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# There I was

By Dave Maynard

There are better ways to start a gunfight than getting hit in the head with an AK round, but that's how it began. I was part of a three-man QRF (Quick Reaction Force) following our subject's convoy; if the subject was ambushed, my QRF team would speed to the rescue.

Our subject's vehicle takes a wrong turn and heads into Indian Country. Uh-oh. We follow as best as we can, but the lead vehicle comes to a road block and stops. This is not good.

A crowd quickly gathers, angry and hostile. Men are frantically yelling into cell phones. The car is now blocked from behind as well; reversing out of the situation is not possible.

Almost immediately, carloads of bad guys begin screeching to a halt around the subject car. The cell phones! The callers have reached their QRF and now dozens and dozens of armed insurgents are streaming out of cars and surrounding houses, yelling and screaming and going insane. More and more cars continued to arrive, disgorging more and more militants.

Our radio goes crazy—the men in the subject vehicle are not talking calmly. I try to break into the frantic

yelling between the men caught in the ambush, but there is no way to break in.

Gunfire! Bullets ricochet off the armored Suburbans. Pop-pop-pop. More shots. Dozens of shooters now. I'm about ready to give the order to move, but not quite yet... the subject vehicle is trying to ram its way out of the ambush. Don't give up our position too soon...

Thud! The muted blast of a grenade! One of the operators in the subject vehicle has somehow opened the door and tossed out a frag. Now the bad guys go into a firing frenzy, peppering the cars with gunfire. The mob has surrounded the two cars, unleashing holy hell from 5 to 40 yards away. The armored windows are beginning to splinter.

I give the order to move, but the moment we pull out from the alley, we take fire. It sounds like hundreds of bees buzzing all around our Suburban, then the metallic ping-ping-ping of bullets hitting our vehicle.

We skid to a halt by the now-bullet-riddled subject's car. I throw open the steel door of our armored Suburban and start to climb out with my SAW—and that's when the AK round hits me in the head.

My helmet is violently knocked askew and I'm shoved backwards into the Suburban. I don't recall the next few seconds, but my teammates later tells me I catapulted right back out of the truck like a Jack-in-the-box. It is like I was attached to a rubber band that was pulled tight—I just go sailing back out that door!

**My SAW is equipped with an EOTech Holographic sight and a SureFire M900 Vertical Foregrip WeaponLight. I have a 200-round belt in the gun. It's dark out. I trigger my M900 WeaponLight. The crowd is seething, jacked-up to fever pitch. Angry men with guns, shooting at me.**

I come up firing. I distinctly remember targeting specific individuals, just like in training. I'm consciously aware of bullets flying all around me. The thought that I'll never survive this enters my mind.

I glance down, see a concrete median right next to my vehicle, about 18 inches tall; I jump on the median for a better field of fire. It turns out I will stay there for the entire firefight, doling out short, controlled bursts at target after target after target. There is no opportunity to move to cover under such constant fire; I can only shoot back.

Jam! My SAW belt is twisted. I've fired precisely 160 rounds. How do I know that? Because

my belt kinks at exactly round number 40 out of a 200-round belt. I have fired 160 rounds.

Suddenly it is over. The crowd simply disappears. We are later informed that 62 of the ambushers were KIA and another 80-odd are wounded.

We trained for this very scenario. It was my most memorable afternoon between 2003 to 2011, when I was deployed 25 times to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Lebanon for a total of over 50 months. Most of the operations I conducted remain highly classified, and since I do not wish to compromise my teammates still doing the work, I will only describe our activities in very general terms.

During my first two deployments to Afghanistan, the compound generators must've been salvaged from the Korean War. They were Third World quality—or lack thereof—and were known to go out all the time, especially when large explosions went off nearby. Explosions usually indicated we were under attack, so all personnel would instantly jump to high alert and man strategic positions.

Obviously, if the generator was out, it would be pitch black. Now you see real fast why you need to have a tactical light on your





weapon! Needless to say, I trained constantly with tactical lights.

The shooting ranges in our AO were awesome. They enabled us to really train out of the box. We were doing things you could never get away with on any Stateside military range. Fortunately, I worked with very competent operators and they excelled at advanced live-fire training. Together we would develop all kinds of combat shooting drills that fit our operational resume.

Iraq was very similar. Most AOs I was sent to had good range facilities, with no one looking over our shoulders, so I was able to really push the training. I would dial my teammates into the training concepts during several daylight drills, then take them back in the dark to teach them how to "light and move" with M4s and M249s.

