



BULLET PROOF

THE MAKING OF AN INVINCIBLE MIND

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CHUCK HOLTON

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PROOF**

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Multnomah Books

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PROLOGUE



INVINCIBLE

Midnight,
somewhere in the Gulf of Mexico

A light rain pelted the USS *Guadalcanal* as it turned into the wind twenty-five miles off the coast of the Florida panhandle. Five MH-60 Black Hawk helicopters spun up for takeoff, the prop wash transforming the drizzle into a cold spray that caused miniature waterspouts to dance along the pitching, dimly lit deck. Seemingly oblivious to the ship's movement, seamen in color-coded helmets scurried about, making final preparations for mission launch.

I had just climbed aboard chopper three and was sitting on an ammo box with my back to the door gunner, who manned one of the two 7.62 mm Vulcan cannons situated behind the pilot on the special-ops-modified aircraft. These were the same Night Stalker crews we had flown with in Panama a year earlier, and the little stick figures painted in front of the guns on each chopper bore silent testimony to the action they had seen there.

Through the open door, I could see another chopper fifty feet away; I glimpsed a line of soldiers in black helmets hurrying out to it, each heavily laden with every sort of high-speed military hardware imaginable. As far as I could tell, none of it was standard issue. These guys weren't Rangers, like the rest of us, though some of them had been before they were "selected" for the ultrasecret unit they were now a part of. We affectionately called them "long hairs" because they all had long hair. (Not a very creative name, I suppose.) We weren't supposed to talk to them, but their impressive array of custom-made weapons and anonymous uniforms ensured that we talked about little else. They were the main event on this mission; we Rangers were only on board to provide support and security.

I looked over at two of the privates on my team—Lavoie and Urban—sitting with their feet dangling from the aircraft's open door. They were going to have a cold ride. Like me, they couldn't wait to get on with the show, mostly because we were all sick of being stuck on this ship. The last three days had been enough to make all of us glad we hadn't joined the Navy. We had been assigned bunks that stacked five high, with only about eighteen inches of space between each rack. And if the pitching and yawing of the ship weren't enough to make a guy sick, every couple of hours some purple-shirted Navy guys called "grapes" showed up in our quarters to check the levels on the ship's fuel tanks—filling the room with diesel fumes.

I finally ended up sleeping in the ship's fo'c'sle (forecastle), a large room all the way forward that had been set up as a workout area. Did I say sleeping? I actually spent several

hours hanging my head out the anchor chain hole, gasping for some fresh air. How anybody could spend six months on a ship without becoming suicidal was beyond me.

A tap on the shoulder interrupted my thoughts. The door gunner was holding up an index finger. One minute to launch. *Let's get on with it!* I thought. I turned to watch the pilots running through their last-minute checks. Noting my interest, the gunner handed me an extra set of headphones so I could hear what they were saying. Not that I understood any of it.

“N2—103 percent.”

“Check.”

“Auxiliary pitot heat, off.”

“Check.”

The crew chief smiled at me from under his goggles and twirled his finger in the air. Translation: *Game on.*

The pitch of the Black Hawk's engines changed, its powerful turbine whining as if it couldn't wait to get off the ground. Then the five helicopters lifted off as one and the heaving deck of the carrier dropped away beneath us. G-forces pressed me into my seat as the nose of the chopper pitched forward and we picked up speed.

I clutched my M203 grenade launcher, held barrel down like we'd been trained. It was always a good idea. That way, in the unlikely event of an accidental discharge, nothing important—like the engine—would be damaged. This time, we were all carrying live rounds. This mission was the final test—the culmination of the last month of training which, if successful, would get us the green light to do this thing for real, on the ground in Iraqi-occupied Kuwait.

I looked out the open door of the helicopter as we hurtled over white-capped waves 250 feet below. The water looked cold, almost evil. I shivered.

Hard-rock music came blasting through my headset. My head jerked around in time to see the gunner finish connecting a wire from the onboard radio to the headphone jack on his Walkman. He grinned and gave me a thumbs-up. Background music. *Special-ops pilots. These guys are fun.*

A month ago I'd been enjoying one of the best deployments of my life—an entire summer assignment as an instructor at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Every year the Rangers were tasked to provide some noncommissioned officers to teach infantry tactics to the “yearlings,” or first-year students. It was awesome. We got treated like superstars, because the cadets are taught to have great respect for NCOs. But it was more than that. The Rangers had just returned from the first major combat operation in nearly a decade, sporting combat jump stars on our uniforms—which were so rare we constantly got asked, “What is that little gold star on your jump wings?” Life was good.

