

THE RANGER WAY



THE RANGER WAY

Living the Code on and
off the Battlefield

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NEW YORK NASHVILLE

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Ranger Creed

Recognizing that I volunteered as a Ranger, fully knowing the hazards of my chosen profession, I will always endeavor to uphold the prestige, honor, and high esprit de corps of the Rangers.

Acknowledging the fact that a Ranger is a more elite soldier who arrives at the cutting edge of battle by land, sea, or air, I accept the fact that as a Ranger my country expects me to move further, faster, and fight harder than any other soldier.

Never shall I fail my comrades. I will always keep myself mentally alert, physically strong, and morally straight and I will shoulder more than my share of the task whatever it may be, one hundred percent and then some.

Gallantly will I show the world that I am a specially selected and well trained Soldier. My courtesy to superior officers, neatness of dress, and care of equipment shall set the example for others to follow.

Energetically will I meet the enemies of my country. I shall defeat them on the field of battle for I am better trained and will fight with all my might. Surrender is not a Ranger word. I will never leave a fallen comrade to fall into the hands of the enemy and under no circumstances will I ever embarrass my country.

Readily will I display the intestinal fortitude required to fight on to the Ranger objective and complete the mission, though I be the lone survivor.

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Chapter One

THE BATTLE FOR YOUR BEST LIFE

Battles can be beautiful. I mean that literally. It's hard to explain that to people who have never been in one. When I am looking at a firefight through night vision goggles, I can see tracers, which are rounds that burn. The color depends on the size of the round: if it's from a PKM or an AK-47, it might look green or maybe orange, and the explosions streak trails in the distance like the most spectacular light show I've ever seen. If there is heavy fire, the landscape pulses with fluorescent color. There is a snapping sound like someone cracking a whip over and over again. Those are high-velocity rounds breaking the sound barrier as they careen by my head. *Snapsnapsnap*. When mortars and rockets hit, the impact momentarily blinds my vision, and then, as it clears, I can see particles that are like charged and heated pixie dust, glowing as they rain down. I have watched all this while I felt the heat of a blazing fire as I moved toward it. My

brothers and I did move toward it, striding into the chaos with absolute focus, and I was not afraid.

I was not thinking that it was the worst moment of my life. My adrenaline was surging, my world was opening up, and I might even have been thinking that this was one of the best, most important moments of my life. Because I was surrounded by my brothers, whom I trust. Because I was about to fight, which was what I had been trained to do. Every drill, every rotation, every moment of my training had prepared me for this. I was having what some scientists call a flow experience. The battle required my complete sensory involvement and the total integration of my skills and consciousness in order to complete my mission. And the mission, in battle, is always meaningful, because whatever else it might be about, lives are on the line. I am fighting for my brothers.

I am honored to have been able to fight in battle for my brothers and for my country. I was part of the CIA Annex security team that responded to the terrorist attack on the US Special Mission in Benghazi, Libya, on September 11, 2012. For more than thirteen hours that night, our team of six fought the enemy to save lives and assets. Some people are surprised when I tell them that I consider Benghazi to be one of the greatest nights of my life. That I'd go back to Benghazi in a heartbeat; you don't need to ask me twice. Just tell me where my airplane's at, I am guaranteed to be there. September 11, 2012, was a tragic night in many ways. Ambassador Christopher J. Stevens, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods, and Glen

“Bub” Doherty died that night putting themselves in harm’s way on behalf of our country. Mark “Oz” Geist and David Ubben were severely wounded. And I know that the families of the men we fought that night mourned their dead and wounded, too. It was a dangerous mess. But if I were needed, I’d be happy to go back.

People make a mistake when they think happiness is about being relaxed, kicking back over barbecue and a beer. Don’t get me wrong, that can be good, and my friends will tell you that I’ve had plenty of days like that. A bunch of those days can be part of a good life. But the satisfaction and pride that are earned through truly optimal experiences come from being challenged, working hard, and putting your training to the test in service of a goal you care about. I’m not going to lie; sometimes that hurts while it’s happening. You’ve got to be tough and believe that the hurt will be worth it.

Happiness comes from being tested and accomplishing your mission. That’s why I’d always go back into battle. You get tested there. And you get inspired, seeing the selfless service all around you down range. I’ve spent the last couple years traveling around this country as a civilian, and I know it’s harder to see that here at home. It’s harder to see it in Washington, D.C., that’s for sure. But you can create the feelings that come from optimal experience and selfless service for yourself, and you can inspire others to do the same. That’s what this book is about. It’s about my life and about your taking control of your own life and fighting your own battles.

But it's also about understanding that we never know what the impact of our actions is going to be. That is one of the reasons you can't ever give up.

Never quit. You're going to be hearing a lot in this book about lessons I learned while training to become an Army Ranger in the 75th Ranger Regiment. "Never quit" is a big one. You never know what the outcome of your decisions might be. Your actions might do something positive for someone else, not just you. You might even save somebody's life. Bub Doherty died a hero in Benghazi because he never gave up. Bub, along with three other GRS guys and two Delta Force operators, rented a private plane, on their own, to get to us from Tripoli, without help from Washington or the US Africa Command in Germany. We had no US air assets that night: the US outpost in Benghazi was not heavily staffed, and there were no US troops near us on alert for the anniversary of September 11, 2001. The Pentagon apparently did not know about the attack until an hour after it happened, and US assets were not in an immediate state of readiness to help. The plane that Bub's team chartered is how they got into Benghazi and how our injured got out. When Bub was flying in from Tripoli with his team, he didn't know that he was going to save lives that night or lose his own. But that plane is how my brothers Oz and Dave got the medical attention they needed when they were bleeding out in the morning. Bub's action, and his never-quit attitude, saved their lives. But I'm getting ahead of that story; I'll come back to it.

