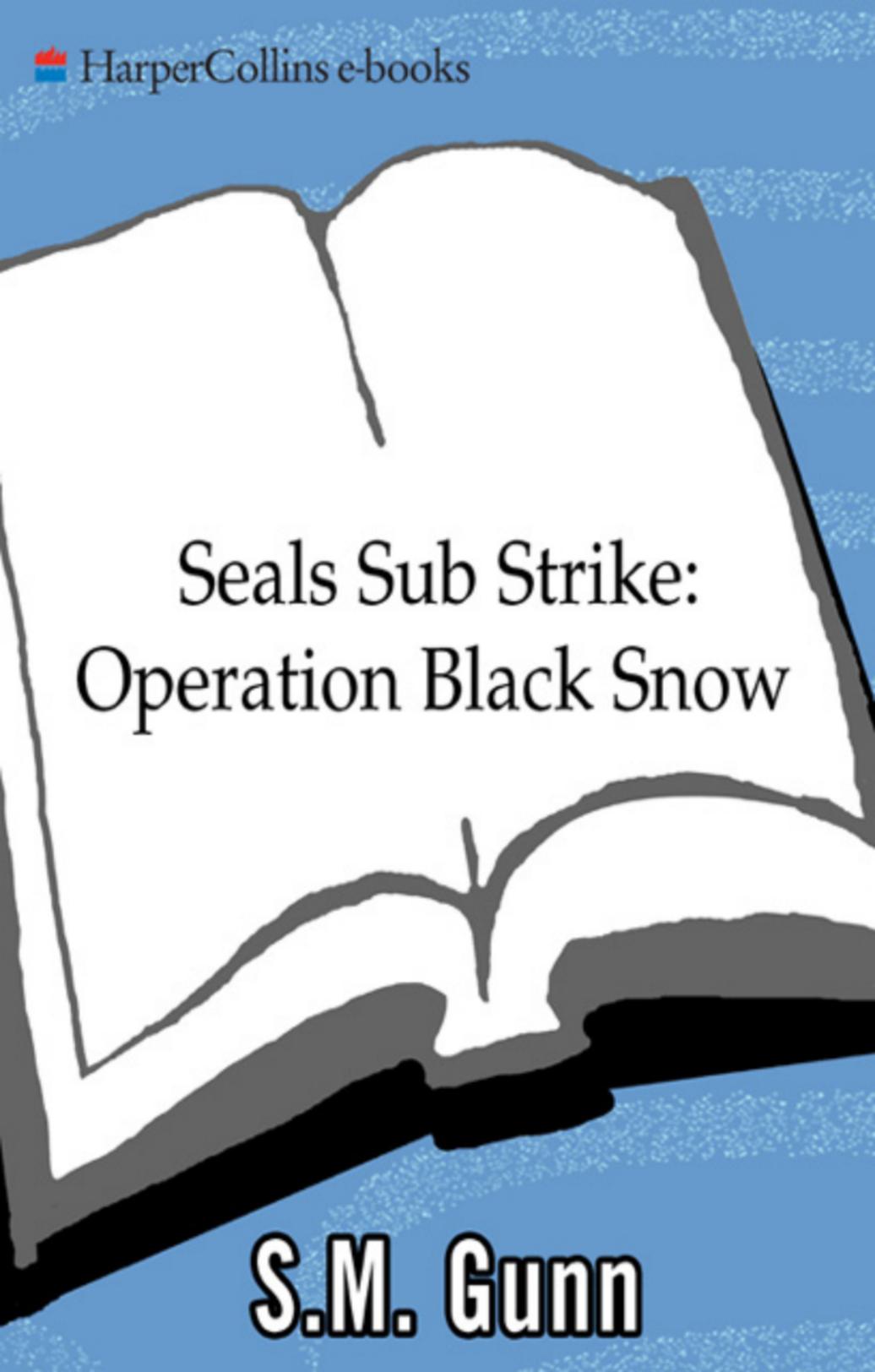




HarperCollins e-books



Seals Sub Strike:
Operation Black Snow

S.M. Gunn

SEALS

SUB STRIKE

OPERATION BLACK SNOW

S.M. GUNN



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CHAPTER 1



1990

Iraq

When there was a difficulty in getting what he wanted, Saddam Hussein did not hesitate to throw money at the problem in order to solve it. He had learned from his dealings with the West and the rest of the world that there were few difficulties that couldn't be solved with a copious flow of cash. The bigger the difficulty, or the more desired the final product, the more Hussein was willing to spend. This flow of wealth was not bottomless, and the eight-year war with Iran had almost bankrupted Iraq in spite of her huge oil reserves.

It didn't matter that the people of Iraq were suffering in the aftermath of their long struggle with their neighbor to the east. The vast oil wealth of Iraq was available to Saddam alone—to spend as he saw fit. Anyone caught cheating Iraq, and by proxy Hussein himself, might find it very difficult

to live long enough to enjoy their profits. That threat did very little to stem the flow of people, and even countries, offering Saddam what he wanted.

