

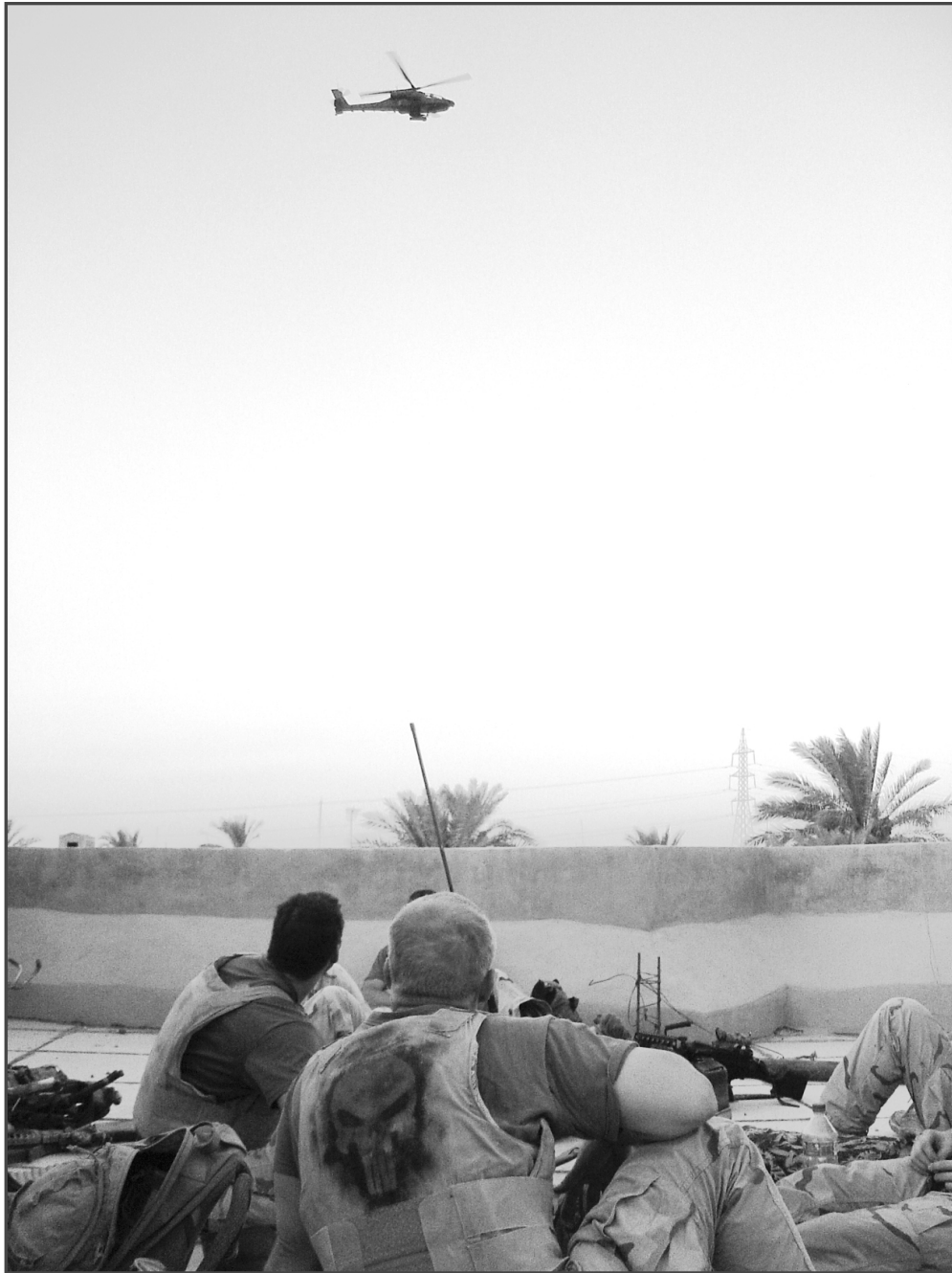
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**EXTREME
OWNERSHIP**

**HOW
U.S. NAVY
SEALS
LEAD AND WIN**

JOCKO WILLINK AND LEIF BABIN



Dawn breaks over South-Central Ramadi. Task Unit Bruiser, Charlie Platoon sniper overwatch deep into enemy territory with AH-64 Apache gunship overhead. Enemy fighters shot thousands of rounds at the helicopter as they overflow the city.

