

The Good Soldiers, by David Finkel, National Enterprise Editor, Washington Post. © 2009, by David Finkel

Excerpt (Chapter 5) of the 2 Reuters Cameramen (plus 2 kids & 12 or so others) deaths by US helicopter (Apache) fire, July 12, 2007. Description of AH-47 snuff incident begins after the string (in red) “*end of page 91*”. If you want more of the background/context of the day, start at the beginning of the chapter, here.

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JULY 12, 2007

We're helping enhance the size, capabilities, and effectiveness of the Iraqi security forces so the Iraqis can take over the defense of their own country. We're helping the Iraqis take back their neighborhoods from the extremists.

—GEORGE W. BUSH, *July 12, 2007*

*[Military acronym BUSH stands for BULL SH*t. I don't know what the GEORGE and WALKER stand for, however. Ed.]*

““**W**hat’s happened that has turned everything into a fight?” Kauzlarich had wondered in June. “What the hell is going on?” Now, in July, as the daily explosions continued, he had his answer.

“We’re winning,” he explained. “They wouldn’t be fighting if we weren’t winning. They wouldn’t have a reason to. It’s a measure of *effectiveness*.”

Cummings believed it, too, although he said it differently.

“Good thing we’re winning,” he’d begun reciting on the five-minute walk from his desk to the DFAC [*Dining FACility — used to be called Mess Hall. Ed.*] as he continuously scanned for the closest place to run to for cover in case of a rocket attack. “Because if we were losing”

Meanwhile, at Alpha Company’s COP [*Combat OutPost, I believe. Ed.*], which had been renamed COP Cajimat, someone put up a handmade morale meter with seven different settings.

“Embracing the suck,” was one.

“Fuck this shit, I quit,” was another.

“Bend over. Here it comes again,” was another.

But it wasn't as if they had a choice. They were soldiers whose choices had ended when they had signed contracts and taken their oaths. Whether they had joined for reasons of patriotism, of romantic notions, to escape *[end of page 83, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]*



Al-Amin, Baghdad, Iraq

[end of page 84, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]

a broken home of some sort, or out of economic need, their job now was to follow the orders of other soldiers who were following orders, too. Somewhere, far from Iraq, was where the orders began, but by the time they reached Rustamiyah, the only choice left for a soldier was to choose which lucky charm to tuck behind his body armor, or which foot to line up in front of the other, as he went out to follow the order of the day. Order: “enhance the size, capabilities, and effectiveness of the Iraqi security forces so the Iraqis can take over the defense of their own country.” So

out they went to do that, day after day, even though the fact was that the Iraqi Security Forces were a joke.

Every one of the soldiers knew it. How could they not? Just about every time an EFP exploded, it seemed to be within sight of an Iraqi Security Forces checkpoint, and did the Iraqis manning those checkpoints not see someone who was two hundred feet away digging in the dirt, emplacing an EFP, and unspooling some wire? Did they know the EFP was there and not say anything because they were in partnership? Were they merely incompetent? Was there another explanation that would make them worthy of an American soldier's respect? Did they ever come running to help? No. Even once? No.

And yet in the strategy of the surge, Americans and Iraqis were supposed to work together, so Kauzlarich began building a relationship with a man named Qasim Ibrahim Alwan, who was in charge of a 550-member National Police battalion whose AO overlapped the 2-16s. It was Colonel Qasim's men who were often the ones suspiciously nearby when the EFPs went off. Qasim himself, however, seemed to be sincerely trying to work with Kauzlarich and his soldiers, even though he was in constant jeopardy for doing so. He received frequent text messages on his cell phone telling him that he was going to be killed. He was a Sunni, and most of his soldiers were Shiite, and for all he knew they were the ones sending the text messages.

As a result, Qasim led a wary, uneasy life. But instead of running away from Baghdad and becoming one of Iraq's three million internally displaced people, or running away from Iraq entirely and becoming one of the war's two million refugees, he continued to align himself with the Americans, even showing up to pay his respects at Cajimat's memorial *[end of page 85, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]* service. As he took his seat, some soldiers openly seethed that an Iraqi was in their midst. But he seemed genuinely moved by the display of a dead soldier's empty boots and the mournful tone of eulogies, and when the Americans bowed their heads in silent prayer and he raised his palms and lifted his eyes skyward, the splendor of the moment was not lost on Kauzlarich. "If I lose Qasim, I'm fucked," he told his soldiers one day. "We're fucked." That's how deeply Kauzlarich was coming to trust Qasim.

But Qasim was the only one. The rest were to be suspicious of, starting with the very first Iraqi some of them had met back at Fort Riley, just before they deployed, a visiting general who couldn't have seemed

less interested as soldiers performed an exercise for him in which they showed how they had been trained to enter a building. Flawlessly, they did it once for the general, and then again, and what the general did for them was to stuff his hands in his overcoat, look down at some melting snow, kick at it with his polished maroon shoes, and make some perfunctory comments about how he was “very hopeful” that the Iraqi and American soldiers would be able to work well together.

Five months later, that hadn't yet happened. It was now the Americans' turn to watch Iraqi soldiers in training, and what they were seeing was a sorry collection of thirty Iraqi Army soldiers and twenty National Police officers who didn't even have the rudimentary skills that were taught to American soldiers in basic training. Their uniforms didn't quite fit. Their hair was shaggy. Their helmets were on cockeyed. They were at a weedy, rundown Iraqi military academy adjacent to Rustamiyah, doing an exercise in which they were supposed to learn the American way of patrolling, and one soldier who was walking backward swiveled around just in time to walk face first into a tree trunk. Now they were supposed to rest by kneeling down on one knee — “Take a knee” was the instruction — and one who was clearly too old to be a soldier, and too overweight to be a soldier, instead sprawled on the ground and began plucking at some weeds.