With his thug's mentality, what Saddam wanted most of all was weapons—the more powerful, the better. A nuclear weapon was the Iraqi dictator's ultimate desire. But during the war with Iran, chemical weapons had turned the tide for the Iraqi forces facing the Iranian hordes. In spite of his personal fear of disease, Saddam had been assured that biological weapons could cause even more damage than nerve gas. And that the psychological effect of a disease being delivered as a weapon would be even greater than the actual body count might warrant. His own fears made it very easy for Saddam to believe others would feel exactly as he did.

The invasion and annexation of Kuwait had gone smoothly and quickly just a few short months before. The fact that the largest creditor of his war debts was being ground under his rule should have delighted Hussein. His joy was eliminated by his very bad misjudgment of the world's reaction to his invasion. Led by the United States, a coalition of forces was gathered under United Nations approval with the intent of driving Iraq out of Kuwait. The U.S. was building up strength in the Persian Gulf and Saudi Arabia since early August, only days after the Iraqi invasion had been completed.

Backed by UN resolutions authorizing and increasing use of direct action against Iraq, the U.S.

and coalition forces had become a major threat to Saddam's plans for a unified Middle East—free of what he considered the Israeli problem. This unification would be conducted under his “benevolent” leadership, which Hussein considered only right.

To continue his plans, Saddam wanted weapons capable of destroying people on a massive scale. The Iraqi nuclear program was receiving massive support, but was still months away from delivering the sudden destruction Saddam wanted. Months were not available to Iraq or Saddam. Time was short, so money and material were being poured into ongoing chemical and biological weapons programs. The first program to give the dictator what he wanted would be viewed under a vary favorable light from Baghdad. Saddam wanted results, and he wanted them right now.

1054 ZULU

33° 12' North, 42° 28' East

Bunker 38

Al Muhammadiyat Test Range

Iraq

The large man in green fatigues wore dark sunglasses under the black beret that covered his gray hair. He looked out across the empty section of desert in front of him. There was nothing to be seen anywhere beyond the high chain-link fence surrounding the huge ammunition storage site that was his responsibility. The dozens of sand-covered, carefully camouflaged concrete bunkers

were spread out in an orderly fashion behind him. He was standing in front of the open door and blast shield of one of these bunkers, looking out at absolutely nothing but sand, rock, and the occasional scorpion or venomous snake.

Colonel Hafiz Kassar al-Tikriti had proven himself more than a capable and trustworthy man. During the invasion of Kuwait only a few months before, he had demonstrated bravery and ability while operating as the Staff Intelligence Officer with the 2nd Armored Brigade of the Iraqi Republican Guards' Medina Division. His technical knowledge helped his personnel pinpoint very desirable scientific equipment in Kuwait City and quickly arrange for its transport to Iraq. So why did his reward seem so much like punishment?

The recent addition of two gold stars underneath the eagles on his shoulder boards was a welcome weight, though the responsibilities that went with his recent promotion to full colonel in charge of the weapons facility were heavier than he liked. His rise in the ranks of the Republican Guards had not come about just because he was from President Hussein's home town of Tikrit. He well knew the value of following a precise timetable, and just when such attention to detail is most important. This was one of those times.

Another thing the colonel had learned during his military career was how to play to an audience. And there was only one person in the immediate vicinity that he was responsible to. The present location might be the armpit of Iraq, a spot so remote not even camels cared to pass

through it. But it was his assignment, one he would carry out to the best of his abilities.

Colonel Kassar watched the second hand of his Rolex sweep around the face of the watch. The information under the security cover on his aluminum clipboard had been very expensive to obtain. He would not waste one moment of the time that information gave him, or react too quickly and make all their efforts useless.

Checked for accuracy only the day before, Kassar trusted his watch now as the second hand swept past the twelve o'clock position. The other hands of the watch indicated 7:55 in the morning. Seeing this, he placed a nickel-plated whistle between his lips and blew a shrill blast.

The shattering noise of the whistle was repeated across the compound as whistles were blown by lower-ranking officers and the sergeants below them. The desert became a beehive of activity as men and vehicles left the shade of their protected positions and raced out across the sands. The colonel turned and entered the front door of Bunker 38 at the Muhammadiyat weapons storage facility and test range. The reason for all the secrecy and careful timing of the morning, as well as the technicians responsible for it, were inside the bunker.

Abu Waheed and Jaleel al-Dossadi were standing back as Colonel Kassar stepped into the cool darkness, away from the brilliantly sunlit open doorway.

"It is one minute exactly," said Kassar, "past the time that the American Keyhole spy satellite has passed over the horizon. The information our

Soviet friends have so graciously supplied us with states that the next Keyhole satellite, the KH-11/7, will not come over the horizon and invade our airspace until 10:14:40. You have two hours and eighteen minutes to conduct your test and have everything removed from the test site. Radar is reading clear for the moment, and most of the American spy plane overflights come in intermittently in the afternoon. I suggest you get moving.”

There was little more the two technicians could say. Abu Waheed climbed into the cab of the GAZ-66 truck he was standing in front of. In the back was a tarp-covered payload. The driver behind the wheel started the engine, and ran the vehicle out the front door as soon as Waheed had shut the door. Jaleel al-Dossadi joined several other men in a much smaller, tan-colored UAZ-469. The jeeplike vehicle quickly followed the truck.

