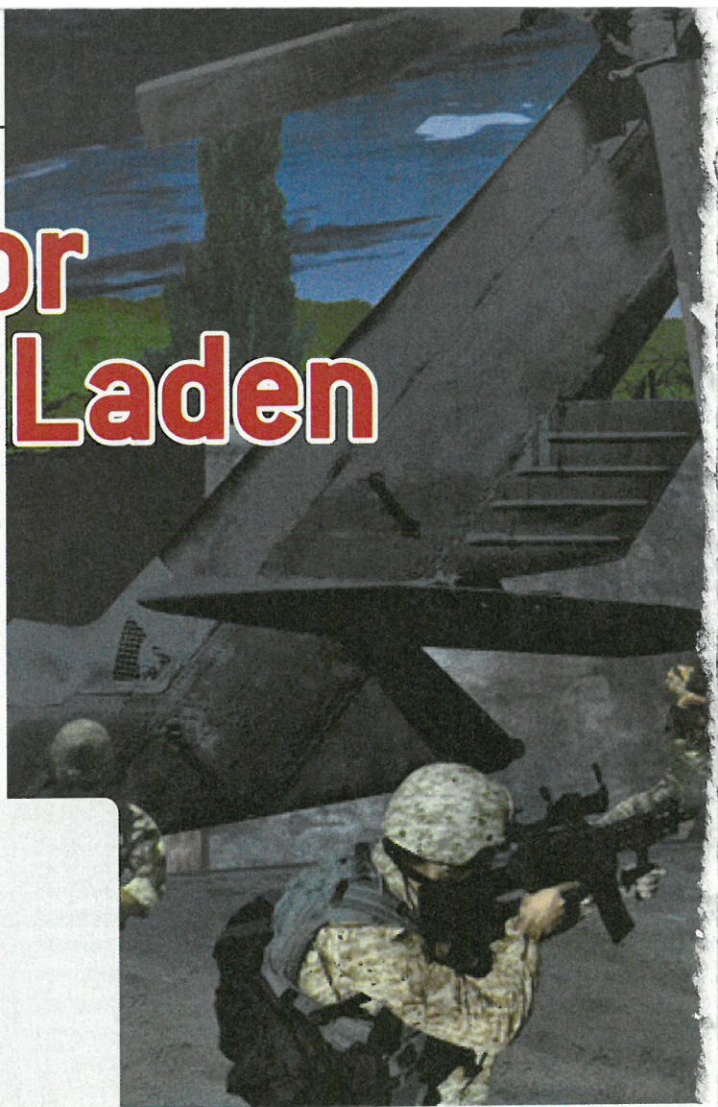


The Hunt for Osama bin Laden

In 2011, U.S. officials thought they had located the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks in Pakistan. They knew they had to act.



CHARACTERS

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| *Analyst 1 | } agents with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) | Joe Biden, Vice President |
| *Analyst 2 | | Crew Chief, aboard SEAL helicopter one |
| Leon Panetta, CIA Director | | |
| Barack Obama, President of the U.S. | | *Pilot |
| Bill McRaven, Navy SEAL commander | | *U.S. Navy SEAL |
| Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense | | Narrators A-E |
| Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State | | |

*Indicates a fictional or composite character.

PROLOGUE

Narrator A: On September 11, 2001, Osama bin Laden became the most wanted man in the world. The leader of **Al Qaeda** was behind the terrorist attacks that killed nearly 3,000 people in New York City;

WORDS TO KNOW

- **Al Qaeda** (*n*): an international Islamic fundamentalist terrorist organization founded by Osama bin Laden in 1989
- **SEAL** (*n*): member of a U.S. Navy Special Forces team trained in counterterrorism activities
- **surveillance** (*n*): a close watch kept over someone or something

Arlington, Virginia; and Pennsylvania. “Get bin Laden” became a key goal of U.S. leaders. The following month, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, where bin Laden was thought to be hiding. But he eluded U.S. forces in the country’s wild, mountainous west—and then seemed to disappear. Years passed, and as they did, U.S. intelligence services had to admit: The trail of Osama bin Laden had gone cold.

SCENE 1

Narrator B: Nearly nine years after 9/11, Americans wonder if bin Laden will ever be caught. But in the summer of 2010, agents of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)

think that they have made a breakthrough. Analysts in the agency’s Virginia headquarters brief the CIA’s director, Leon Panetta.

Analyst 1: We’ve been watching a courier who carries messages between important Al Qaeda officials. Now we’ve traced his white SUV to a million-dollar compound [a fenced-in area with several buildings] in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

Analyst 2: The place is surrounded by high-security fences. But this guy isn’t rich. How did he afford it?

