

What is the final destination of hatred when you look at the enemy and see yourself?

Anon

Chapter One

Southern Iraq, January 1991

Sergeant Rory Calderwood turned from his vantage point and made a hand signal to his number two behind him indicating, 'contact ahead.'

Corporal Lennie 'the Loon' Arthur acknowledged with the 'ok' sign.

At his command, the rest of the eight man platoon dropped to their haunches against the friable brick of what was possibly a barn or some sort of small storage facility.

The village had not been on their original itinerary.

Their orders were to seek and destroy the launchers which deployed the deadly Scud missiles which were already creating havoc in Israel, potentially threatening to bring them into the war. Saddam Hussein was gambling that this strategy would cause a rift between the coalition partners thus jeopardising cooperation between the Arab members. There had also been credible intelligence that Scud's were about to be launched from Southern Iraq directed at Saudi Arabia, which both politically and militarily would prove more than an embarrassment; such was the importance of this mission.

The population of this part of Iraq was mainly Shiite and considered sympathetic to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein but squads of Republican Guards were in evidence across the region as they prepared for the expected invasion by coalition forces. It was an extremely hostile place.

Calderwood had been given orders to investigate reports of sightings of possible launchers along a main road west of Basra. Iraqis were quick and clever in hiding their weaponry; wadis and culverts were regularly used to conceal them. The team was tasked with a 'seek and destroy' remit.

This small village, close to the road was of interest and he had chosen to take a closer look.

A whirl of dust was kicked up by a squall. Calderwood pulled up the edge of his *shemagh* to protect eyes and once again peered through the site of his NVD and the green triangle which was now his field of vision. Anyone associating the desert with blistering heat should be here now, he thought - it was bitterly cold, but his focus was total and he shrugged off the temperature as an inconvenience.

The object of his interest appeared again; then, as quickly, disappeared from sight.

It had been a three hour hike since they had been dropped off by their Chinook transport. From their helicopter landing zone their first objective was to locate the tarmac road.

That bit had been easy but having followed the deserted road for several miles they had now stumbled across the village, although that description was euphemistic. It was a small collection of what appeared to be farm buildings and a scattering of around ten or twelve houses down a track about two hundred yards from the road. It was a similar size to some of the hamlets Calderwood was familiar with back in his native Herefordshire – there was no other similarity. The environment was hostile and not just because of the proximity of enemy forces. There was no evidence of water, just dust and scrub. He wondered how anyone could survive in this place never mind eke any sort of living. The cold was dry and penetrating, not like a winter's day back in England.

Spotting the buildings the platoon had followed the track to their present locale, overlooking what appeared to be a courtyard. Directly ahead of them was a larger building on two floors, a dim flickering lighting was visible probably from hurricane lamps; there was no sign of electricity that Calderwood could see - no power lines or the tell-tale noise of a generator. There was also no evidence of a telephone connection.

Although Calderwood had taken up a recon position their observation post was not ideal; they were stretched out along the side of the first building and only the sergeant had a proper view of proceedings.

Calderwood ducked back from the corner of the building and shielded by the wall, the team gathered around him. He briefed his men in faint whispers.

"Two trucks covered in netting parked against the wall of the building opposite... could be carrying Scuds... certainly big enough and someone's gone to a lot of trouble to hide them; one rag-head, heavily armed, came out for a smoke... there'll be more inside... Lennie, you take Stan and Digger... scout round the back of the main building and see what you can find. I'm going to take a peek at the trucks. Rendezvous back here in seven... go."

The three men set off; a tinkling of bells from a herd of goats could be heard, disturbed by the intrusion.

The remaining squad dropped lower.

Calderwood spoke to lance corporal Steve Swanson. "Swanie, take the NVD and cover me... I need to check those trucks."

Calderwood handed him his night vision device and checked his M16 before silently moving to the first vehicle fifty feet or so across the square. Swanson looked on closely, his assault rifle at the ready.

The sergeant was totally in the zone, adrenaline taking him to a high, senses on alert. He stooped behind the nearest truck, unseen from the house. He lifted the loose netting to check its cargo; then moved quickly to the leading truck and did the same before heading back to his team.