“Pretty good,” a major named Rob Ramirez, who was observing the training for Kauzlarich, called out, and when the soldier on the ground *[end of page 86, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]* smiled and waved at Ramirez, Ramirez smiled and waved back, while saying under his breath, “When we leave, they're going to get whacked.”

It was a hot day, above 110 degrees. Everyone was sweat-soaked, the old, overweight soldier most of all. He had been a tank driver in the days of Saddam's army, but now, with unemployment rates in this part of Iraq said to be over 50 percent, he was just trying to hang in there with the others, all of whom were trying to hang in, too. In spite of the heat, they were glad to have been selected for this training course. Their rooms were air-conditioned. The toilets and showers worked. They would be here a total of four weeks before having to go back to their regular, post-invasion lives in Baghdad, and they wondered sometimes if the Americans understood what life for them had become. The lack of electricity. The lack of equipment and money. The lack of everything, really, other than threats. “We are afraid,” an Iraqi Army lieutenant

colonel named Abdul Haitham confided, and did the Americans understand that?

Break over, the Iraqis stood and moved down a dirt road with their mismatched guns as Haitham stayed back to ask Ramirez a question.

“If anything happens to us, what will happen to our families?” he asked, and then explained that when word circulated that he worked with the Americans, his name was read aloud in a mosque, a death threat was issued, and, as he and his family fled to the safety of a relative’s house, his house was destroyed. “Even my kids’ photos,” he said of what he saw when he was able to return briefly. “They used a knife. They cut the neck. They burned the eyes. They cut the ears.” Then they set the house on fire, he said, and three months later his family was still with relatives and he was living in a room at the academy. “I am waiting for a visa to America,” Haitham said. “Because I hate this country.”

He looked at Ramirez anxiously, the question of help implicit, and Ramirez looked back at him, at his worried face, at his sweat-stained uniform, at his thick chest, at his big hands, at his fat fingers, and finally at a shiny ring on one of those fingers, a ring with a large stone. It was a stone favored by members of Jaish al Mahdi, and, in particular, Jaish al Mahdi triggermen. *[end of page 87, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]*

Who is this man? Ramirez wondered, and so he changed the subject. “On a good note, training is going good, I think,” he said.

Haitham sighed. “For thirty-five years I built that house step by step. I buy it with my own money, and then I built it, and then I lose it,” he said, and then excused himself so he could catch up with his men.

On they went, through a series of tests that were supposed to prepare them for leading patrols in Baghdad. The first involved the discovery of a suspicious box. They noticed it hidden in some weeds and cordoned it off. The second involved celebratory gunfire at a wedding. They guessed what it was and didn’t shoot the bride or the groom. The third involved an assault by rock throwers, which turned out to be a couple of guys halfheartedly lobbing a few small stones that the Iraqis picked up and laughingly threw back. Then came a fourth scenario that hadn’t been planned, an actual rocket attack. The Iraqis heard the warning horn drifting over from Rustamiyah, where radar had picked up the approaching rockets, and as several came down in the distance and exploded, some of the Iraqis used the occasion to grab a leisurely smoke until the all-clear.

A few hours later, the exercises done for the day, the temperature even higher, everyone gathered on some bleachers next to a sun-beaten field to review how had they done. Suddenly one of them collapsed.

It was the old, overweight tanker. He was quickly surrounded by other Iraqis, but there wasn't much they could do. Not only were they a collection of mismatched uniforms and weapons, but they had no supplies on hand other than useless bottles of hot drinking water, which they dumped onto the man, and the man's sweat-soaked shirt, which they removed and used to wipe down his face.

It was the ready-for-anything Americans who came to the rescue. Ramirez's medic had cool water and a portable IV kit. He uncoiled the plastic tubing and prepared the IV bag as the collapsed Iraqi watched through half-open eyes. Next the medic began readying the needle, and now the Iraqi was trying to sit up.

"I'm okay," he said weakly.

"You look sick," Abdul Haitham said.

"Believe me, I'm good," the man insisted. *[end of page 88, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]*

"Are you scared?" Haitham said. He started laughing.

Then everyone, except for the man, started laughing and drifted away until only the American medic was left. "*Shukran,*" the man said gratefully after drinking the cool water, and with whatever dignity a too-old, too-heavy soldier could muster, he rose to his feet, wobbled his way from the bleachers to a parked pickup truck, climbed in, shut the door, closed his eyes, and slumped forward onto the dashboard.

He appeared to be passed out.

"Oh shit," the medic said, spying this, and while the others went off with Haitham and his shiny ring that may have meant something or may have meant nothing, the American ran over to further help and enhance.

Kauzlarich's strategy for helping, in addition to befriending Qasim, was to go to meeting after meeting with Iraqi officials and to treat each one as if the outcome of the entire war hung in the balance. If the Iraqis served a platter of sheep's brain, he reached toward the skull and ate a handful of sheep's brain. If they wanted to talk about trash, he would talk about trash until even they were exhausted by his enthusiasm.