(Photo courtesy of the authors)

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AND
LEIF BABIN**

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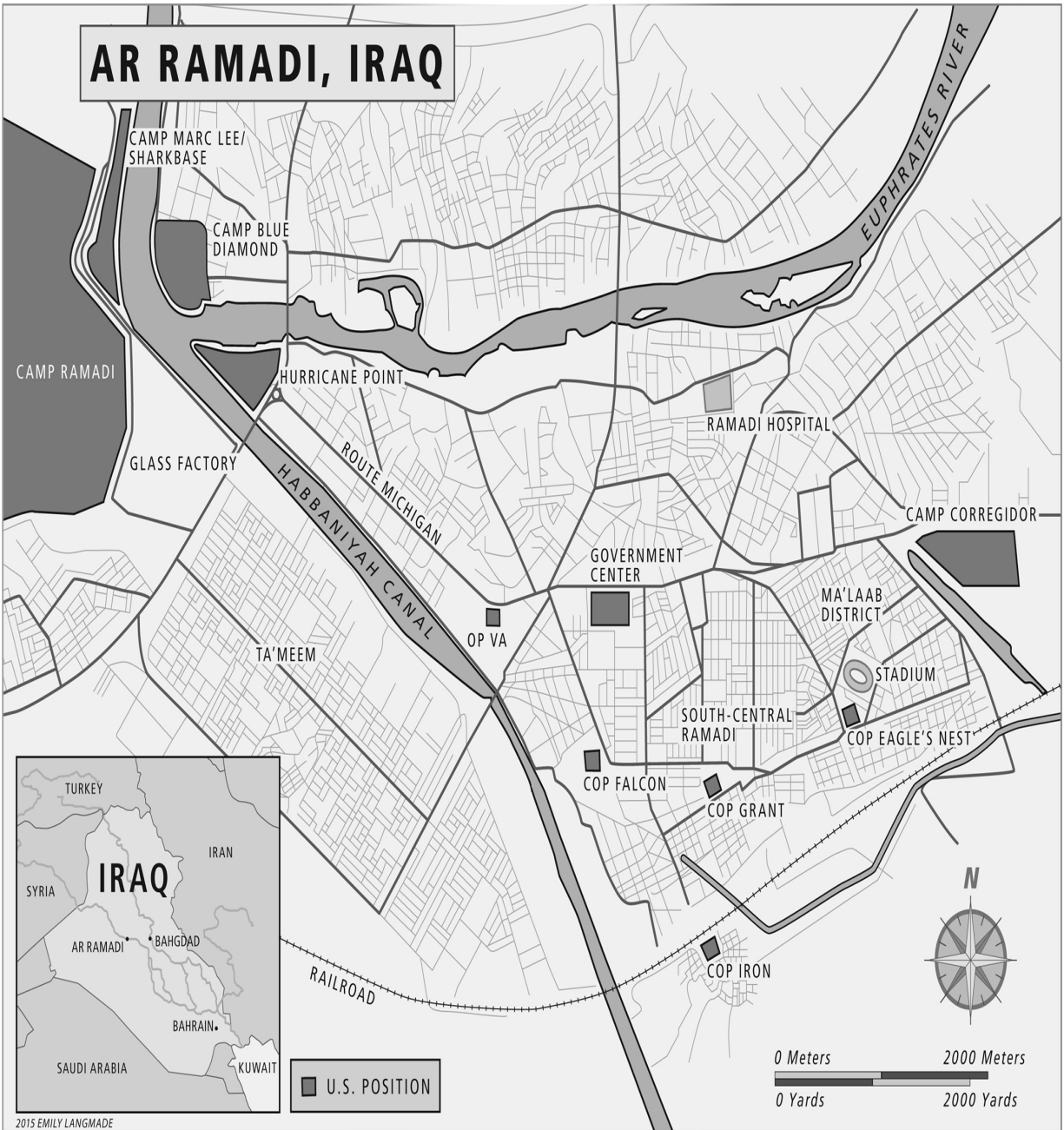
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Dedicated to Marc Lee, Mike Monsoor, and Ryan Job—three courageous warriors, SEAL teammates, and friends—who valiantly wielded their big machine guns on the mean streets of Ramadi and laid down their lives so that others might live.