Then Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. The next day, a camouflage Humvee drove up to our patrol base in the woods around Camp Buckner, and a West Point major stepped out with a message for us. The note said simply, “RETURN TO BENNING IMMEDIATELY.” It had been sent by our company commander.

Twenty-four hours later, after an all-night road trip, we rolled up to the Ranger barracks on Fort Benning's main post. The compound boiled with activity—Rangers hurrying to inspect and palletize everything we would need for an

extended deployment. I was struck by the practiced precision of it all. And this time I understood what enabled us to react so quickly. As a private, I had hated all of the inspecting, packing, unpacking, and repacking that we did in training. But now that I'd seen combat in Panama, I understood the importance of training on the tedious things.

They separated our battalion into “assault packages,” pairing groups of us up with other special-ops units to accomplish the various missions our leadership had been given. My company had been tasked with protecting the exterior of the U.S. embassy in Kuwait City—at that very moment surrounded by thousands of Iraqi troops. Once we secured the exterior, the long hairs would go inside and get our people out.

A full-scale plywood mock-up of the embassy had been constructed on a remote section of an air force base in Florida. Meanwhile, our unit scrambled to learn how to execute our part of the mission. We started by laying out engineer tape on the dewy grass of our PT field, representing the dimensions of the embassy. Then it was just a matter of walking through our mission again and again until each of us knew exactly what to do.

After being flown to the USS *Guadalcanal*, we began practicing the operation in earnest. In conjunction with naval elements, air assets, and long hairs, we hit the mock-up on the beach over and over again, working out the kinks in the mission. I had to keep reminding my guys not to run in front of the miniguns when they exited the chopper. When it came time to use live rounds, a misstep could get a guy cut in half by four-thousand-rounds-per-minute of ball ammunition.

After three days and six dry runs, someone decided we were ready to try it with live ammo. This was the final test, and if we passed, it was likely that the order to execute the mission would soon follow.

This would be altogether different from our deployment in Panama. In Operation Just Cause, we had parachuted in with overwhelming force and, after the first twenty-four hours, spent the majority of our time watching people surrender. If this mission went off, we'd be fighting for our lives against a numerically superior force, dependent as much on combat support from the air as we were on our own trigger fingers.

This mission was "hit and git": Rescue the hostages and disappear before the enemy could get organized enough to resist us. The goal was ten minutes, max. If something happened and we were on the ground longer than that, things would get downright unfriendly, and fast.

Something in the back of my mind was less enthusiastic about this thrust into the Middle East than I had been about going into Panama. Maybe it was because I knew this action would be more difficult. Then again, maybe those combat images of losing buddies the previous year were fresh enough in my mind to keep me from wanting to go through it again.

Really, it didn't matter either way. I had learned to compartmentalize my feelings away and concentrate on my part of the mission. My men were counting on me to guide them through the operation successfully. If I got distracted, it wouldn't affect just me but my squad as well, and perhaps the entire mission. I wasn't going to waste time worrying about the outcome; I had to focus on performing my part.

I had learned to trust our commanders. In Panama, we'd been given the task of taking over a penitentiary that held political prisoners. Before we even boarded the choppers, however, word came down that our regimental commander, Col. William F. "Buck" Kernan, had actually called the prison on the telephone and informed them we were coming. *What?* We couldn't believe it. I sincerely believed he had just signed our death warrant by giving up the element of surprise. None of us could understand what would possess him to take such a risk. When we arrived at the prison, however, we were met by a neat line of unarmed guards standing out front, waiting to surrender. We accomplished the mission without firing a shot. Our commander had known what he was doing.

This time around, I worried about how seventy Rangers were supposed to hold off thousands of enraged Iraqis. I had to remind myself that it wasn't my job to understand; it was my job to carry out the mission I'd been given.

Civilian friends of mine couldn't understand that mindset and might have said I was foolish or even brainwashed to put myself into a situation like this. But because I trusted my commander, I found great freedom in ceding control of my well-being to him. Could it be I wouldn't come back from this one? Sure. But I could just as easily get run off the road into a bridge abutment on my way to a nine-to-five job somewhere in suburbia. All things considered, I preferred the uncertainty and risk of this life to the stale comfort of a more predictable and safe existence. And even though this mission scared me a bit, my guys needed me. No way would I let them go off into combat alone.