"In America, we do not put trash out in the street," he said at one meeting with a man named Esam Al-Timimi, who was the civil manager of Kauzlarich's part of Baghdad. "We have garbage *cans*, and the

garbage *man* drives up to the garbage cans, and throws the garbage in the garbage *truck*, and takes it away.” He paused for translation. Timimi sat behind an ornate desk decorated with fake red flowers and vines. On the wall was a broken cuckoo clock. “Do we want to do that here?” Kauzlarich asked. Timimi leaned forward. “We cannot compare to America,” he said. Kauzlarich started to reply, but Timimi cut him off. “Let me give you an example,” he said and launched into a story about a time years before, during the time of Saddam Hussein, when Spain decided to clean up the garbage of Sadr City. Contractors were hired with the promise that they could sell anything valuable that they found in the trash and keep the money. And it might have worked, Timimi said, except that the scavenging children of Sadr City got to the garbage first. “I saw children with black arms. I thought they were wearing clothing. Actually it was dirt. *[end of page 89, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]* They recycled everything, even the plastic inside medical bags,” he said. “This is an example. Our life is very hard.”

“So, Mr. Timimi,” Kauzlarich said, pressing on, “Do we want to buy big trash cans for people to put garbage in?”

And so Timimi told another story about a time when there *were* big trash cans for people to put garbage in, but the problem, he said, was that in their culture, children take out the trash, and the children were often too short to reach the big trash cans. “So they dumped it in the street next to the containers.”

“Let’s do this,” Kauzlarich tried. “Let’s buy the right-size plastic containers.”

And so Timimi told another story about a time when plastic containers for water were distributed, and people used them sometimes to store water, and other times to store petrol, and ended up getting sick. “Educated people—they understand. But it’s very difficult to teach the citizens of Nine Nissan,” he said.

And so Kauzlarich suggested putting the big trash cans not in homes but in schools. “So we can teach kids to put garbage in the garbage cans,” he said.

And Timimi thought about this, and ignoring the fact that so many schools had been ransacked and were closed, he said: “Good!”

That was an outstanding meeting.

But more often, the meetings were like the one Kauzlarich had with a sheik who began by saying, “I wanted to have a meeting with you to

thank you. I want to be the leader who brings peace to our area.”

And then he said that to do this he would need money and a car.

Also, “I need a new pistol.”

And bullets, too.

“Everybody wants something in this country,” Kauzlarich had said before the meeting, predicting what would happen. “Where is my telephone? Where is this? Where is that? When is America going to bring in paint? Walls? Electricity? Where’s the TV? Where, where, where?”

“It’s a gimme gimme gimme society,” he continued, and then backed down a bit. He wasn’t blind to how bad things had become because of the war’s ruinous beginnings, and unlike many soldiers, he had read enough [end of page 90, *The Good Soldiers*, July 12, 2007] about Iraq, and about Islam, to have at least a fundamental awareness of the people he was among. “The whole religion of Islam is supposed to be a peaceful religion, in which the jihad is supposed to be that internal fight to be the best person you can be,” he said. “I mean the Iraqi people, they’re not terrorists. They’re good people.”

Where things got blurry for Kauzlarich, though, was in the meaning of *good*, especially in the subset of Iraqis whom Kauzlarich found himself dealing with. The sheik, for instance: at one point Kauzlarich threatened him with jail for possibly being involved in an IED cell, but then let him go after he promised to provide information about what was going on inside Kamaliyah and to help keep things under control. So was the sheik good or bad? Was he an insurgent, or was he an informant? All Kauzlarich knew for sure was that he was making uncertain bargains with someone who wore a heavy gold watch and a pinky ring with a turquoise stone, smoked Miami-brand cigarettes, lit those cigarettes with a lighter that had flashing red-and-blue lights, blew smoke from those cigarettes into Kauzlarich’s face while asking for money, for guns, for bullets, for a new cell phone, for a car, and referred to Kauzlarich as “my dear Colonel K.”

He also called Kauzlarich “Muqaddam K” at times, and in this he had plenty of company. *Muqaddam* was the Arabic equivalent of lieutenant colonel. It was what people began calling Kauzlarich soon after his arrival in February, which so pleased him that in response, to show his respect, he had been trying to use Arabic, too.

He learned to say *habibi*, which was “dear friend.”

He learned to say *shaku maku* (“what’s up?”), *shukran la su’aiek*

(“thank you for asking”), and *sajjya dajfya* (“sunny and warm”).

He learned to say *anee wahid kelba* (“I am one sexy bitch”), which made people laugh every time he said it.

The months went by. The meetings grew repetitive. The same complaints. The same selfish requests. The same nothing done.

He learned to say *marfood* (“disapproved”) and *qadenee lei jenoon* (“it drives me crazy”).

June came.

He learned to say *cooloh khara* (“it’s all bullshit”) and *shadi ghabee* (“stupid monkey”). *[end of page 91, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]*

July now.

Allah ye sheelack, he found himself saying. I hope you die. “May God take your soul.”

On July 12, Kauzlarich ate a Pop-Tart at 4:55 a.m., guzzled a can of Rip It Energy Fuel, belched loudly, and announced to his soldiers, “All right, boys. It’s time to get some.” On a day when in Washington, D.C., President Bush would be talking about “helping the Iraqis take back their neighborhoods from the extremists,” Kauzlarich was about to do exactly that.

The neighborhood was Al-Amin, where a group of insurgents had been setting off a lot of IEDs, most recently targeting Alpha Company soldiers as they tried to get from their COP to Rustamiyah for Crow’s memorial service a few days before. Two IEDs exploded on the soldiers that day, leaving several of them on their hands and knees, alive but stunned with concussions, and now Kauzlarich was about to swarm into that area with 240 soldiers, 65 Humvees, several Bradley Fighting Vehicles, and, on loan to them for a few hours from another battalion, two AH-64 Apache helicopter gunships.

