defense & Army Green Beret Colonel*

**CHRISTOPHER C. MILLER**

*with Ted Royer*

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**SOLDIER  
SECRETARY**

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*Warnings from the Battlefield & the Pentagon about*  
**AMERICA'S MOST DANGEROUS ENEMIES**

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# SOLDIER SECRETARY

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CENTER  
STREET

Nashville • New York

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WITH GRATITUDE AND HUMILITY TO:

My family

The Special Forces regiment (the Green Berets)

Those that didn't come home from our wars

Our servicemembers still on their journey back

The families and loved ones that gave their  
treasure in the pursuit of peace during my time as  
the leader of the United States Department of  
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***De Oppresso Liber***

—CHRIS MILLER

For John and Dillon and the heroes of  
Generation X.

—TED ROYER





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# INTRODUCTION

At 3:44 p.m. on January 6, 2021, I was sitting at my desk in the Pentagon holding a phone six inches away from my ear, trying my best to make sense of the incoherent shrieking blasting out of the receiver. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was on the line, and she was in a state of total nuclear meltdown.

To be fair, the other members of Congressional leadership on the call weren't exactly composed, either. Every time Pelosi paused to catch her breath, Senator Mitch McConnell, Senator Chuck Schumer, and Congressman Steny Hoyer took turns hyperventilating into the phone.

Two hours earlier, a crowd of Trump supporters had unlawfully entered the Capitol. Congressional leadership had been swept away to a secure location at a pre-Civil War era Army installation less than two miles away. As Acting Secretary of Defense, I was across the river at the Pentagon, speaking to them by phone and watching the mayhem play out on my TV screen.

Pelosi demanded that I send troops to the Capitol *now*. The irony wasn't lost on me. Prior to that very moment, the Speaker and her Democrat colleagues had spent months decrying the use of National Guard troops to quell left-wing riots following the death of George Floyd that caused countless deaths and billions of dollars in property damage nationwide.<sup>1</sup> But as soon as it was her ass on the line, Pelosi had been miraculously born again as a passionate, if less than altruistic, champion of law and order.

When I could finally wedge a comment in, I pointed out that I had already ordered the complete mobilization of the District of Columbia National Guard and that forces were on their way to the Capitol as soon as they were properly equipped and synchronized with the Capitol Police.

At this point in time, I had been President Donald Trump's

Acting Secretary of Defense for approximately two months. I had known when I took the job that it was going to be wild. But I never could have imagined anything like this—getting reamed out by a histrionic Nancy Pelosi and Mitch McConnell as they implored me to send troops to forcibly expel a rowdy band of MAGA supporters, infiltrated by a handful of provocateurs,<sup>2</sup>, <sup>3</sup> who were traipsing through the halls of the Capitol, taking selfies, and generally making a mockery of the entire institution.

As a lifelong soldier who had spent nearly 24 years in Special Forces, I'd been in my share of shitstorms. I had been among the first Green Berets on the ground in Afghanistan after 9/11. I'd dodged bullets, grenades, missiles, and mortars in Iraq. I'd captured genocidal war criminals in Bosnia with the CIA. I'd hunted down the world's most dangerous terrorists as director of the National Counterterrorism Center. But I had never seen anyone—not even the greenest, pimple-faced 19-year-old Army private—panic like our nation's elder statesmen did on January 6 and in the months that followed.

For the American people, and for our enemies watching overseas, the events of that day undeniably laid bare the true character of our ruling class. Here were the most powerful men and women in the world—the leaders of the legislative branch of the mightiest nation in history—cowering like frightened children for all the world to see.

Do I blame a bunch of geriatrics for acting like a bunch of geriatrics? Of course not. But do I judge them for it? You're damned right I do. Most of all, I resent that we are ruled by a bunch of geriatrics that ruthlessly and selfishly maintain their hold on power and refuse to develop the next generation of leaders.

In the military, stress becomes hardwired into your cerebral cortex. It's always there, and you either learn to live with it, or you don't live. And you sure as hell don't run away when you've got a job to do.

That's what I learned from my dad and uncles as a kid growing up in Iowa. They survived the Depression, fought in World War II and Korea, then raised their kids to be patriots in the maelstrom of the Vietnam era. All of the adults I grew up around were tough as nails, and they taught us to be just as tough.

At family get-togethers, the typical topic of conversation was ass-kicking. I would routinely overhear crazy stories about my dad's service in Korea, or an uncle rolling 55-gallon barrels of gasoline into caves to burn out the Japanese.