The helicopter suddenly dropped like a stone toward the black sea below, jolting me back to the present. For a split second I was weightless, free-falling toward the water and clutching for something to hold onto before my safety line caught and pulled me back down into the seat. I held on as the chopper dove to within thirty feet of the waves on its final approach to the beachfront landing zone in front of the embassy mock-up.

“One minute!” The crew chief gestured into the mass of bodies packed into the Black Hawk’s dark interior. Only a few saw him, but they quickly passed it along to the rest of the men. My guys looked to me for their cue to “go hot”—to load their weapons with live ammunition. Pulling a magazine from my vest, I tapped it against my Kevlar helmet, then pushed it deftly into the receiver on my M203. Lavoie and Urban did the same, and I was gratified by the fluidity with which they charged their own weapons. All those endless hours of disassembling and reassembling their M203s in training were paying dividends tonight.

We thundered over a Zodiac inflatable boat full of commandos—presumably Navy SEALs—as they headed for the beach, practically invisible but for the wake left by the boat. Then I checked my weapon’s safety catch, making sure it was on, and started to finger the snaplink connected to my safety line.

The objective was clearly visible at this point. Smoke rose in columns from around the perimeter of the plywood fence surrounding the pretend embassy. The choppers began to decelerate, their tails flaring downward. Just when everything felt like it should be moving the fastest, time seemed to slow.

Time to focus. Time to go.

Just before touchdown, the door gunners opened up, hosing down the objective with a vicious belch of hot lead, chewing up the sand, as the rotor wash caused a momentary brownout. Settling on the beach just long enough for the men inside to scramble out and hit the prone, the aircraft lifted off scant seconds later. Once the dust began to settle, we could make out the dim shapes of bunkers around the outside wall of the embassy, and silhouettes of plastic “enemy” soldiers inside. I pumped a 40 mm training grenade into the nearest bunker, as Lavoie laid on the trigger of his squad automatic weapon on my left. The rattle of his gun was accompanied by the sound of rounds impacting the target.

Just then, something whooshed by over my head, and a split second later the bunker twenty feet in front of me evaporated with a flash. The shock wave from the explosion felt like a pro wrestler jumping on my flak vest. I buried my face in the sand as shrapnel and clods of dirt sailed through the air above me. *Wow! That was a 2.75 inch rocket!* I glanced at the sky behind me in time to see the Night Stalker Little Bird that had fired the rockets swoop down low toward the objective, spouting flame from its 5.56 mm miniguns as it passed. The knowledge that the pilots aimed their weapons systems by making a mark with a grease pencil on the windscreen wasn't especially comforting, as their rounds were impacting fairly close to my position.

No sooner had this thought crossed my mind than I heard Lavoie suddenly cry out, and I looked over to see him writhing on the ground in pain. *Oh no!* Rising to my hands and knees, I scrambled to his side, fearing he'd been hit by a

stray round. I yelled, “Are you hit?” and was met by a stream of profanity as he continued to roll on the ground. It looked like he was trying to get out of his flak vest. “Brass!” he screamed. “Hot brass down my back!”

Then I realized what had happened. The passing chopper had been firing, ejecting hot brass cartridges, and one of them had dropped down the back of Lavoie’s shirt. I quickly put my knee on his back, reached into his shirt, located the spent cartridge, and removed it.

Lavoie let out a groan. “Thanks, Sergeant.”

“You scared me,” I replied. “Now let’s move.”

Bounding up to the edge of the wall surrounding the embassy, we took our position at the southeast corner. I keyed the radio mic attached to my body armor and reported to the commander.

“Yellow three, clear.”

“Roger, Yellow three. Hold what you’ve got. Out.”

My team and I pulled security toward empty dunes of sand, trying to imagine what it would be like when we did this mission for real. Our briefing had shown that the real embassy in downtown Kuwait City was surrounded by buildings. The plan was to flatten them to disrupt the enemy, so we’d probably be looking at smoking rubble if this were the real thing. But for now, the rain had moved away and a moonlit sky showed a huge special-ops Pave Low helicopter approaching from the sea. The long hairs were inbound to extract our precious cargo.