All together, it made for a massive and intimidating convoy that at 5:00 a.m. was lining up to leave Rustamiyah when the radar system picked up something flying through the still-dark sky. “Incoming! Incoming!” came the recorded warning as the alert horn sounded. It was a sound that, by now, after so many such warnings, seemed less scary than melancholy, and the soldiers reacted to it with shrugs. Some standing in the open reflexively hit the dirt. The gunners who were standing up in their turrets dropped down into their slings. But most did nothing, because the bullet had been fired, it was only a matter of time, and if they knew

anything by now, it was that whatever happened in the next few seconds was the province of God, or luck, or whatever they believed in, rather than of them.

Really, how else to explain Stevens's split lip? Or what happened to a captain named Al Walsh when a mortar hit outside of his door early one morning as he slept? In came a piece of shrapnel, moving so swiftly that *[end of page 92, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]* before he could wake up and take cover, it had sliced through his wooden door, sliced through the metal frame of his bed, sliced through a 280-page book called *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, sliced through a 272-page book called *Buddhism Is Not What You Think*, sliced through a 128-page book called *On Guerrilla Warfare*, sliced through a 360-page book called *Tactics of the Crescent Moon*, sliced through a 176-page *Calvin and Hobbes* collection, sliced through the rear of a metal cabinet holding those books, and finally was stopped by a concrete wall. And the only reason that Walsh wasn't sliced was that he happened in that moment to be sleeping on his side rather than on his stomach or back, as he usually did, which meant that the shrapnel passed cleanly through the spot where his head usually rested, missing him by an inch. Dazed, ears ringing, unsure of what had just happened, and spotted with a little blood from being nicked by the exploding metal fragments of the ruined bed frame, he stumbled out to the smoking courtyard and said to another soldier, "Is anything sticking out of my head?" And the answer, thank whatever, was no.

Another example: How else to explain what had happened just the day before, in another mortar attack, when one of the mortars dropped down out of the sky and directly into the open turret of a parked Humvee? After the attack was over, soldiers gathered around the ruined Humvee to marvel — not at the destruction a mortar could cause, but at the odds. How much sky was up there? And how many landing spots were down here? So many possible paths for a mortar to follow, and never mind the fact that every one of them comes down in a particular place — the fact that this one followed the one path that brought it straight down through a turret without even touching the edges, a perfect swish, the impossible shot, made the soldiers realize how foolish they were to think that a mortar couldn't come straight down on them.

Resigned to the next few seconds, then, here they were, lined up at the gate, listening to the horn and the incessant, "Incoming! Incoming!"

and waiting for whatever was up there to drop.

One second.

Two seconds.

A boom over there. *[end of page 93, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]*

One second.

Two seconds.

Another boom, also over there.

And nothing here, not even close, no swish this time, so the gunners stood back up, the soldiers in the dirt dusted themselves off, and the massive convoy headed toward Al-Amin to begin a day that would turn out to feature four distinct versions of war.

Arriving just after sunrise, Charlie Company broke off from the convoy and headed to the west side of Al-Amin. It was a *saffya daffya* day, and the soldiers found no resistance as they began clearing streets and houses. Birds chirped. A few people smiled. One family was so welcoming that Tyler Andersen, the commander of Charlie Company, ended up standing under a shade tree with a man and his elderly father having a leisurely discussion about the war. The Iraqis asked why the Americans' original invasion force had been only one hundred thousand soldiers. They talked about the difficulties of life with only a few hours of electricity a day, and how much they mistrusted the Iraqi government because of the rampant corruption. The conversation, which lasted half an hour and ended in handshakes, was the longest, most civil one Andersen would have with an Iraqi in the entire war, and it filled him with an unexpected sense of optimism about what he and his company of soldiers were doing. That was the first version of war.

The second occurred in the center of Al-Amin, where Kauzlarich went with Alpha Company.

Here, sporadic gunfire could be heard, and the soldiers clung to walls as they moved toward a small neighborhood mosque. They had been tipped that it might be a hideout for weapons, and they wanted to get inside. The doors were chained shut, however, and even if they hadn't been, American soldiers weren't allowed in mosques without special permission. National Police could go in, but the three dozen NPs who were supposed to be part of this operation had yet to show up. Kauzlarich radioed Qasim. Qasim said they were coming. Nothing to do but wait and

wonder about snipers. Some soldiers took refuge in a courtyard where a family's wash was hanging out to dry. Others stayed bobbing and weaving on the street, which was eerily empty except for a woman in *[end of page 94, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]* black pulling along a small girl, who saw the soldiers and their weapons and burst into tears as she passed by.

Here, finally, came the NPs.

"There are weapons inside," Kauzlarich told the officer in charge, a brigadier general.

"No!" the general exclaimed in shock, and then laughed and led his men toward a house next door to the mosque. Without knocking, they pushed through the front door, went past a wide-eyed man holding a baby sucking his thumb, climbed the steps to the roof, took cover for a few minutes when they heard gunfire, jumped from that roof down onto the slightly lower roof of the mosque, went inside, and emerged a few minutes later with a rocket-propelled grenade launcher, an AK-47, ammunition, and, placed carefully into a bag, a partially assembled IED.

"Wow," Kauzlarich said after all this had been brought down to the street, and for a few moments, defying his own order to always keep moving, he stared at the haul, disgusted.

Weapons in a mosque. As a commander, he needed to understand why an *imam* might allow this, or even sanction it, because as it said in the field manual on Cummings's desk, which was getting dustier by the day, "Counterinsurgents must understand the environment." Good soldiers understood things. So did good Christians, and Kauzlarich desired to be one of those, too. "For he who avenges murder cares for the helpless," he had read the night before in the *One Year Bible*. "He does not ignore the cries of those who suffer."