He dropped down behind the wall of the barn and briefed his men again.

"Bingo!" he whispered. "Two missile launchers... Right, time to announce our presence. As soon as Lennie gets back, I'll outline the plan."

Two minutes later the corporal returned with his two buddies and dropped down next to the sergeant.

"What have we got?" asked Calderwood.

"One exit... three rag-heads having a smoke... looked very relaxed... don't think they're going anywhere soon. No other vehicles or weaponry visible," said the corporal.

Lennie took a stick and drew a rough outline of the complex in the dirt. It was 10.13pm and pitch-black but with their eyesight attuned to the lack of light they could clearly make out the corporal's map of the target.

"This is the main building... this is us... round the back there's another piece of ground about fifty feet, then a couple of houses... civvy I think. There are two houses here, and two here."

He drew two blocks, north and south of the target and two blocks immediately behind, forming a shape of a horse shoe.

"Priority one will be the launchers," announced Calderwood. "Swanie, be ready to come with me with the PE4 and detonators. Lennie... round the back with Stan and Digger... take Phillips. So that's four here and

four at the back. When the trucks go the shit's gonna hit the fan... We'll take out as many rag-heads as we can... Rendezvous back at the main road, here."

He drew a mark in the sand at the top of the track where it met the black top.

"We'll tab parallel to the road until we break off to the pick-up point."

Calderwood made gestures with his hands to emphasise the point.

"Everybody clear?" There were nods of agreement.

"Bernie, let HQ know and get them to meet us at zero two hundred... Should give us enough time in case we have to make a detour or two."

"Roger that," said the wireless operator, who was immediately surrounded by three of his team to absorb any possible sounds.

"Alpha two bravo to kingfisher... this is highlight, be advised we have two, repeat two runners in sight and are pursuing with vigour... lift home zero two hundred from DOP... over."

"Roger that... alpha two bravo... out."

Calderwood deployed his men and waited five minutes for Lennie and his team to get into position. It was at times like this that he appreciated the value of the training which had brought him to this lonely piece of the Iraqi desert. Trust in his men was total.

"Right Swanie, here we go," and the two men moved across the open ground to the first truck; the two remaining squad members covering their backs. A gust of wind blew some dead scrub across their path.

Swanson crawled under the nearest lorry and took out the plastic explosive from its container. He shaped the putty-like substance and moulded it to the underside of the vehicle then inserted the LPD detonator.

Within seconds he was out and making his way to the next truck; Calderwood acting look-out and cover.

Same process and the two men returned to their comrades.

"How long, Swanie?" asked Calderwood.

"Three minutes, number one; two minutes, number two."

Calderwood checked his watch and waited.

"Right lads take cover," and the men scrummed down and braced themselves against the wall away from any blast wave and flying debris.

Suddenly a loud boom disturbed the silence, followed by the clattering of metal and other objects. A few seconds later a second explosion echoed around the compound.

Machine gun fire could be heard at the back of the building and quickly Calderwood and his team appeared from behind the barn and opened up on the front of the building.

At the rear it was literally a killing field, as Lennie and his team took out the exiting Iraqis with withering fire. The corporal had taken cover behind the low wall in front of the house immediately behind the target building.

Suddenly Digger cried out. "Incoming!!"

An RPG launched from an upstairs window arrowed towards Lennie. He dropped to the floor and the missile went over his head, through the window of the house behind him and exploded with such ferocity that the front wall disintegrated. Lennie was momentarily deafened by the compression and showered by brick dust and rubble. A second missile followed, again too high, but completing the demolition of the building. Screams could be heard from inside while flames danced around the remains. Digger loaded a grenade into his M16 and fired at the window where the Iraqi had appeared. The window blew outwards showering debris and body parts across the open ground. The firing stopped and Lennie joined Digger and the rest of his team and headed for the back door and entered the building.

Inside it was devastation, the walls pock-marked with shell holes. Lennie counted five bodies. Worryingly there was a radio which, although now inoperative, there was no way of knowing whether a message had been relayed; they had to assume one had. The front door kicked in and the team was joined by Calderwood and Swanson as Lennie and Digger cleared the building.