AR RAMADI, IRAQ



2015 EMILY LANGMADE

FOREWORD

Of the many exceptional leaders we served alongside throughout our military careers, the consistent attribute that made them great was that they took absolute ownership—Extreme Ownership—not just of those things for which they were responsible, but for everything that impacted their mission. These leaders cast no blame. They made no excuses. Instead of complaining about challenges or setbacks, they developed solutions and solved problems. They leveraged assets, relationships, and resources to get the job done. Their own egos took a back seat to the mission and their troops. These leaders truly *led*.

In the years since we left active duty, we have worked with multitudes of business professionals, from senior executives to frontline managers, across a vast range of industries, including finance, construction, manufacturing, technology, energy, retail, pharmaceutical, health care, and also, military, police, fire departments, and emergency first responders. The most successful men and women we've seen in the civilian world practice this same breed of Extreme Ownership. Likewise, the most successful high-performance teams we've worked with demonstrate this mind-set throughout their organizations.

Since the publication of *Extreme Ownership*, we've heard from readers across the United States and around the world whose lives have been strongly impacted for good. They've told us how implementing its principles changed their lives and made them better: a more productive employee, a more supportive spouse, or a more engaged parent. Once people stop making excuses, stop blaming others, and take ownership of everything in their lives, they are compelled to take action to solve their problems. They are better leaders, better followers, more dependable and actively contributing team members, and more skilled in aggressively driving toward mission accomplishment. But they're also humble—able to keep their egos from damaging relationships and adversely impacting the mission and the team.

We've heard countless stories about how applying these combat leadership principles have helped readers accomplish what others, or even they themselves, had previously thought impossible. *Extreme Ownership* has helped people all over the world launch a successful company or nonprofit, receive a major promotion, land a better job with greater responsibility and more opportunity for growth, hit numbers far beyond expectations, achieve special recognition as an exceptional team member, or accomplish their goals, whatever they may be.

Every day we hear new stories—different people, different businesses, different industries. The details change. The characters are diverse. There are always slight differences in the way things unfold. But their outcomes are ultimately the same. “I can't believe how well that works” is a common response.

The principles are simple, but not easy. Taking ownership for mistakes and failures is hard. But doing so is key to learning, to developing solutions, and, ultimately, to victory. Those who successfully implement these principles run circles around the rest of the world.

Since the release of *Extreme Ownership*, the fundamental principles of combat leadership that we learned on the battlefield of Iraq have been exposed to, understood, and implemented by hundreds of thousands of readers around the world. We've worked with thousands more individuals through our leadership consulting business, Echelon Front, and reached a vast audience on social media. We've also been fortunate to receive feedback from many of them on a daily basis. Their responses have been incredible.

We've heard from readers who called the book: “life-changing,” “the best leadership book I've ever read,” and “exactly what I needed to hear.” They explain how they have learned even more on the second, third, or fourth read through the book. There can be no higher compliment to us as authors than to observe the scores of *Extreme Ownership* copies we have signed with multiple color tabs marking well-underlined, highlighted, and dog-eared pages with scribbled notes in the margins that serve as testament to the book's frequent use as a ready reference guide for engaged leaders navigating the challenges of business and life. Such testimonials and observations inspire us to work even harder ourselves.