Were these people suffering? Yes. Were they helpless? Yes. Was this their version of crying, then? Was the explanation somewhere in the words of Psalms?

But what about a statement released a few days before by an Iraqi religious leader, which said, in part: "Yes, O Bush, we are the ones who kidnap your soldiers and kill them and burn them. We will continue, God willing, so long as you only know the language of blood and the scattering of remains. Our soldiers love the blood of your soldiers. They compete to

chop off their heads. They like the game of burning down their vehicles.”

What a freak show this place was. And maybe that was the explanation *[end of page 95, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]* at it deserved no understanding whatsoever.

Weapons in a mosque, including an IED to burn vehicles and kill soldiers.

Unbelievable.

Shadi ghabees. Cooloh khara, Allah ye sheelack.

“*Shukran,*” Kauzlarich said out loud to the general, keeping his other thoughts to himself. He made his way to his Humvee to figure out where to go next and was just settling into his seat when he was startled by a loud burst of gunfire.

“Machine gun fire,” he said, wondering who was shooting.

But it wasn’t machine gun fire. It was bigger. More thundering. It was coming from above, just to the east, where the AH-64 Apache helicopters were circling, and it was so loud the entire sky seemed to jerk.

Now came a second burst.

“Yeah! We killed more motherfuckers,” Kauzlarich said.

Now came more bursts.

“Holy shit,” Kauzlarich said.

It was the morning’s third version of war.

One minute and fifty-five seconds before the first burst, the two crew members in one of the circling Apaches had noticed some men on a street on Al-Amin’s eastern edge.

“See all those people standing down there?” one asked.

“Confirmed,” said the other crew member. “That open courtyard?”

“Roger,” said the first.

Everything the crew members in both Apaches were saying was being recorded. So were their communications with the 2-16. To avoid confusion, anyone talking identified himself with a code word. The crew members in the lead Apache, for example, were Crazy Horse 1-8. The 2-16 person they were communicating with most frequently was Hotel 2-6.

There was a visual recording of what they were seeing as well, and what they were seeing now — one minute and forty seconds before they *[end of page 96, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]* fired their first burst — were some men walking along the middle of a street, several of whom appeared to be carrying weapons.

All morning long, this part of Al-Amin had been the most hostile. While Tyler Andersen had been under a shade tree in west Al-Amin, and Kauzlarich had dealt with occasional gunfire in the center part, east Al-Amin had been filled with gunfire and some explosions. There had been reports of sniper fire, rooftop chases, and rocket-propelled grenades being fired at Bravo Company, and as the fighting continued, it attracted the attention of Namir Noor-Eldeen, a 22-year-old photographer for the Reuters news agency who lived in Baghdad, and Saeed Chmagh, 40, his driver and assistant.

Some journalists covering the war did so by embedding with the U.S. military. Others worked independently. Noor-Eldeen and Chmagh were among those who worked independently, which meant that the military didn't know they were in Al-Amin. The 2-16 didn't know, and neither did the crews of the Apaches, which were flying high above Al-Amin in a slow, counter-clockwise circle. From that height, the crews could see all of east Al-Amin, but the optics in the lead Apache were now focused tightly on Noor-Eldeen, who had a camera strung over his right shoulder and was centered in the crosshairs of the Apache's thirty-millimeter automatic cannon.

“Oh yeah,” one of the crew members said to the other as he looked at the hanging camera. “That's a weapon.”

“Hotel Two-six, this is Crazy Horse One-eight,” the other crew member radioed in to the 2-16. “Have individuals with weapons.”

They continued to keep the crosshairs on Noor-Eldeen as he walked along the street next to another man, who seemed to be leading him. On the right side of the street were some trash piles. On the left side were buildings. Now the man with Noor-Eldeen guided him by the elbow toward one of the buildings and motioned for him to get down. Chmagh followed, carrying a camera with a long telephoto lens. Behind Chmagh were four other men, one of whom appeared to be holding an AK-47 and one of whom appeared to be holding a rocket-propelled grenade launcher. The crosshairs swung now away from Noor-Eldeen and toward one of

those men. *[end of page 97, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]* “Yup, he’s got one, too,” the crew member said. “Hotel Two-six, Crazy Horse One-eight. Have five to six individuals with AK-47s. Request permission to engage.”

It was now one minute and four seconds before the first burst.

“Roger that,” Hotel 2-6 replied. “We have no personnel east of our position, so you are free to engage. Over.”

“All right, we’ll be engaging,” the other crew member said.

They couldn’t engage yet, however, because the Apache’s circling had brought it to a point where some buildings now obstructed the view of the men.

“I can’t get them now,” a crew member said.

Several seconds passed as the lead Apache continued its slow curve around. Now it was almost directly behind the building that Noor-Eldeen had been guided toward, and the crew members could see someone peering around the corner, looking in their direction and lifting something long and dark. This was Noor-Eldeen, raising a camera with a tele-photo lens to his eyes.

“He’s got an RPG.”

“Okay, I got a guy with an RPG.”

“I’m gonna fire.”

But the building was still in the way.

“Goddamnit.”

The Apache needed to circle all the way around, back to an unobstructed view of the street, before the gunner would have a clean shot.

Ten seconds passed as the helicopter continued to curve.

“Once you get on it, just open —”

Almost around now, the crew could see three of the men. Just a little more to go.

Now they could see five of them.

“You’re clear.”

Not quite. One last tree was in the way.

“All right.”