While my men stayed prone, surveying their sectors of fire, I took a knee and thought about how tough it would be to lose any of them. These men were the brothers I’d always

wanted as a boy. We'd been through a lot together. I wouldn't let anything hurt them, if I had to kill the whole city or die trying. I imagined having to hold off hundreds of Iraqi troops from this exposed position, protecting fellow Americans whom we'd probably never even see.

Looking through my night vision goggles at the empty dunes to my front, images of a fight to the death flashed through my head. For one moment, the real weight of the commitment I'd made nearly four years earlier to "support and defend" came looking back at me through that night scope. I realized fully, maybe for the first time, that I'd agreed to go to my death if that's what it took. I'd freely given up any choice in the matter. If my commander decided it was necessary to send me on a suicide mission, I had pledged to go.

Oddly enough, that thought didn't bother me much. In fact, it brought a sense of purpose and quiet determination. I wasn't in any hurry to get killed, but it felt good to be a part of something that transcended my own life.

Four minutes later, after the Pave Low had come and gone, the Black Hawks swooped back in from the sea and landed on the beach, their rotor blades phosphorescing with static electricity. We waited for a cue from our leader, then pulled back toward the choppers. Before we clambered aboard, I pulled out a small mag light and made sure each man cleared his weapon.

As the aircraft turned back toward the ship, I checked my watch. The entire mission had gone like clockwork. It had taken less than six minutes.

We were ready.

The confidence brought on by that knowledge made me

feel, well, invincible. I was armed with a belief in the mission, a knowledge that I was prepared for it, and the understanding that other competent men were watching my back. The risks were very real, but there were Americans out there who needed our help, and we weren't going to let them down. I suddenly felt as if I'd found the very wellspring of courage.

I felt bulletproof.

ONE



SPIRITWARRIORS

29 January 2004

Mosul, Iraq

Something's wrong with this picture.

Jeff could see the barricade up ahead. It looked like road construction. Fifty-five-gallon drums blocked the road and Iraqi workers swept the pavement, while vehicles trying to get through were detoured onto a side street. Jeff saw the lead vehicle in their convoy—a gray Suburban—turn the corner and then stop at the roadblock. The vehicle he was driving was close behind.

I don't like the looks of this.

No sooner had the thought formed in his mind than automatic gunfire erupted from everywhere. The *pop-pop-popping* was so loud in his left ear that he was sure the gunman was right outside his window. He flinched instinctively at the sound and watched in horror as gunmen peppered the Suburban with bullets right before his eyes.

NO!

One of the first rounds smashed through the back window of the Suburban, pierced the driver's headrest, and struck the driver in the back of the neck. Another round penetrated the back door and the rear seat and struck a passenger in the spine. Still more bullets pierced the door frame next to Maj. Steve Ward, who was riding shotgun. Then a spiderweb of cracks appeared from bullets smashing through the windshield in front of him.

Jeff saw the Suburban hesitate for a moment, then bolt to the left, jumping the curb and plowing through the barricade as it tore out of the kill zone. Jeff hit the accelerator and followed suit, knocking more barrels aside, as the soldier riding shotgun in his vehicle attempted to return fire.

Once away from the congestion it became clear there had been no road construction. The ambush had been well planned and executed. As Jeff realized the full magnitude of what had just happened, he became very concerned for the three people in the lead vehicle, all of whom had become good friends in the time they'd been together in Iraq.

He picked up his radio and called the Suburban. "Is everyone all right up there?"

"We have a hit!" the major's voice crackled over the airwaves. "We have a hit! We're heading back to base!"

D-Main Base, Mosul,
thirty minutes earlier

The five warriors stopped everything and stood together. It was time to put on their body armor.

While their mission was one of peace, they were entering

a city at war. They knew the risks but also held a deep understanding of their purpose in that place. With eyes closed, they stood in a circle and called on their Commander for safety, courage, and clarity on this mission.

As members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, their specialty was construction, not destruction, so the military didn't consider them soldiers. But even though the military part of the campaign had been over for months, a greater fight still raged—a spiritual battle between chaos and order, turmoil and peace, discord and harmony. In this war, these five were frontline combat troops.

Norm would drive the Suburban, the lead vehicle in their convoy. He was a big Norwegian whom everyone called “Stormy” or “Bubba.” That day, he had lent his extra-large body armor to a friend, which left him to go without. The thought didn't bother him; he knew that his safety in Mosul had much less to do with his bulletproof vest than it did with his standing before God. As the team prepared to leave, however, someone came up to Norm and offered him an XL vest, which he happily accepted.