Analyst 1: Another suspicious thing: the people at the compound have no phone or Internet there—as if they didn’t want anyone to trace any communications to them. And



In this photo illustration, Navy SEALs prepare to storm the house where they think Osama bin Laden (above) is hiding.



SCENE 2

Narrator D: The CIA director gives the task of planning those options to Vice Admiral Bill McRaven, a Navy **SEAL** team commander. On March 29, 2011, McRaven meets with Obama and his national security advisers.

Barack Obama: Admiral McRaven, what do you recommend?

Bill McRaven: Mr. President, we think it would be too risky to send a team on foot to scale the wall. We

believe it would be best to fly a helicopter into the compound.

Robert Gates: With all due respect, I think that still puts our men in too much danger. I recommend mounting a major air strike on the compound.

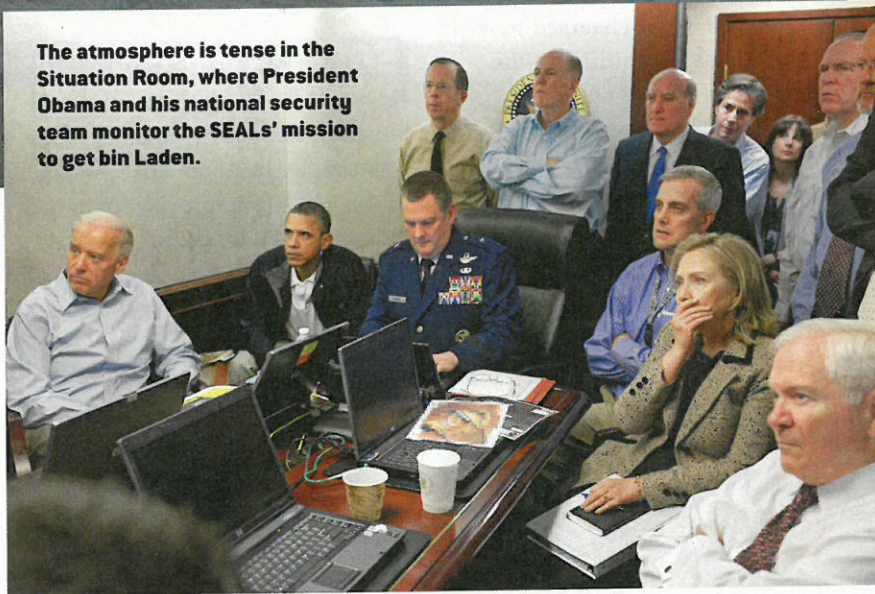
Hillary Clinton: But Pakistan is a U.S. ally. They would be furious if we bombed their country. Also, the amount of bomb power we'd need to penetrate an underground bunker would create a huge crater.

Joe Biden: It would be like an earthquake had hit. *And* we'd have no body to prove we got bin Laden.

Obama: I'm not going to flatten an entire city and kill innocent people for this. Admiral McRaven, start planning your helicopter raid.

Narrator E: McRaven turns to Navy SEAL Team 6, an elite unit that takes on antiterrorism missions so sensitive that the American

continued on p. 30 →



The atmosphere is tense in the Situation Room, where President Obama and his national security team monitor the SEALs' mission to get bin Laden.

they burn all their trash.

Analyst 2: The courier comes and goes. But there is a man living on the third floor of the main house who never leaves. He just paces around inside the compound walls. We can't get a good look at his face on satellite photos.

Leon Panetta: Could it be bin

Laden? Maybe instead of hiding in a cave, he's hiding in plain sight. It's time to tell the President.

Narrator C: Panetta briefs President Barack Obama on the figure the CIA agents call the Pacer. Obama directs Panetta to keep **surveillance** on the man, and to draw up options for a raid on the compound.

government won't officially confirm its existence. The team spends a couple of weeks in North Carolina and Nevada rehearsing the raid. On Thursday, April 28, CIA Director Panetta again meets with the President.

Panetta: The team is ready. The next few nights, there will be no moon over Abbottabad—perfect for a raid. If we have to wait a month for another new moon, word could leak out and ruin the operation.

Obama: How sure are we that we have bin Laden in our sights?

Panetta: I've asked my senior officials—and they range from 40 percent to 95 percent certain.

Obama: Let me sleep on this. I'll make my decision by morning.

Narrator A: On Friday morning, Obama summons two top national security aides to the White House Map Room.

Obama: The mission is a go. Complete the orders.

SCENE 3

Narrator B: McRaven sets the mission for Sunday night. All weekend, tension is high among Obama and his close advisers. On Sunday afternoon, they meet in the Situation Room, a secure underground facility in the White House. There they watch a soundless video feed from a drone while Panetta keeps them updated from CIA headquarters.