Their conversations absolutely petrified me—yet I was enthralled. To this day, some small part of me wonders whether I joined the Army out of a desire to live life like they did—on the edge, in the crosshairs, serving the nation they loved on one death-defying adventure after another. I've collected a few of my own crazy stories over the years, which I'll happily share in the pages to come.

Unlike the typical book written by retired military men, this is not a book of recycled policy prescriptions or repackaged "lessons in leadership." This is the story of one soldier's rise from a private in the Army Reserve to the highest office at the Pentagon. It's about the heroes I fought alongside in Iraq and Afghanistan who didn't live to tell their tales, and the sacrifices my generation has made on behalf of our nation. It's about the rank-and-file troops I humbly served as Acting Secretary of Defense, who bestowed on me an affectionate nickname: the "Soldier Secretary." This book is also about our country, and how our military, our institutions, and our leaders failed to change in the decades following September 11, 2001—and how we *must* change in the future if America is to survive.

The battles I've fought at home and abroad have left me profoundly worried for our nation's future. Yet I am not without hope. I believe we can save America from the self-anointed experts who have led our country into one disastrous war after another. All it takes is a little common sense, and common sense is one thing our elites have yet to take from the American people.

In the pages that follow, I won't make myself out to be some kind of flawless superhero who always did the right thing. I made plenty of mistakes, as both a soldier and a public servant, and I'll do my best to give you an honest picture of people and events as I saw them.

I'm not looking to gain the plaudits of a national security establishment that has spent the last two decades losing wars in the Middle East. I'm not looking for fame or fortune or a lucrative

deal as a talking head on cable news. Other than my family and a handful of friends, I don't give two shits about what anybody thinks of me.

I profoundly dislike talking about myself, and I am the first to acknowledge that anything I accomplished was because of others. I have always viewed myself as just a guy doing his job and trying his best to serve his family, nation, and God with dignity, empathy, and honor.

I have written my experiences and thoughts simply to help the American people make sense of this brief, but likely important, period of American history that we find ourselves living through, and perhaps, to help us find our way forward. And, just maybe, some 14-year-old kid in the Middle West like I once was will be inspired to serve and contribute to this incredible experiment that is the United States of America.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> David Welna, “Don’t Send U.S. Military to Protests, Hill Democrats Warn Trump,” NPR, June 2, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/02/868338367/dont-send-u-s-military-to-protests-hill-democrats-warn-trump>.

<sup>2</sup> Larry Celona, “Two Known Antifa Members Posed as Pro-Trump to Infiltrate Capitol Riot: Sources,” *New York Post*, January 7, 2021, <https://nypost.com/2021/01/07/known-antifa-members-posed-as-pro-trump-to-infiltrate-capitol-riot-sources/>.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Feuer and Adam Goldman, “Among Those Who Marched into the Capitol on Jan. 6: An F.B.I. Informant,” *New York Times*, September 25, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/25/us/politics/capitol-riot-fbi-informant.html>.

## CHAPTER ONE

# ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

The Vietnam War was the background noise of my childhood in Delaware and Iowa. Every night, the TV was an endless stream of stories about battles and killing and death and protest. The draft was still going on, and I just assumed I would join the Army and go to war. I used to lie awake in bed at night trying to figure out how to get out of it.

But when your dad and uncles are a bunch of hard-assed combat veterans in the 1970s, learning to be a man means facing your fears and overcoming them, so that's what I had to do. In my circle of rambunctious teenaged friends, the code we lived by was "Manliness or death." An *interesting* life—not a long or comfortable life—that was what mattered.

When I was 14, Iranian revolutionaries overthrew the Shah, stormed the American embassy in Tehran, and took our diplomats hostage. The story captivated the nation for months, and my group of friends in particular. This wasn't supposed to happen to Americans—our people were the ones who liberated the oppressed, not the ones who begged to be rescued. Finally, President Jimmy Carter authorized a rescue mission. It was a disaster. I felt personally humiliated. On April 25, 1980—one day after the failed rescue attempt—I decided to join the Army.

As soon as I graduated from high school, I walked into the post office and went upstairs to see the Army recruiter.

I figured you just showed up and signed a form, then they shipped you off to some kind of troop replacement depot where you got a uniform and started marching around and shit. Bing, bang, boom.

The recruiter glanced at my paperwork and tossed it back. “Need your parent’s approval.” Oops. As a 17-year-old, I could volunteer to kill people as long as my parents were cool with it. No biggie. I returned the next day with a signed permission slip.