We'd practice bailing out of multiple vehicles with many shooters, engaging all targets on the move in pitch-black conditions—full-auto. I would set up multiple targets painted different colors and would call out a color to change the target ID, so if you watched this evolution, all you would see is a bunch of lights and muzzle flashes moving across the range.

The lights then would disappear in a mock "room clearing" engagement and then slide across the range to the other side, blasting all kinds of targets along the way. My guys could execute these types of drills without saying a word. Of course, it helped that I had some very talented operators to work with, so it was relatively easy to train them to their potential. If anybody had to fight these guys, especially at night, they would be in big trouble.

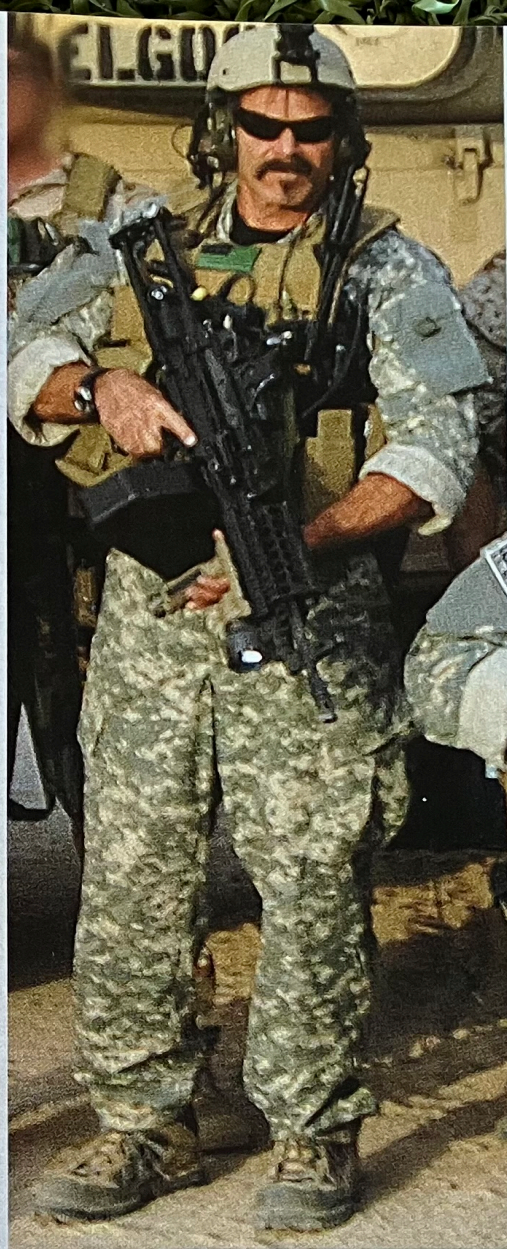
Nobody questioned my insane live-fire drill sets because they couldn't figure out what the hell we were doing, and probably didn't want to feel stupid if they asked. The reality is that, once you understand combat geometry and how to use your tactical lights correctly, it is very safe.

You learn to read the lights or muzzle flashes of your teammates so you always know exactly where everyone is and in which direction they're shooting.

**I trained so intensely because the type of missions we conducted necessitated a very small team. In most cases, we would be severely outnumbered by the bad guys if the crap hit the fan. So our ability to successfully overcome a larger enemy force and get home safely was a constant reality.**

Also, the type of mission structure required us to get in—then get out—without being noticed. We were very good at that. Our mission success rate was extremely high, but there are those times when Murphy takes over and everything goes into the crapper. When it starts going south, it usually just keeps getting worse, but you must keep battling until your body doesn't work anymore. Getting captured is out of the question, so you have no choice.

You really develop great respect for your teammates when you find yourself surrounded, outnumbered 20 to 1 by threats



that are engaging your position from 5 to 40 yards away. Lead flying all around, bad guys literally no more than spitting distance away. This is extreme CQB.

Right at that moment, I knew there was no way I would survive that ambush, but I was going to shoot and shoot and shoot until they physically dragged my corpse off that median.

Each one of us had to deal with Murphy messing with us. Even for Murphy, it was a bit much to get hit in the head with an AK round before I even got a chance to shoot back. Luckily, my helmet kept the round from emptying my cranial cavity, which is not carrying a lot of brains anyway, but it still would've been messy to clean up.

But each member of our team got into the fight quickly and authoritatively. As we engaged the threats, a wonderful thing happened. Murphy changed teams! That SAW on top of the median was seriously chewing into their ranks, and perhaps they decided to cut their losses, but miraculously they broke off the attack and ran away. How we all got home, nobody knows; however, that's when you know your mama's prayers really do work. **CT**