The technicians and their cargo were on their way. Now Kassar faced the small group of people still in the bunker with him. The three bodyguards could be dispensed with for the moment. Ignoring them was about as safe as not paying attention to cobras you saw near your feet. But not giving the utmost respect to the man the bodyguards flanked, Abdul Talfaq, made playing with cobras seem like a desirable entertainment.

Talfaq was a big man in his early thirties, stocky, powerfully built. His black hair was slicked back and oiled, as was his black mustache. The nephew of Saddam Hussein on his mother's side, he was head of Iraqi Secret Service Organi-

zation, the SSO—in charge of protecting Saddam himself, as well as overseeing all operations of the Iraqi intelligence organizations—which made Talfaq the second most powerful man in Iraq. In addition, Talfaq was responsible for what Hussein considered his most important projects—the development of weapons of mass destruction—and was in charge of the Ministry of Industry and Military Industrialization, one of the most powerful ministries in the Iraqi government.

MIMI ran all military procurement in Iraq, the standard items as well as the nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons programs. The bulky item on the back of the GAZ truck that had just left the bunker was a warhead for the new al-Hussein rocket. Instead of high explosives, the warhead was filled with the final test simulant for a biological weapon.

“I had been led to believe that the last of these tests had been conducted back in August,” Talfaq said. “We do not have the time to waste resources on manufacturing and loading simulants.”

A handsome woman spoke up from nearby, where she was standing next to an older man.

“Those tests were of the R-400 aerial bombs,” Dr. Badra Hushmand said. “They were loaded with a wet-slurry agent. The efficiency of that weapon has been proven by earlier testing. The consistency of this new agent is very different and has to be tested at least once.”

“The freeze-dried and milled *Bacillus subtilis* that this warhead was filled with had to be made anyway,” said Dr. Saeed Hushmand, the older man

with Bandra. "The production machinery had to be set up and calibrated. It was much more efficient to use a simulated agent to do that. In this state, *Bacillus subtilis* acts the same as anthrax would."

"Out of the more than sixty-one kilograms of material in that warhead," the woman said, "only ten percent is the simulant. The rest of the material is inert."

"Make no mistake," Talfaq said in a dangerously soft voice, "this test had better prove your device and agent. A new director and associate director could be located for the Iraqi Biological Weapons Research Center. Replacements would be found much more easily than the remains of anyone who failed to deliver results at this late stage."

Abu Waheed was more than happy to see the weapons storage bunker disappear in the distance behind him. Saeed Hushmand was the director of the top secret research center. As such, he was the single scientist most responsible for the biological weapons program. To direct such an undertaking, Hushmand had to be a scientist of no small skill and dedication. And the man constantly showed a single-minded devotion to the idea of turning diseases into weapons of war, weapons of mass destruction.

Saeed's sister, Badra Hushmand, was also a scientist. She had received her advanced degree in microbiology from her studies in Germany. Her

skills had helped place her as the associate director of the research center.

A scientist in name only, and despised by those who worked for her, Badra had a lust for power and prestige that was plainly seen by anyone she considered her inferior. In the throat-cutting world of Iraqi politics, she blended in well with the rest of the carnivores in Saddam's higher circles. Badra Hushmand had more than her share of blood on her hands, and just about everyone but her brother knew it.

Badra was quick to take the credit for anything that went right in the bioweapons program. She was only faster when it came time to shift the blame for a failure on someone else. This was not something that endeared the woman to those who worked under her, including Abu Waheed.

With Abdul Talfaq in the bunker, along with his Republican Guard thugs, the atmosphere in the closed area had become much too politically charged for Waheed's comfort. Talfaq wanted to hand to Saddam Hussein the means to control all of the Middle East and the bulk of the world's oil production.

The destruction of Israel with a biological or chemical weapon would bring the Arab world around to realizing the leadership of the man who finally eliminated the Israeli Problem from the Middle East. If he happened to defeat and reduce the United States—the world's last superpower, at least for the time being—to groveling at his feet for oil, so much the better.

Besides escaping from the politics of the situation, the technical aspects of the upcoming test were difficult enough, Waheed wanted to get his friend Jaleel away from the bunker and the nest of vipers inside of it. Jaleel al-Dossadi was a brilliant technician. His years of work in the military had given him an encyclopedic knowledge of ordnance and the tools of war. But the man whined that coming from Saddam's home village of Tikrit made him invulnerable to the petty intrigues of others.

Abu could see that the biological weapons program was very important to the government of Iraq, and that meant it was also important to Saddam. With importance came power, and where there was power to be had, there was intrigue. He could still remember as a small boy being with his uncle Abdulla in the desert, the old man pontificating at length on the intrigues of what he despairingly called civilization. And the simple desert nomad had been proven right from just about everything that Abu had ever experienced in his government's service.

The missile warhead adaptation and filling project had not been going well. The freeze-drying equipment Iraq had obtained from a pharmaceutical equipment company in Belgium had been plagued with technical problems. The lyophilization process was supposed to remove all the moisture from a solution of biological agent mixed with a sugar stabilizer. By freezing and removing the