But what's been even more gratifying is to hear about are the *RESULTS*.

We get reports from military leaders on the front lines putting the principles to work against our nation's enemies; these leaders are “leading up the chain of command” to receive the green light for approval to launch on critical battlefield missions or utilize crucial resources. Chief executive officers of massive, global companies detail how they have initiated *Extreme Ownership* in their organizations and observed their personnel throughout the chain of command step up and lead. We hear from first responders who utilize the lessons from *Extreme Ownership* in their official training programs to lead their troops in stressful and dangerous situations. All of their stories have reinforced what we learned in the

SEAL Teams: leadership is the most important thing on the battlefield and the principles of good leadership do not change regardless of the mission, the environment, or the personalities of those involved. Leading is leading.

We worked with the division of a construction company that faced the grim possibility of shutdown due to systemic safety problems. But once its employees implemented Extreme Ownership, the division not only solidified their right to operate, but it also earned a top position in safety at the company. We've helped companies streamline their manufacturing process, make deadlines on the delivery of product, and complete vast projects on time and under budget. We've guided young, capable, eager leaders struggling in antagonistic relationships with their bosses to implement the mind-set of no excuses and no one else to blame. By taking ownership, checking their egos, and accepting the blame for a difficult relationship, they repaired relationships and regained the trust of their leaders. As a result, they achieved recognition above their peers and throughout their industry for exceptional performance. We've heard from leaders in the medical profession who tell us how explaining the "why" to their team and communicating orders in a "simple, clear, and concise" manner greatly enhanced their team's performance and saved lives in the operating room.

We've watched fire department battalion training chiefs utilize *Extreme Ownership* as a handbook, teaching their firefighters to implement "Cover and Move" to better function as a team, enabling them to more effectively serve their communities while better protecting their firefighters in harm's way. We've seen police officers promoted into leadership positions of greater authority and responsibility attribute their success directly to the principles of *Extreme Ownership*.

A number of school teachers, educators, and coaches have told us how the concepts of this book have made them better, delivering greater impact and improving the lives of their students and athletes. Pastors and mission groups have relayed to us how *Extreme Ownership* made their teams more effective, delivering greater impact to the lives of people in need.

We've even heard from spouses who tell us how *Extreme Ownership* saved their marriage. Once they stopped pointing fingers and casting blame on their wife or husband, they were able to look inwardly at what they could take ownership of to produce a better outcome. As a result, their relationships were repaired and strengthened.

To see such far-reaching, extraordinary impact is deeply meaningful to us. We wrote this book to truly help others—leaders and aspiring leaders—to be better: to lead more successful and fulfilling lives, become more engaged and effective people, to have a greater impact for good on everyone around them.

Helping others live better lives is also a way for us to honor the legacy and heritage of those we served with in combat who gave their last full measure. We

owe them everything.

We believe in these principles because we have witnessed their extraordinary results, not only on the battlefield, but also in business and in life. We look forward to watching the message continue to spread far and wide and to seeing the mind-set of Extreme Ownership continue to enable every leader, every follower, and every person to become even more effective and to fulfill their ultimate purpose: *lead and win*.

GET AFTER IT.

—*Jocko Willink and Leif Babin*
July 2017

PREFACE

“*So, there I was...*”

Plenty of glorified war stories start like that. In the SEAL Teams, we make fun of those who tell embellished tales about themselves. A typical war story told in jest about something a SEAL did usually begins like this: “So, no shit, there I was, knee-deep in grenade pins...”

This book isn’t meant to be an individual’s glorified war story. As SEALs, we operate as a team of high-caliber, multitalented individuals who have been through perhaps the toughest military training and most rigorous screening process anywhere. But in the SEAL program, it is all about *the Team*. The sum is far greater than the parts. We refer to our professional warfare community simply as “the Teams.” We call ourselves “team guys.” This book describes SEAL combat operations and training through our eyes—from our individual perspectives—and applies our experience to leadership and management practices in the business world.