Narrator C: At 1:15 a.m. Pakistan time, two U.S. MH-60 Black Hawk helicopters take off from Jalalabad, Afghanistan. They carry 25 Navy SEALs, an Arabic-speaking translator, and a military dog named Cairo. Shortly afterward . . .

Panetta: They've crossed over into Pakistan.

Narrator D: Onboard the two Black Hawks, no one speaks as the SEALs go over their well-rehearsed moves in their heads. According to the plan, helicopter one will let its SEALs down into the courtyard,

while four SEALs fast-rope onto the roof of the main house from helicopter two. As they approach Abbottabad, the men wait for the signal from the crew chief over their headsets. Finally . . .

Crew Chief: Six minutes.

Narrator E: The Black Hawks come alive with the sound of rounds of ammo being chambered. But minutes later, as helicopter one hovers over the courtyard, it suddenly loses altitude. The chopper's tail clips a compound wall, breaking off a rotor, and the aircraft begins to spin out of control.

Pilot (*shouting over his headset*): Brace yourselves. I'm going down.

Narrator A: The pilot brings his aircraft down hard in an animal pen outside the courtyard, scattering chickens. The Black Hawk is dead.

SCENE 4

Narrator B: The tension inside the Situation Room has become unbearable. In Abbottabad, the SEALs have to improvise. Now helicopter two lands on the other side of the compound and, from two directions, the SEALs blast through gates to assault the main house. Not knowing the layout of the house or whether it is booby-trapped, the commandos rush up the stairs. On the second floor, they kill one of bin Laden's sons. Running up to the third floor, the lead SEAL, through his night-vision goggles, sees a tall man poke his head out of a bedroom then quickly retreat.

Narrator C: SEALs storm in after the tall man and shoot him twice—in the head and chest. They are pretty sure whom they've shot. The SEALs have devised a code name for when they have taken bin Laden: Geronimo. Now a SEAL radios in.

Navy SEAL: For God and country—



MAP: JIM McMAHON/MAPHAN



Seen through a night-vision camera, SEALs train for a night raid with an inflatable boat.

TOUGH GUYS

In 1962, President John F. Kennedy called for a secretive, highly skilled, elite fighting force. Modern warfare required having specialized fighters who could creep behind enemy lines undetected, remain hidden, and take out individual targets.

In response, the U.S. Navy established the SEAL program.

The term *SEAL* comes from the unit's ability to operate anywhere on any terrain: sea, air, and land. Team 6 is often described as "the elite of the elite."

SEAL training takes at least two years. Teams train in special operations (Special Ops) such as demolitions, hand-to-hand combat, underwater warfare, and nighttime

parachuting. Training culminates in a week of continuous drills—trainees can sleep only four hours a night. During this phase, the men (women are not allowed to be SEALs) can ring a bell at any time to quit. An estimated 1,000 men enter SEAL training each year. About 100 to 200 make it.

Today, SEAL teams

are deployed throughout the world to carry out dangerous missions, such as destroying explosives, searching for terrorists, and rescuing prisoners of war. Teams generally operate in 16-man groups.

Though SEALs keep their identities secret, stories of their toughness are widespread.

Geronimo, Geronimo, Geronimo. Geronimo EKIA.

Narrator D: Admiral McRaven is monitoring the action in Jalalabad. Moments later, he addresses the group gathered in the White House, using the same code for "enemy killed in action."

McRaven: Geronimo EKIA.

Narrator E: There is a silence in the Situation Room. Finally, the President speaks quietly.

Obama: We got him, we got him.

Narrator A: A SEAL commando takes a picture of bin Laden that is processed with facial-recognition

software to ID the body. The U.S. flies the dead terrorist's body to the aircraft carrier *USS Carl Vinson*. Officials prepare the body according to the rituals of Islamic burial before tipping it into the Indian Ocean.

EPILOGUE

Narrator B: At 11:55 a.m. on Monday, May 1, President Obama appeared on television to announce that bin Laden had been killed.

Obama: The images of 9/11 are seared into our national memory. . . . And yet we know that the worst images are those that were

unseen to the world. The empty seat at the dinner table. Children who were forced to grow up without their mother or father. . . . We give thanks to the men who carried out this operation, for they exemplify the professionalism, patriotism, and unparalleled courage of those who serve our country.

Narrator C: On May 6, Obama delivered the thanks of a grateful nation in person to SEAL Team 6. Although the identities of most of the men who killed bin Laden are shrouded in mystery, their deed is legendary.

—Charles Piddock & Bryan Brown