It's hard to tell the story of Benghazi. I am sincere when I say that battles can be beautiful and amazing, but that doesn't mean I like reliving the experience or talking about watching my brothers die. That might sound odd, since it seems as though talking about it is a big part of what I've been doing for the last few years. And I have a confession to make: I hate social media. I hate getting on Twitter. I hate arguing with people about the politics of our story. But I use those outlets when I have to because I can't let the story of Benghazi die. Heroes die only when their stories are forgotten. Tyrone Woods and Glen Doherty are heroes; they sacrificed everything that night. Some politicians don't see it that way. It's not necessarily political: people on both sides of the aisle have gotten things wrong. If you let the wrongs go unanswered and let the media distortions spin out of control, those guys will die all over again. I will not let that happen. And if that means I have to go on Twitter and tag CNN and MSNBC or anyone in the media when they get it wrong, I'm going to do it. When you see someone saying something that denies what you as an eyewitness know to be the truth, you must speak up. Sometimes the truth hurts. If the truth hurts your political aspirations, that's how it goes. If the truth offends you or does not seem politically correct, get over it. It's not about politics. Benghazi, for me, is about heroism, faith, sacrifice, brotherhood, and God. What the truth of our story means for you, after you hear it, might be different. But it's so important that you hear it.

And if it means I tell the story over and over, to anyone who can hear me, I'm going to keep talking. I'm more grateful than I can say for all the people who listen. If you're reading this book, then that's you, too, and I thank you. If you are a veteran reading this, I'm grateful for your service and happy that you're home. If you have ever felt misunderstood, left behind, or stuck in civilian life, I think I know what it feels like, and I hope you'll find something helpful in these pages.

* * *

Ranger training is designed to push you to your physical and mental limits and then make you hurt some more, so that you can learn how to keep working in punishing situations. Training to be a Ranger means confronting a series of physically demanding goals and tasks that increase in intensity every day. Ranger candidates are constantly scrutinized and assessed while they perform those tasks, usually in a state of sleep deprivation and hunger and frequently in unfriendly weather conditions. Sleep, food, and good weather may all be hard to come by in combat, so learning how to do without optimal conditions on the front is a key component of all special forces training. As you'll be learning in these pages, Ranger training can be flat out miserable. Being a Ranger, or training for any kind of special ops unit, is, by design, not for everyone. Using the principles of Ranger leadership and culture doesn't mean that you need to militarize your life. There is no need for most of us to train to be combat ready.

But we're all fighting our own battles, and you can use my experience and some of the principles, expectations, and techniques of Ranger training to help create your own battle rhythm and achieve victory, whatever that means to you. We all go through our own version of a battlefield. You want to do your reconnaissance, and train and prepare as hard as you can, but then you can relinquish control and let go to God. You can't control every situation in life and certainly not in combat. The action I've described on my battlefield is an extreme example, but you can experience that vividness and grace in your own life. It is all about finding your purpose, taking action, and being where you were meant to be.

You might get hurt along the way. We all hurt, and the principles behind Ranger training can be used by anyone to help you endure and overcome the hard times to achieve your goals. It doesn't matter whether your goals are physical, personal, or professional. It doesn't matter what kind of physical shape you're in, how old you are, or if you're a man or a woman. If you are willing to be honest with yourself and put in the work, you can become stronger, tougher, more disciplined, more resilient, and more confident; you can be of service to your community, be better under pressure, and, I'm betting, be happier too.

Anybody can do anything. My call sign as a GRS operator is "Tanto," and if you follow me on social media, you know that that "anybody can do anything" is a famous "Tantoism." I'm no philosopher, but if I had to drill down to

my core beliefs, one of them is: you have no idea what you're capable of until you are tested. You have to allow yourself to be tested. If the circumstances of your life aren't already doing it for you, you have to push yourself and let others push you. That means that you are going to be uncomfortable and sometimes in pain, that you are sometimes going to be challenged, afraid, bone tired, and at your wits' end. You're going to want to give up if you're doing it right. But if you don't quit on yourself, you will find that you are capable of more than you ever thought you could be. Every time you don't quit, you will prime yourself to want more, to become stronger, faster, smarter, better. Other people will respond to your best self and your willingness to be challenged. And you will know the satisfaction, the gratitude, and the inner peace that come from giving life your best shot.

But first you have to define your mission, which means setting goals. Consciously setting a goal will give you concrete focus and motivation. And successful goal setting requires doing a hard, cold assessment of where you're at and what you want. Because goals that are in alignment with your purpose are the ones that you will be most likely to achieve. Goals that are in alignment with your values will keep you committed when things are tough. To set good goals, you need to understand who you are. When you have a clear vision for yourself that is in line with your values, your strengths and weaknesses, and your dreams, you'll find that pursuing the vision is just as valuable as actually achieving it.

This isn't going to be smooth sailing. But you know that already, right? You need to find the right goals and the right form of motivation, for you. That looks different for each of us and might change over time, depending on what's going on. You've got to stay flexible, humble, and curious, learn from your mistakes, and be brave.

If anything about my story helps you hang on and inspires you to make some positive change in your own life, it will make me feel even more blessed and grateful that I haven't quit. You shouldn't, either. You are capable of more than you know.