Yet, our SEAL operations were not about us as individuals; our stories are of the SEAL platoon and task unit we were lucky enough to lead. Chris Kyle, the SEAL sniper and author of the best seller *American Sniper*, which inspired the movie, was one member of that platoon and task unit—Charlie Platoon’s lead sniper and point man in Task Unit Bruiser. He played a part in the combat examples in this book, as did a host of other teammates who, though deserving of recognition, remain out of the spotlight. Far from being ours alone, the war stories in this book are of the brothers and leaders we served with and fought alongside—the Team. The combat scenarios describe how we confronted obstacles as a team and overcame those challenges together. After all, there can be no leadership where there is no team.

* * *

Between the Vietnam War and the Global War on Terrorism, the U.S. military experienced a thirty-year span of virtually no sustained combat operations. With the exception of a few flashes of conflict (Grenada, Panama, Kuwait, Somalia), only a handful of U.S. military leaders had any real, substantial combat experience. In the SEAL Teams, these were the “dry years.” As those who served in heavy combat situations in the jungles of Vietnam retired, their combat leadership lessons faded.

All that changed on September 11, 2001, when the horrific terrorist attacks on the U.S. homeland launched America once again into sustained conflict. More than a decade of continuous war and tough combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan gave birth to a new generation of leaders in the ranks of America’s fighting forces. These leaders were forged not in classrooms through hypothetical training and theory, but through practical, hands-on experience on the front lines of war—the front echelon.¹ Leadership theories were tested in combat; hypotheses put through trials of fire. Across the ranks of the U.S. military services, forgotten wartime lessons were rewritten—in blood. Some leadership principles developed in training proved ineffective in actual combat. Thus, effective leadership skills were honed while those that proved impractical were discarded, spawning a new generation of combat leaders from across the broad ranks of all U.S. military services—Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force—and those of our allies. The U.S. Navy SEAL Teams were at the forefront of this leadership transformation, emerging from the triumphs and tragedies of war with a crystallized understanding of what it takes to succeed in the most challenging environments that combat presents.

Among this new generation of combat leaders there are many war stories. After years of successful operations, including the heroic raid that killed Osama bin Laden, U.S. Navy SEALs have piqued the public’s interest and received more attention than most of us ever wanted. This spotlight has shed light on aspects of our organization that should remain secret. In this book, we are careful not to remove that shroud any further. We do not discuss classified programs or violate nondisclosure agreements surrounding our operational experiences.

Many SEAL memoirs have been written—some by experienced and well-respected operators who wanted to pass on the heroic deeds and accomplishments of our tribe; a few, unfortunately, by SEALs who hadn’t contributed much to the community. Like so many of our SEAL teammates, we had a negative view when SEAL books were published.

Why then would we choose to write a book? As battlefield leaders, we learned extremely valuable lessons through success and failure. We made mistakes and learned from them, discovering what works and what doesn’t. We trained SEAL

leaders and watched them implement the principles we ourselves had learned with the same success on difficult battlefields. Then, as we worked with businesses in the civilian sector, we again saw the leadership principles we followed in combat lead to victory for the companies and executives we trained. Many people, both in the SEAL Teams and in the businesses we worked with, asked us to document our lessons learned in a concrete way that leaders could reference.

We wrote this book to capture those leadership principles for future generations, so that they may not be forgotten, so that as new wars begin and end, such crucial lessons will not have to be relearned—rewritten in more blood. We wrote this so that the leadership lessons can continue to impact teams beyond the battlefield in all leadership situations—any company, team, or organization in which a group of people strives to achieve a goal and accomplish a mission. We wrote this book for leaders everywhere to utilize the principles we learned to lead and win.