There. Now all of the men could be seen. There were nine of them, including Noor-Eldeen. He was in the middle, and the others were clus-

[end of page 98, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007] tered around him, except for Chmagh, who was on his cell phone a few steps away.

“Light ’em all up.”

One second before the first burst, Noor-Eldeen glanced up at the Apache.

“Come on — fire.”

The others followed his gaze and looked up, too.

The gunner fired.

It was a 20-round burst that lasted for two seconds. *[This “automatic cannon” can fire 630 rounds of dual-purpose 30mm projectiles per minute; these contain a shape-charge to penetrate up to 2 inches of rolled steel armorplate, & fragment nicely to eliminate hominids. It is a ‘shape charge’ device (also known as an Explosively Formed Penetrators when used by ‘the enemy’). See description at the end of this excerpt. Ed.]*

“Machine gun fire,” Kauzlarich said quizzically, a half mile away, as the sky seemed to jerk, and meanwhile, here in east Al-Amin, nine men were suddenly grabbing their bodies as the street blew up around them, seven were now falling to the ground, dead or nearly dead, and two were running away — Chmagh and Noor-Eldeen.

The gunner saw Noor-Eldeen, tracked him in the crosshairs, and fired a second 20-round burst, and after running perhaps 12 steps, Noor-Eldeen dove into a pile of trash.

“Keep shooting,” the other crew member said.

There was a two-second pause, and then came the third burst. The trash all around where Noor-Eldeen lay facedown erupted. A cloud of dirt and dust rose into the air.

“Keep shooting.”

There was a one-second pause, and then came the fourth burst. In the cloud, Noor-Eldeen could be seen trying to stand, and then he simply seemed to explode.

All of this took twelve seconds. A total of 80 rounds had been fired. The 30-millimeter cannon was now silent. The pilot was silent. The gunner was silent. The scene they looked down on was one of swirling and rising dirt, and now, barely visible as some of the swirling dirt began to thin, they saw a person who was taking cover by crouching against a

wall.

It was Chmagh.

He stood and began to run. "I got him," someone said, and now he disappeared inside a fresh explosion of dirt, which rose and mingled with *[end of page 99, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]* what was already in the air as the Apaches continued circling and the crew members continued to talk.

"All right, you're clear," one said.

"All right, I'm just trying to find targets again," another said.

"We have a bunch of bodies laying there."

"All right, we got about eight individuals."

"Yeah, we definitely got some."

"Yeah, look at those dead bastards."

"Good shooting."

"Thank you."

The smoke was gone now and they could see everything clearly: the main pile of bodies, some prone, one on haunches, one folded into impossible angles; Noor-Eldeen on top of the trash; Chmagh lying motionless on his left side.

"Bushmaster Seven, Crazy Horse One-eight," they radioed to Bravo Company, whose soldiers were on their way to the site. "Location of bodies Mike Bravo Five-four-five-eight-eight-six-one-seven. They're on a street in front of an open courtyard with a bunch of blue trucks, a bunch of vehicles in a courtyard."

"There's one guy moving down there, but he's wounded," someone now said, looking down, scanning the bodies, focusing on Chmagh.

"This is One-eight," the crew member continued on the radio. "We also have one individual who appears to be wounded. Trying to crawl away."

"Roger. We're gonna move down there," Bravo Company replied.

"Roger. We'll cease fire," the Apache crew responded and continued to watch Chmagh, still alive somehow, who in slow motion seemed to be trying to push himself up. He got partway and collapsed. He tried again, raising himself slightly, but again he went down. He rolled onto his stomach and tried to get up on his knees, but his left leg stayed extended behind him, and when he tried to lift his head, he could get it only a few inches off the ground.

“Do you see a shot?” one of the crew members said.

“Does he have a weapon in his hands?” the other said, aware of the rules governing an engagement. *[end of page 100, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]*

“No, I haven’t seen one yet.”

They continued to watch and to circle as Chmagh sank back to the ground.

“Come on, buddy,” one of them urged.

“All you gotta do is pick up a weapon,” another said.

Now, as had happened earlier, their circling brought them behind some buildings that obstructed their view of the street, and when they were next able to see Chmagh, someone they had glimpsed running up the street was crouching over him, a second man was running toward them, and a Kia passenger van was approaching.

“Bushmaster, Crazy Horse,” they radioed in urgently. “We have individuals going to the scene. Looks like possibly picking up bodies- and weapons. Break —”

The van stopped next to Chmagh. The driver got out, ran around to the passenger side, and slid open the cargo door.

“Crazy Horse One-eight. Request permission to engage.”

Ready to fire, they waited for the required response from Bravo Company as two of the passersby tried to pick up Chmagh, who was facedown on the sidewalk. One man had Chmagh by the legs. The second man was trying to turn him over onto his back. Were they insurgents? Were they people only trying to help?

“Come *on!* Let us *shoot.*”

Now the second man had hold of Chmagh under his arms.

“Bushmaster, Crazy Horse One-eight,” the Apache said again.

But there was still no response as the driver got back in his seat and the two men lifted Chmagh and carried him around the front of the van toward the open door.

“They’re taking him.”

“*Bushmaster, Crazy Horse One-eight.*”

They had Chmagh at the door now.

“This is Bushmaster Seven. Go ahead.”

They were pulling Chmagh to his feet.

“Roger, we have a black bongo truck picking up the bodies. Request permission to engage.”

They were pushing Chmagh into the van. *[end of page 101, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]*

“This is Bushmaster Seven. Roger. Engage.”

He was in the van now, the two men were closing the door, and the van was beginning to move forward.

“One-eight, clear.”

“Come on!”

A first burst.

“Clear.”

A second burst.

“Clear.”