My recruiter picked me up early Sunday morning and delivered me to the bus station. I always walked briskly past the bus station because that’s where strange people congregated and weird stuff happened. Only vagrants and hippies and hobos rode Greyhound buses, in my mind. And now I was one of them. I had packed a lovely Case brand fixed blade knife that I had purchased from the True Value hardware store, where I worked part time, just in case.

I assumed I’d be dropped off at a barracks and greeted by a shouting drill sergeant as we scurried off the bus. Instead, I was shuttled to a Marriott hotel in Des Moines and issued my first roommate. He was why I packed my Case knife. He was in his 20s, *clearly* enjoyed using drugs, and didn’t seem mentally stable—definitely the kind of guy who rode Greyhounds. I lay awake clutching my knife the entire night. But hey—at least I was finally seeing the world and meeting interesting people!

The next day, we went to Camp Dodge. I got my physical and took the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)—basically, the military version of an IQ test—then reported to my career counselor, who asked me what I wanted to do in the Army.

“I just want to be in the Army,” I said. Everything I knew about the Army was distilled from the stories recounted by my dad and uncles, all of whom were combat soldiers. I had no idea there were other jobs available.

“Yeah, I got that, but what do you want to *do* in the Army?” asked the befuddled sergeant. “You have a super high ASVAB score. You can do anything you want—intelligence, communications, engineers?”

“I want to carry a gun,” I said. “Go on patrols. You know, be a soldier.”

The sergeant realized that Christmas had come early: Here was an above average yet totally clueless recruit that he could jam into whatever quota hole was dogging him that month. And that month, like every month, the most difficult quota to fill was for the Infantry.



Nobody volunteered for the Infantry. To many career soldiers or those who join to gain a marketable skill, the Infantry is the worst job in the Army. You're always outside, dirty, and tired, and if war breaks out, there's a good chance you'll end up dead. I knew none of this at the time. I didn't even know there was an alternative.

"Miller, I can't make any promises, but I'll see what I can do. Go sit in the waiting area." He was the quintessential used-car salesman wearing down his prey. Six hours later, I was the last recruit in the building when he called me back into his office with "some really great news."

He told me that a kid from Minnesota had broken his leg and couldn't go to Fort Benning for Basic Training. I could take this newly available slot, but only if I signed the enlistment contract *right now*—it was a limited time offer! If he had asked me to hand over \$19.95 for the privilege, I would have gladly done so.

I paused as I put pen to paper—"Hey, I want to be a paratrooper too. Can I do that?"

"Sure thing, Miller," he replied with a grin. "Just ask them when you get to Fort Benning." And I believed him.

I had a bit of a problem though—I had to get rid of my Case knife. After busting my ass to pay for such a pretty blade, I sure as hell wasn't going to let Uncle Sam confiscate it. I sauntered outside and surveyed Camp Dodge. I found some loose earth near a lone tree, and buried it wrapped in a pilfered black garbage bag. Years later, I went back and recovered it, still in perfect condition.

A few days later, I arrived at Fort Benning, Georgia, and was greeted by a swirling swarm of screaming banshees. I remember hearing once that psychologists determined that one's personality is set by the age of 14, and the only way to change it is through a "significant emotional experience." In 1983, when I attended Basic Training between my senior year of high school and freshman year of college, it definitely succeeded in providing that significant emotional experience.

The days of beating recruits senseless had passed, but the drill instructors were still allowed to inflict enormous physical and emotional stress. No one forgets their first 24 hours of Basic

Training. It is a kaleidoscope of pain, suffering, exhaustion, and fear. It was designed to weed out the weak and to instill physical and mental toughness in those who remained. But the stress was calibrated carefully to avoid a mass exodus—it was the rite of passage required to form a new value system.

It was during Basic Training that I first realized I had an above-average capacity for pain, thanks to random luck in the genetic lottery and the example set by my Mother, the most physically and mentally toughest person I know. Apparently, I also possessed above-average smarts—relatively speaking. I've never considered myself the smartest guy in the room, except during Basic Training.

The regimen hadn't changed much since World War II. A task was presented with the conditions and standards announced. For instance, "During this block of instruction you will learn to employ the M47 Dragon Anti-tank Missile. You will perform this task in battlefield conditions in under five minutes." Screwups were met with increasing levels of physical discipline—primarily push-ups—to allow the recruit the opportunity to "refocus" before receiving remedial training.