Who are we to write such a book? It may seem that anyone who believes they can write a book on leadership must think themselves the epitome of what every leader should aspire to be. But we are far from perfect. We continue to learn and grow as leaders every day, just as any leaders who are truly honest with themselves must. We were simply fortunate enough to experience an array of leadership challenges that taught us valuable lessons. This book is our best effort to pass those lessons on, not from a pedestal or a position of superiority, but from a humble place, where the scars of our failings still show.

We are Jocko Willink and Leif Babin, SEAL officers who served together in Ar Ramadi, Iraq, during Operation Iraqi Freedom. There, we became intimately familiar with the humbling trials of war. We were lucky enough to build, train, and lead high-performance, winning teams that proved exceptionally effective. We saw firsthand the perils of complacency, having served on a battlefield where at any time the possibility of our position being overrun by a large force of well-armed enemy fighters was quite real. We know what it means to fail—to lose, to be surprised, outmaneuvered, or simply beaten. Those lessons were the hardest, but perhaps the most important. We learned that leadership requires belief in the mission and unyielding perseverance to achieve victory, particularly when doubters question whether victory is even possible. As SEAL leaders, we developed, tested, confirmed, and captured an array of leadership lessons as well as management and organizational best practices. We then built and ran SEAL leadership training and helped write the doctrine for the next generation of SEAL leaders.

Our SEAL task unit served through the bulk of what has become known as the “Battle of Ramadi.” But this book is not intended as a historical account of those combat operations. In a concise volume such as this, we cannot possibly tell the stories of service and sacrifice by the U.S. military men and women who served,

fought, bled, and died there. We—the authors and the SEALs we served with in Ramadi—were tremendously humbled by the courage, dedication, professionalism, selflessness, and sacrifice displayed by the units we served with under both the U.S. Army 2nd Brigade, 28th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, and the U.S. Army 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division—the Ready First Brigade Combat Team. These included a distinguished list of courageous and storied units, both U.S. Army and Marine Corps. It would require an entire book (or series of books) to detail their heroism and unfaltering dedication to the mission and our country. God bless them all.

Inside that Band of Brothers carrying out the broader fight for Ramadi was our SEAL task unit: Naval Special Warfare Task Unit Bruiser. Again, the combat experiences relayed in the following chapters are not meant for historic reference. Although we have used quotes to impart the message of conversations we had, they are certainly not perfect, and are subject to the passage of time, the constraints of this format, and the shortfalls of memory. Our SEAL combat experiences depicted in this book have been carefully edited or altered to conceal specific tactics, techniques, and procedures, and to guard classified information about when and where specific operations took place and who participated in them. The manuscript was submitted and approved through the Pentagon's Security Review process in accordance with U.S. Department of Defense requirements. We have done our utmost to protect the identities of our brothers in the SEAL Teams with whom we served and for those still serving in harm's way. They are silent professionals and seek no recognition. We take this solemn responsibility to protect them with the utmost seriousness.

We took the same precaution with the rest of the warriors in the Ready First Brigade Combat Team. We have used, almost entirely, rank alone to identify these brave Soldiers and Marines.² This is by no means meant to detract from their service, but only to ensure their privacy and security.

Likewise, we have done our utmost to protect the clients of our leadership and management consulting company, Echelon Front, LLC. We have refrained from using company names, changed the names of individuals, masked industry-specific information, and in some cases altered the positions of executives and industries to protect the identities of people and companies. Their confidentiality is sacrosanct. While the stories of our lessons learned in the business world are based directly on our real experiences, in some cases we combined situations, condensed timelines, and modified story lines to more clearly emphasize the principles we are trying to illustrate.

The idea for this book was born from the realization that the principles critical to SEAL success on the battlefield—how SEALs train and prepare their leaders, how they mold and develop high-performance teams, and how they lead in combat—are directly applicable to success in any group, organization, corporation,

business, and, to a broader degree, life. This book provides the reader with our formula for success: the mind-set and guiding principles that enable SEAL leaders and combat units to achieve extraordinary results. It demonstrates how to apply these directly in business and life to likewise achieve victory.