"Building secure," called Lennie as he came down the stairs. Two rag-heads dead upstairs... another with the RPG is spread across the open ground at the back; five more in the back room. Calderwood looked at the nearest body a lad of no more than seventeen, clearly a conscript.

"Right, let's get out of here," and Calderwood led the assault squad back to the covering team at the barn before they disappeared into the night.

Half an hour later, as the platoon was making their escape; two trucks laden with troops entered the compound. The officer in charge got out of the leading vehicle, a major, sporting the ubiquitous Saddam Hussein moustache, surveyed the carnage. Both the Scud missile launchers were scattered across the courtyard, twisted metal and pieces of machinery littered the area. As he barked orders to his men one truck headed back to the main road to search for the perpetrators.

Around the back the fire blazed on in the demolished house – it would be allowed to burn itself out – there was no alternative; there was no water. The major exited the building at the rear and picked up a spent round and examined it. His aide, and body guard, never more than a few feet away from him at all times, looked at the commander.

"What is it?" he asked.

"M16... probably British," the major replied, looking closely at the cartridge case.

"SAS?" asked the junior officer.

"Almost certainly... we must find them before they are picked up," spat the major.

One of the men who had been scouting around the rest of the compound approached the officer holding the hand of a small boy about five years old.

"Who is this?" asked the major.

"I don't know... we found him wandering at the back of the buildings," said the trooper.

The young boy was completely covered with a white dust which gave him a ghostly appearance; he was clearly traumatised and incoherent, sobbing... dry sobs, as if his whole body was convulsing.

The major bent down and put his hand on the young lad's shoulder and spoke softly to him. The boy reminded him of his own son back in Baghdad. His mind wandered momentarily as he thought about him

and wondered how he was coping during the air strikes. He would be frightened just like the boy who stood in front of him, his hair matted his face streaked with tears; he was still shaking from shock and cold.

"Get him inside and keep him warm... Any other survivors?" he asked the soldier.

"No, I don't know how anyone could have survived that," he said, looking at the smouldering remnants of what was somebody's home.

Back inside the main building the major spoke to his aide who had now taken over custody of the lad.

"Get him some water... see if he saw anything," said the major.

The aide took a plastic bottle of water from his kit bag and helped the boy take in some liquid. Then he gently asked him a few questions.

Meanwhile the major was on the walkie-talkie to the searching truck.

"No... go west, you fools... they won't be heading to Basra... they'll be heading into the desert to be picked up," he said with an air of exasperation.

The aide approached... the major looked in anticipation... "anything?"

"Says his name is Tariq... lives in that house," pointing to the burning ruin. "Mother, three sisters... grandparents... he appears to have escaped with no injuries... was in the back bedroom... seems the wall blew out," the aide summarised.

"Did he see anything?" asked the major.

"No, he's been wandering about... he's still in shock... we need to get him to a hospital," said the aide.

"There's no time for that," said the major. "What about neighbours?"

"The rest of the houses are deserted – looks like everyone has fled," replied the aide.

"Ah yes... the invasion," said the major, mockingly.

"We can't just leave him, sir," said the aide.

The major thought for a moment.

"No... No, of course, you're right; we'll take him back to base but first we must find the bastards that did this," he said determinedly.

The major called his men together.

"Right let's get back on the truck... there's nothing more we can do here," and the eight conscripts climbed into the vehicle; the aide joining the major in the front with the driver. The child sat on the aide's lap whimpering for his mother.

Further west, Calderwood and his team had made good time moving parallel to the road as planned; the draining culvert had provided ideal cover from the occasional passing vehicle.

He checked his GPS to confirm his course courtesy of the US forces who had made the new tracking system available to all coalition forces. He was able to pin-point his position to the accuracy of a few feet.

"Five clicks to the pick-up point," said Calderwood as the team took on liquid.

The group had been marching for over an hour and a brief stop was necessary. They were about to set off again for the pick-up point when a shout went up.

"Vehicle approaching!" called Digger who was on watch.

The road was dead straight for mile upon mile and visibility was good. Even with its restricted lighting the truck could clearly be seen a good half a mile a way... enough time for the squad to take up defensive positions.