A third burst.

“Clear.”

Ten seconds. Sixty rounds. The two men outside of the van ran, dove, and rolled against a wall as some of the rounds exploded around them. The van continued forward a few yards, abruptly jerked backward, crashed into the wall near the men, and was now enveloped in smoke.

“I think the van’s disabled,” a crew member said, but to be sure, now came a fourth burst, a fifth, and a sixth — ten more seconds, 60 more rounds—and that, at last, was the end of the shooting. *[80 + 60 = 140 rounds of 30mm HEDP — high explosive/dual purpose (shape charges, EFPs, for piercing armor; fragmentation/shrapnel for eliminating hominids — all in a neat, fused (point-detonating, superquick type) mini-artillery shell just 1.18 inches in diameter. Ed.]*

Now it was a matter of waiting for Bravo Company’s soldiers to arrive on the scene, and here they came, in Humvees and on foot, swarming across a thoroughly ruined landscape. The battlefield was theirs now, from the main pile of bodies, to the trash pile with Noor-Eldeen, to the shot-up houses and buildings, to the van—inside of which, among the bodies, they discovered someone alive.

“Bushmaster Six, Bravo Seven,” a Bravo Company soldier called over the radio. “I’ve got eleven Iraqi KIAs, one small child wounded. Over.”

The Apache crews were listening.

“Ah, damn,” one of them said.

“We need to evac this child,” Bravo Seven continued. “She’s got a wound to the belly. Doc can’t do anything here. She needs to get evac’d. Over.”

“Well, it’s their fault for bringing their kids to a battle,” a crew member said.

“That’s right,” the other said, and for a few more minutes they continued to circle and watch. *[end of page 102, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]* They saw more Humvees arriving, one of which drove up onto the trash pile, right over the part containing what was left of Noor-Eldeen’s body.

“That guy just drove over a body.”

“Did he?”

“Yeah”

“Well, they’re dead, so —”

They watched a soldier emerge from the van cradling the wounded girl and run with her in his arms to the army vehicle that was going to evacuate her to a hospital.

They watched another soldier emerge from the van a few minutes later cradling a second wounded child, this one a little boy who had been discovered under a body presumed to be his father’s, which was draped over the boy, either protectively or because that was how a dead man happened to fall.

And then they flew on to another part of Al-Amin as more and more Bravo Company soldiers arrived, one of whom was Jay March, the soldier who on the battalion’s very first day in Iraq had climbed a guard tower, peeked out at all of the trash, and said quietly and nervously, “We ain’t ever gonna be able to find an IED in all this shit.”

Since then, March had learned how prophetic he was, especially on June 25, when an EFP killed his friend Andre Craig, Jr. Craig’s memorial service had been on July 7, and now, five days later, as March saw all of the bodies scattered around, blown open, insides exposed, so gruesome, so grotesque, he felt — as he would later explain — “happy. It was weird. I was just really very happy. I remember feeling so happy. When I heard they were engaging, when I heard there’s thirteen KIA, I was just so happy, because Craig had just died, and it felt like, you know, we got

'em.”

As the Apaches peeled off, he and another soldier went through a gate in the wall that the van had crashed into and against which Chmagh had tried to take cover.

There, in the courtyard of a house, hidden from street view, they found two more injured Iraqis, one on top of the other. As March looked closer at the two, who might have been the two who had been lifting *[end of page 103, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]* Chmagh into the van, who as far as March knew had spent the morning trying to kill American soldiers, he realized that the one on the bottom was dead. But the one on top was still alive, and as March locked eyes with him, the man raised his hands and rubbed his two forefingers together, which March had learned was what Iraqis did when they wanted to signal the word *friends*.

So March looked at the man and rubbed his two forefingers together, too.

And then dropped his left hand and extended the middle finger of his right hand.

And then said to the other soldier, “Craig’s probably just sitting up there drinking beer, going, ‘Hah! That’s all I needed’ ” And that was the day’s third version of war.

As for the fourth version, it occurred late in the day, back on the FOB, after Kauzlarich and the soldiers had finished their work in Al-Amin. They knew by now about Chmagh and Noor-Eldeen. They had brought back Noor-Eldeen’s cameras and examined the images to see if he was a journalist or an insurgent.

They had gotten the video and audio recordings from the Apaches and had reviewed them several times.

They had looked at photographs taken by soldiers that showed AK-47s and a rocket-propelled grenade launcher next to the dead Iraqis.

They had reviewed everything they could about what had prefaced the killings in east Al-Amin, in other words—that soldiers were being shot at, that they didn’t know journalists were there, that the journalists were in a group of men carrying weapons, that the Apache crew had followed the rules of engagement when it fired at the men with weapons, at the journalists, and at the van with the children inside—and had concluded

that everyone had acted appropriately.

Had the journalists?

That would be for others to decide.

As for the men who had tried to help Chmagh, were they insurgents or just people trying to help a wounded man? *[end of page 104, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]*

They would probably never know.

What they did know: the good soldiers were still the good soldiers, and the time had come for dinner.

“Crow. Payne. Craig. Gajdos. Cajimat,” Kauzlarich said on the walk to the DFAC. “Right now? Our guys? They’re thinking, ‘Those guys didn’t die in vain. Not after what we did today.’”

Inside the DFAC, the TVs were tuned to Bush’s press conference, which had begun in Washington just a few minutes before.

“Our top priority is to help the Iraqis protect their population,” Bush was saying, “so we’ve launched an offensive in and around Baghdad to go after extremists, to buy more time for Iraqi forces to develop, and to help normal life and civil society take root in communities and neighborhoods throughout the country.

