

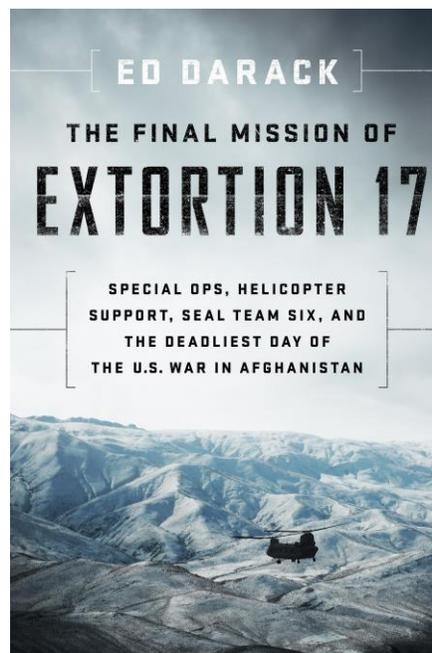


***The Final Mission of Extortion 17:
Special Ops, Helicopter Support, SEAL Team Six, and the
Deadliest Day of the U.S. War in Afghanistan***

Sample interview with author Ed Darack

1. Why did you decide to write this book?

The endeavor wasn't really a decision, but an evolution. After years of embedding with Marines in both training and on the front lines in Afghanistan (three times) and Iraq (twice), I moved to Fort Collins, Colorado in 2010. In early 2011 I embedded with a Marine infantry battalion in Afghanistan one last time, and then looked to continue my work documenting, through writing and photography, the military on the home front. I contacted the Colorado National Guard, expressing interest in documenting the 120th Fighter Squadron, an F-16 Unit based out of Buckley Air Force Base, in the Denver suburb of Aurora. Specifically, I wanted to write about their role in protecting America's skies ten years after the 9/11 attacks. I wrote an article about this for *Air & Space* magazine's September 2011 issue. This article was a great success, and one of the Colorado National Guard's public affairs officers, Darin Overstreet, suggested I should check out a facility of theirs called HAATS, or the Colorado Army National Guard's High Altitude Army National Guard Aviation Training Site, located at Gypsum, Colorado. The small cadre of instructor pilots at HAATS train helicopter pilots of all American military services and those of many ally nations in "high, hot, and heavy" flying, essentially flying in high altitude and degraded and mountainous areas, places that push both pilot and machine to their limits. While spending time at HAATS, I became friends with CW4 Darren Freyer, one of the instructors at the base. A year later, Darren introduced me to the Extortion 17 story, explaining that Dave Carter, one of the helicopter's pilots, was from Fort Collins, and actually buried in a cemetery in the town. Dave was once an instructor pilot at HAATS, as part of his Colorado Army National Guard career. Darren explained that through other instructors who had known Dave, I could learn the inside story of Extortion 17. No one had yet uncovered this full story.



After a number of trips to HAATS and about a dozen in-person and phone interviews, what I learned about Extortion 17 was far more in-depth than anything I'd seen printed or broadcast on the subject. *Air & Space* magazine published my article, "The Final Flight of Extortion 17" in the March 2015 issue, and this led to me connecting with others intimately familiar with the story, including those with insight into aspects of Extortion 17 I hadn't yet explored. With this wealth of new sources, I proceeded to develop the longer narrative into a book. I ultimately interviewed dozens of sources, including fellow aviators of Extortion Company, mothers, fathers, children, and widows of those lost. I also received information from military sources unconnected with those directly tied to the story that allowed me to fill in many blanks in the overall story. Ultimately, this book takes the reader into the most intimate of details of the

forging of the men of the story, reveals never-before-published details of the circumstances of the downing of Extortion 17 and those involved, and conveys the details and drama of the successful hunt of those responsible for the downing.

2. There's been a lot of conflicting reports about Extortion 17. What are the main issues that your book seeks to clear up?

I wrote this book to tell the story of Extortion 17 in great depth. Doing so definitely clarified a number of issues, but my primary purpose was to tell the incredible story, not to clarify any specific mis-stated fact. That said, there has been a tremendous amount of misinformation, and even some salacious and malicious conspiracy theories. I can say with full confidence that *The Final Mission of Extortion 17* is the definitive comprehensive narrative of this incredible story, and as such sets the record straight on a number of specific issues, including the conspiracy theories floated by some.

3. What types of research and interviews went into uncovering the true comprehensive story of the Extortion 17 mission?

The majority consisted of interviews with those intimate to all aspects of the story—mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, and wives of those at the heart of the story, as well as fellow aviators and war fighters. I also received a wide variety of other information detailing facts never published until this book. There was an incredibly broad range of information, from never-before-published second-by-second recounts of the downing of Extortion 17, to the never-before-revealed details of the strike against those responsible for the downing, to the background of those involved in Extortion 17, to the heartbreaking aftermath brought out by the very words of mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, and widows.

4. Tell us a bit more about how this mission fit in with other special ops teams. And what does the mission, in its place amongst other operations, reveal about modern warfare?

This is a great question, and one that I feel very fortunate to have been able to answer through the writing of this book. Through the narrative, I convey the human factors of modern war—from the perspective of war fighters, their mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, and wives—and also never-before-revealed details of how such special operations are developed. In this book I reveal, for the first time, details of how special operations are developed beginning from the collection of intelligence all the way through the process to mission execution, with an emphasis on how Army aviation fits into the picture.



Author / photographer Ed Darack prior to embarking on a combat operation with U.S. Marines outside of Marjah, Afghanistan. Photo credit: Luke Downey

5. What do you hope readers will take away from this book?

I really feel that this is the greatest story of modern war told. The individuals, the circumstances, and the events that in aggregate make this complete story are breathtaking, immersive, and impossible to put down. There is so much to this story, and there are so many details, from how the operation that Extortion 17 was supporting was developed to the aftermath of the tragedy, that I really feel that the book gives the most complete experience of modern war ever published. I really feel that everyone, not just Americans, who have any interest in modern war should read this book.