Like the rest of my generation, I'd been an unknowing lab rat for the experimental educational approaches born in the 1960s, with self-paced learning and an unhealthy obsession with self-esteem. At the time, the Army's approach seemed antiquated and barbaric to me. In hindsight, I now realize it was brilliant. If you plopped an M47 Dragon Anti-tank Missile in front of me today, I could put it into operation. This is what the Army does best. Everything our public schools have forgotten, the Army remembers.

Even though it was against the law by the early 1980s, some judges still gave delinquent young men the choice of joining the Army or going to jail. It was viewed as a win for everybody—the community got rid of a troublemaker, the Army gained another warm body, and the "volunteer" got a healthy dose of discipline and a chance to become a contributing member of society.

My bunkmate, a sinewy, hollow-eyed Tennessean who reminded me of a character in *Deliverance* and seemed prone to psychopathic behavior, was one of many such cases. He had

decorated his bony knuckles with a delightful jailhouse tattoo: *F U C K* on the four fingers of his right hand; *Y O U!* on his left. On the off chance that was too subtle for you, he'd fold down his lower lip to reveal the same message. I had no idea there were so many uses for those crappy disposable ink pens!

Needless to say, Private Fuck You! and I did not become best friends, but we did learn to rely on one another. No recruit was capable of meeting the two-minute standard for making our bunks. After multiple failed individual attempts, our disgusted drill sergeant informed us that we were complete dumb shits and the only way to succeed was by using the buddy system. Private Fuck You! and I became partners to avoid the disgrace of failure. That's another thing the Army does well—it has a way of tearing down barriers between people, including the barriers you'd rather leave up.

I had always been an average student in school—I did the minimum required to avoid an ass-chewing. But compared to my bunkmate and many others in my cohort, I was a genius. If you paid attention and did a bit of homework (which was required anyway), you could excel and earn rewards like additional specialized training, advanced promotion with higher pay, and extra time off. The Army's incentive system was the ultimate meritocracy: If you got the job done, you were rewarded. It didn't matter if you were a middle-class kid from Iowa or an illegally paroled ex-con. All that mattered was performing, and it was extremely effective motivation.

I finally figured out that I might have an affinity for this military thing on one brutally hot afternoon in July 1983, four weeks into the eight-week ordeal of Basic Infantry Training. We had marched out to a sandy training area nestled in the pine wasteland and were greeted by a sergeant standing on an elevated platform. We knew he wasn't a drill instructor because he wasn't wearing a Smokey the Bear hat. Rather, he was a subject matter expert who was responsible for teaching us a yet to be described martial task.

The sergeant was thin, gangly, and well over six feet tall, with the kind of sinewy leanness that denotes a metabolism working overtime due to severe hyperactivity. I couldn't tell his ethnicity—he seemed to be everything and nothing at once. But his defining

and most distracting feature was the pencil-thin mustache that crept perfectly along his upper lip. It wiggled and danced as he chain-smoked Kools, spellbinding you as he strode confidently across the platform like Genghis Khan surveying his cavalry.

As we sat at his feet, raptly waiting to gather the crumbs of wisdom that fell from his table, Sergeant Pencil-Stache proceeded to unleash the most blasphemous, outrageously profane, scatological tirade I had ever heard. We learned intimate details about every sexual encounter he ever had. We learned about the differences in genitalia of every ethnicity, and what our mothers enjoyed in the bedroom. He clearly reveled in having a captive audience.

After some time, he finally revealed that we were going to learn how to put on our protective masks. He talked us through the process in painstaking detail, though it was actually quite simple. When you heard someone shout “Gas, gas, gas” or the sound of banging metal, you completed a 10-step process that culminated in moving out of the area with your protective mask securely attached.

We practiced until the sun began to drop, when our drill instructors blessedly reappeared and ordered us to march back to the barracks. Once we were breathing heavily and the sweat was flowing freely, a billowing gray cloud began to envelop us. Someone yelled, “Gas, gas, gas” and we all scrambled to complete Steps 1 through 10.

With my mask quickly secured, I could see phantomlike figures scurrying and scattering in every direction until I was alone. I crested a hill and was met by several drill instructors who pulled me off the road and announced, “All clear.” Over the next 15 minutes, 138 recruits staggered up the hill in various degrees of distress. Their eyes were red and swollen and full of panic. Their sinus cavities had voided, and snot slobbered across their faces. Some were vomiting profusely. Others had abandoned their weapons, and many had lost their helmets.

We had just been subjected to our first simulated gas attack. Only two of us out of 140 had kept our cool and passed the test. Maybe, I thought, this was something I could be good at. And if not, it would probably still make for an interesting story.