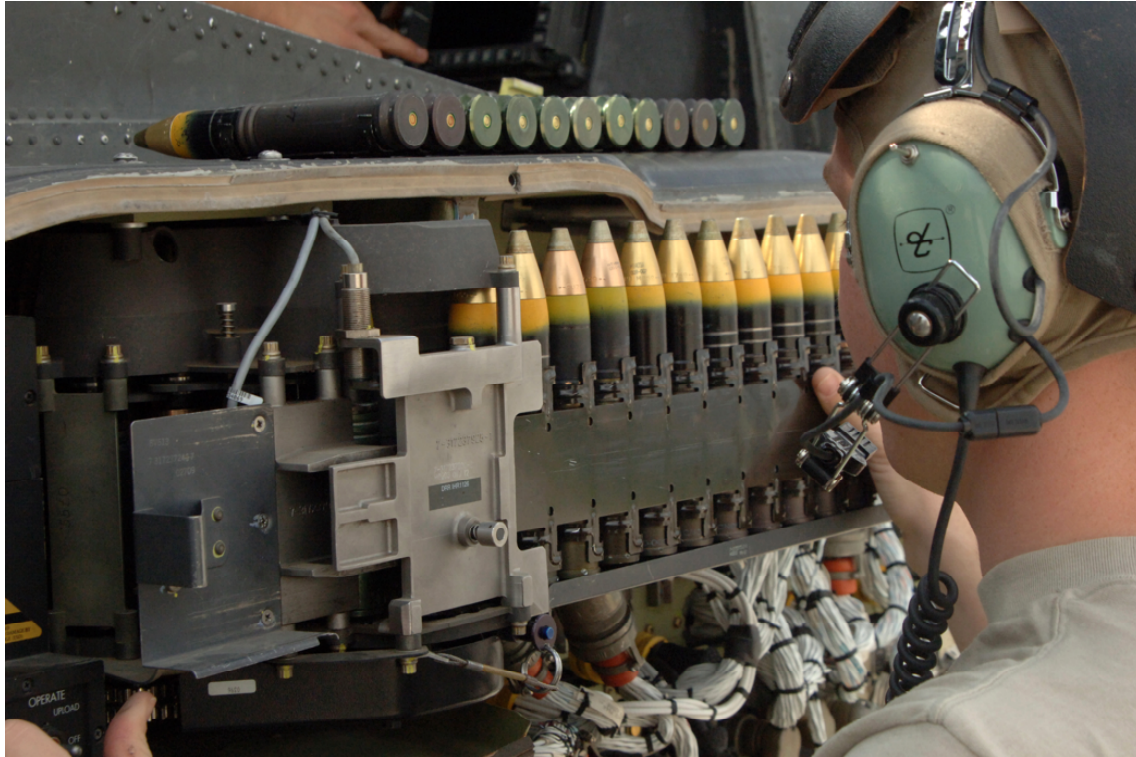
“We’re helping enhance the size, capabilities, and effectiveness of the Iraqi security forces so the Iraqis can take over the defense of their own country,” he continued. “We’re helping the Iraqis take back their neighborhoods from the extremists . . .”

This was the fourth version of war.

Kauzlarich watched as he ate. “I like this president,” he said.

[end of page 105, end of Chapter 5, The Good Soldiers, July 12, 2007]

Editorial addendum:



Soldier loading the Apache Attack Helicopter's 30mm cannon. The shells (aluminum casing + base + primer + projectile + fuze) are just about 7.8641732 inches long (199.75 mm).



According to ATK, “The [ATK](#) LW30mm HEDP ammunition features a spin-compensated, shaped-charge liner for superior armor defeat plus additional growth potential. Outstanding armor penetration, combined with blast, concussion and fragmentation characteristics, gives the LW30mm ammunition superior multi-role, multi-target capabilities.

“Combat proven in Operations Iraqi Freedom, Just Cause and Desert Storm, the LW30mm demonstrates excellent armor penetration at ranges from 150 to 4,000 meters.” Here's an ATK data-sheet on the ammo, next page.

LW30mm M789 HEDP
High Explosive Dual Purpose

DODIC B129

PHYSICAL DATA

Cartridge Length	.199.75mm
Cartridge Weight	.339g
Projectile Weight	.229g
Propellant Weight	.50g
Propellant Type	Ball or Extruded
Cartridge Case Length	.113mm
Cartridge Case Material	Aluminum
Primer	.PA520 Electric
Fuze	.M759 PD

PERFORMANCE DATA

Muzzle Velocity	.805 mps
Chamber Pressure (ambient)	.335 MPa
Dispersion	.135 mils
Penetration	.25mm RHA @ 50° at 500m

LW30mm HEDP ammunition features a spin-compensated, shaped-charge liner for superior armor defeat. Outstanding armor penetration at ranges from 150 to 4,000 meters, combined with blast, concussion and fragmentation characteristics, gives superior multi-role, multi-target defeat capabilities.

Developed and fielded for ATK's M230 chain gun on the AH-64 Apache helicopter, the ammunition is fully interoperable with the M230 Link Fed (LF) gun system.

Contact www.atk.com or call 480-324-8729 for more information.



Here you can see the 30mm canon, and the right landing gear is easy to see, while

the left wheel, tire & strut blends into the fuselage behind it—you can just make out a bit of the metallic (silver) wheel, but I can't distinguish the left strut from the fuselage.



The 30mm cannon sits between the front landing gear of the Apache. There's a hollow space just above the cannon into which the cannon can crumple in the case of a hard landing, w/o jamming into the crew sitting on either side of the hump.