Gayle, a reporter for the Armed Forces Network, would accompany the engineers on their mission today, riding in the backseat of the lead vehicle. She wore a bulletproof vest, but it was only rated to stop nine-millimeter rounds.

Jeff, the driver of the second vehicle, went by the call sign “FM.” It stood for “Family Man,” because of the loving wife and two young daughters who awaited him at home. It had been a tough decision to come to Iraq, but he felt called to do so. Today was especially difficult for him, because it was his ninth wedding anniversary.

Their mission this day was to visit a local radio station and work up a report on what it would take to make the station operational.

After their short prayer, the team loaded up, with some armed Gurkha soldiers riding along for protection.

They left the main gate...and drove straight into the ambush.

Twenty minutes later, the convoy burst back through the gate of the compound, stopping in front of the aid station. Jeff watched anxiously as Norm stumbled out of the Suburban, holding his neck. Apparently he had driven the entire way like that—steering and honking the horn with one hand, while keeping pressure on a neck wound with the other.

A quick examination revealed that the bullet had deflected off the seat post behind Norm and wrapped itself up in the Kevlar collar of his flak vest, grazing off to one side. The round pierced both his uniform collar and his T-shirt collar but left only a scratch on his neck.

Quickly, the medics turned their attention to Gayle. The bullet had struck very close to her spine, but a closer look revealed that the vest had stopped the AK-47 bullet, even though it wasn't rated for such a powerful round. A hole in the shoulder of her vest showed that another round had gone straight through it—missing her body. Gayle had a nice bruise but was back on duty later that day.

Major Ward had only superficial injuries, despite being surrounded by bullet holes. In fact, a close examination of the lead vehicle showed that rounds penetrated every headrest, shattered both front and rear windshields, and riddled the

door frames next to where people were sitting. Jeff's vehicle, despite being directly in the line of fire and only five yards or so behind the Suburban, was hit only three times, though it was clear the shooters had been targeting the driver's side.

As the team took stock of the damaged vehicles, it became obvious to everyone that they were looking at a miracle. The prayers offered up before they left had been answered in a big way. God had sent unseen protectors to ride with them on this mission.

RECKLESS LOVE

Don't get too enchanted with the miraculous deliverance Jeff and his friends experienced that day. Yes, it was certainly something for which to praise and thank God. But we are surrounded by miracles every day. What should impact us most about this story is not that the members of this team were shielded from harm in a dark and evil place, but that this band of Christian soldiers did not let the prospect of violent death deter them from God's calling on their lives.

It's a point that would have been just as valid if every one of them had been killed. In fact, not three months after this incident, four Southern Baptist missionaries were shot to death in a similar incident in the very same city.

Larry and Jean Elliott, along with David and Carrie McDonnall and Karen Watson, were on their way to a site in Mosul where they were planning a water purification project to bring fresh water to the people of the city. In an ambush almost exactly like the one just described, gunmen opened fire on their vehicle. Carrie McDonnall was the only survivor.

Career missionaries, the Elliotts understood the risks associated with being in Iraq. And they went anyway.

Their purpose was never to badger the residents of the predominantly Muslim country, but to preach the gospel with their *actions*, giving fresh water to anyone who needed it. Their greater goal, however, was to share living water with those willing to listen.

Some might say that being killed ended the Elliotts' chance to change people's lives. But in actuality, their death has leveraged their effectiveness, enabling them to inspire more people into His service. Before this incident, very few people knew about the exploits of this small band of committed believers. But in death, their story has been spread around the world.

Norma Martinez de Robbins attended the service in Bullock, North Carolina, to honor the Elliotts' lives of service. She says that the Elliotts' death has sparked a renewed fervor in her own life: "Now I'm more encouraged to tell and be faithful. They taught me loving is the first key to start evangelizing."¹

The Elliotts were simply following the example modeled for them by Christ Himself. Speaking of His own pending crucifixion, Jesus said:

"Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in

your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal."
(John 12:24–25, *The Message*)

Reckless love. What better way is there to describe the actions of these intrepid missionaries? Oh, that I could learn to love like that!

Another memorial service was held for the couple in Honduras, where they had served as missionaries for twenty-six years. Cesar Pena, the pastor of the church there, said, "People wanted to follow them—I wanted to follow them—because they followed Jesus with a wholehearted passion."²

Pastor Pena went on to describe the twelve churches and more than eighty water wells the Elliots left behind when they died, a testament to their faithfulness to the Great Commission.