Calderwood gave the orders and the team spread out along each side of the tarmac. Digger was in front with the grenade launcher, behind him Lennie, hidden in the culvert. There was no other cover.

The truck's progress was inexorable, closer, closer... the squad readied themselves knowing exactly what to expect. They had already made the decision not to risk giving away their position and lie low rather than to take out the truck... but were ready just in case. The vehicle trundled past at little more than walking

pace, then ground to a halt. Someone on the back stood up and produced a search light and scanned the highway ahead of them. Then out into the desert... left... then right. Calderwood and his team hunkered down flat to the side of the road.

The search light swung round 180° and scanned the tarmac behind. From that angle there was no hiding place and an excited shout went out as the beam picked up the shape of a crouching SAS soldier.

Wild automatic fire went out from the back of the truck and ricocheted off the road a good twenty feet in front of the man. Digger took aim with the Grenade launcher and let one go. There was a whooshing noise as the grenade left the rifle followed by the explosion as it landed in the back of the truck. Those that could attempted to flee from the vehicle but the squad had closed in putting down a lethal barrage of fire. The screams of the wounded echoed around the still night air. Another explosion as the fuel tank blew up, the truck now well ablaze.

Calderwood and Swanson reached the vehicle checking for any survivors; the remainder of the squad covering their back. A pitiful moaning noise could be heard from the drainage ditch at the side of the road where an injured Iraqi lay. Lennie went over to the prostrate soldier and dispatched him with a double tap to the head – there would be nobody to reveal their presence or be able to describe the direction in which they would travel. The body count was ten.

Calderwood led his team off the road and into the desert travelling at a ninety degree angle to the road until they came to a dry wadi which they had traversed on their way in. They continued along the arid river bed and covered the three miles to the drop-off point in less than half an hour... now the wait. The terrain was flat and in the far distance the burning truck lit up the horizon.

The major's truck was some way behind the burning vehicle and it was almost an hour before they reached their luckless comrades. Once again the commander got down from his cab to a scene of devastation. He could smell the unmistakable aroma of burning flesh mixed in with the heady scent of fuel oil and metal. He looked down at the first body with sadness and vowed revenge. He had given up any hope of finding the perpetrators but he would drive on ahead for a few miles... he might just be lucky.

Back in the desert the wait continued. Then, just a few minutes after the appointed time, Calderwood and his team heard the unmistakable sound of the Chinook. A long droning noise echoed across the desert floor. This was the most dangerous time, when they were at their most vulnerable - a low flying helicopter, particularly the lumbering Chinook would be an easy target for any surface-to-air missile. The team huddled together in the cold night air as the helicopter closed in on the given co-ordinates. Swanson flashed a beam from his torch to guide the pilot in. Louder and louder the noise, the shape now visible against the desolate terrain not thirty feet from the ground. It hovered for a moment before touching down and the men scrambled on board. The evac took a matter of seconds and the Chinook made height and turn until it was well out of any artillery range.

Despite their training and expertise, the team felt a degree of elation at a job well done and the banter was positive before the adrenaline dissipated and tiredness enveloped them. Later, as Calderwood and his team relaxed in the belly of the Chinook each with his own thoughts, the sergeant took stock and reflected on the mission. He recalled once being asked if he was a soldier or a man, as if the two were somehow incompatible and right now he understood the relevance of the question. He had seen sights that no human being should witness; done things which were against the very fabric of human behaviour... it was his job; he had to live with the consequences.

Rory Calderwood was eventually awarded the Military Medal for the mission and was to lead subsequent forays into enemy territory; each time he felt the same.

Back in Iraq the major never got his revenge. It was a long and difficult journey back to their base in Basra after the incident and it was made in complete silence interrupted only by the pitiful crying of the young Tariq. The following day the boy was handed over to the local Red Crescent who would take responsibility for him. A few days later, shortly before the start of Operation Desert Sabre, the major was called back to Baghdad ostensibly to assist in the protection of the City and the President. A full report of the incident had been dispatched to his superiors and on his return to the capital the unsuspecting major was arrested and tried at a military tribunal for dereliction of duty, carrying the can for the raid. He was shot three days later.

Tariq Siddique on the face of it would enjoy a better fate.