In reality, these missionaries "died" years earlier, when they allowed God's purpose for their lives to supplant their own. This surrender gave them peace in the midst of chaos, a peace evident in an e-mail Jean sent home just days before she was murdered:

We are happy to be here in Iraq, and our calling has been confirmed. This is a very special time for us, and God is so REAL. No matter what happens, we are in His hands, and we know that we are where we should be.³

Like another martyred missionary, Jim Elliot, Larry and Jean willingly "gave up something that they could not keep to gain something that they could not lose," and many others

have been encouraged to do the same by their example.

Jeff's group in Mosul experienced supernatural protection, and the Elliotts' group was massacred. But both had this in common: Each was doing the work they had been called to do, and Jesus Christ was glorified as a result. Both groups emerged from their ordeals victorious—one granted additional time to make a difference on this earth, and the other taken home for a victory celebration. Both teams had learned to approach their battles with a *bulletproof mindset*, which made them invincible—in every way that mattered.

In Philippians 1:20, Paul wrote, "I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death."

What both of these missionary groups did was to eagerly pursue God's purpose in their lives, trusting Him with the results. They were concerned less with their own personal security than they were with their standing before their Commander. They lived well, and in the latter case, they died well.

PARADOX

There is a paradox here that's troubled me at times. In Luke 21:16–19, Jesus seems to contradict Himself on this issue of safety for believers:

"You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not

a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life.”

What? How does that add up? How can some of us be put to death, yet realize the promise that “not a hair of your head will perish”?

The answer can only be found in a radically different concept of safety.

Jesus sees things from His Father’s perspective. In His eyes, the passage from this world into eternity looks more like a coming-of-age, or a rite of passage. It’s a *beginning* of something much more than it is an end of something. Remember your high school graduation? Caps and gowns, hugs, high fives, and perhaps a few tears. It’s a bittersweet occasion marking the passing of one phase of life, but the sadness is overshadowed by the anticipation of the many experiences awaiting you on the road ahead.

Paul explains the passage into eternity using similar terms in 2 Corinthians 5:4. The apostle was ready to be done with this life. Why? Because he wanted to be dead? Far from it! Paul wanted to finally experience what it means to be truly alive!

For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, *so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.* (emphasis mine)

Our Lord’s view of safety is vastly different from that of the world. To Him, our earthly dwelling does not represent life, but death. Paul wrote, “Who will rescue me from this

body of death?” (Romans 7:24). We see life being swallowed by death, but Christ saw death being swallowed by Life—with a capital *L*! This is how He could say, “Some of you will be put to death...but not a hair on your head will perish.”

Jim Elliot, martyred by the Auca Indians in Ecuador in 1956, demonstrated Christ’s perspective in a letter to his brother when he wrote, “You are immortal until your work is finished.” But Elliot’s focus was never on living a long and comfortable life. Instead, his prayer was this:

God, I pray Thee, light these idle sticks of my life and may I burn up for Thee. Consume my life, my God, for it is Thine. I seek not a long life, but a full one, like You, Lord Jesus.⁴

Jim Elliot’s prayers were answered. He lived a full, adventurous life—one which the world would say was cut short when he was brutally murdered attempting to reach a remote tribe with the gospel. But Elliott looked at life differently than the world does. To him, what mattered most was his effectiveness for the kingdom of God. As it turned out, his martyrdom gave rise to a tidal wave of young missionary volunteers. And after Jim’s widow went to live with the Aucas—the very ones who murdered her husband—showing them the meaning of forgiveness, the tribe was converted almost in its entirety.

If Jim Elliot had lived and ministered till he was one hundred, he could not have had a greater impact for the kingdom of Christ. This spirit warrior understood that risk has much less to do with the external hazards in life than

with his standing in the kingdom of the Most High God.

That's what this book is all about. About risk and why we shun it, but shouldn't always do so. About true safety and security that extend far beyond the brief candle that is this lifetime and reach into the endless years of light and true life in the presence of our Savior. Throughout history, this understanding has enabled men and women to be willing, even joyful, when enduring hardship, uncertainty, pain, and death. From their examples, I can learn to be a more elite soldier for Christ.

And so can you.

*Life is not a journey to the grave
with the intention of arriving safely in
a pretty and well preserved body, but rather
to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up,
totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming,
“Wow, what a ride!”*

ANONYMOUS