



Extortion 17

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On August 6, 2011, a U.S. CH-47D Chinook military helicopter operating with the call sign Extortion 17 (pronounced "one-seven") was shot down while transporting a Quick Reaction Force attempting to reinforce a Joint Special Operations Command unit of the 75th Ranger Regiment in the Tangi Valley in Maidan Wardak province, southwest of Kabul, Afghanistan.

The resulting crash killed all 38 people on board including 17 US Navy SEALs, 2 United States Air Force Pararescue, 1 United States Air Force Combat Control Team member, one pilot and two crewmen of the United States Army Reserve, one pilot and one crewman of the United States Army National Guard, seven members of the Afghan National Security Forces, and one Afghan interpreter, as well as a U.S. military working dog. With 31 U.S. military personnel killed, the shoot down of Extortion 17 represents the greatest single-incident loss of U.S. lives in Operation Enduring Freedom – Afghanistan.

After US intelligence services discovered in 2011 that senior Taliban leader Qari Tahir was possibly in Tangi Valley, Wardak province, Afghanistan, local US forces launched a mission to apprehend or kill him. At 22:37 (local time) on the night of August 5, a platoon of 47 U.S. Army Rangers left at forward operating base in Logar



Province via two CH-47D transport helicopters, one of which would later be involved in the accident. After a twenty-minute flight (around 23:00), the two Chinook helicopters landed near the compound ostensibly containing Tahir, offloaded the Ranger platoon, and returned to base.^[11]

The mission was deemed high risk; two AH-64 Apache helicopters, an AC-130 gunship, and other additional intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft supported the troop transports on their approach, and remained with the ground forces afterwards. 17 U.S. Navy SEALs remained in reserve at the forward operating base.

As the Rangers approached the target compound, ISR aircraft observed several people leaving the compound. This group grew in number over the course of the night, but US forces were—at first—too preoccupied to engage. At 23:30, one of the Apache support helicopters engaged in a brief skirmish with a different group of eight Taliban fighters 400 m (440 yd) north of the compound, killing six.^[11]

Separately, ISR aircraft continued to observe the unengaged group from the compound. Originally just two people, the group eventually accumulated a total of 9–10 fighters, and the special operations task force commander and the Immediate Reaction Force commander became concerned that it might include Tahir. At 01:00, they decided to engage the group with the SEAL reserves.^{[9][11]}

Almost an hour later (01:50), the aviation brigade commander approved a new landing zone for infiltration of the SEAL team. The landing zone had been examined for a previous mission, but had not yet been used.^[11]



At 02:00, the special operations task force commander and the Immediate Reaction Force commander decided to add additional (non-SEAL) reinforcements, increasing the size of the team to 33. In order to speed disembarkation, all troops were loaded on a single CH-47D helicopter for transport; the other Chinook would approach the landing zone second as a decoy. Around 02:23, the two helicopters departed the forward base.^{[9][11]}

Meanwhile, the group of Taliban fighters split in two. At 02:15, one group of three Taliban fighters took a position in a stand of trees; the remaining 6–7 men entered a building located some 2 km (1.2 mi) from the target compound. Going forward, the two AH-64 Apache helicopters would be engaged in tracking those two groups of Taliban, and hence unable to provide surveillance or fire support to the inbound helicopter carrying the SEAL team.

Six minutes prior to reaching the landing zone, the empty CH-47D left the formation as planned. The helicopter carrying the SEALs proceeded to the landing zone alone, without external lighting. During the Ranger insertion earlier that night, the CH-47D had approached from the south; this time, it approached from the northwest. The helicopter made its last radio transmission stating it was one minute away from the landing zone, then descended to an altitude of 100–150 ft (30–46 m) and slowed to a speed of 50 knots (58 mph; 93 km/h) as it approached the landing zone.

Around 02:38, the helicopter was fired upon and shot down by a previously undetected group of Taliban fighters approximately 220 m (240 yd) south of the helicopter. The group fired 2–3 RPG rounds from a two-story building, the second of which struck one



of the three aft rotor blades of the helicopter. The resulting explosion destroyed the aft rotor assembly. In less than five seconds, the helicopter crashed, killing all occupants, and approximately 30 seconds later one of the AH-64 Apache helicopters radioed in the crash.

Six minutes later, the Rangers concluded securing the compound, detained several people, and then began to move (on foot) towards the crash site. They reached the crash site at 04:12 and found no survivors. Several minutes later a 20-man Pathfinder team (specializing in downed-aircraft rescue and recovery) arrived at the site as well.

By 16:25 all of the remains were taken from the crash site via ground convoy and transported to Combat Outpost Sayyid Abad. Recovery of wreckage from the crash site lasted until 9 August 2011.

Casualties from the event included:

- 15 United States Navy SEALs and one Military Working Dog handler from the Naval Special Warfare Development Group's Gold Squadron
- 2 U.S. Navy SEALs from Naval Special Warfare Group 1
- 4 U.S. Naval Special Warfare support personnel: Two Explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) technicians, one Cryptologic technician and one Information systems technician.
- 3 U.S. Army Reserve personnel (Aircrew) from the 7th Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment
- 2 U.S. Army personnel (Aircrew) from the 2nd Battalion, 135th Aviation Regiment, part of Colorado Army National Guard



- 2 U.S. Air Force Pararescuemen from the 24th Special Tactics Squadron
- 1 U.S. Air Force Combat Controller from the 24th Special Tactics Squadron
- 7 Afghan National Army Commandos, part of the Afghan National Army
- 1 Afghan civilian interpreter Sayed Jawid Sadat
- 1 U.S. Military Working Dog (Bart)

The 31 American deaths represent the greatest loss of U.S. military lives in a single incident in the, by then, decade-long war in Afghanistan that began in 2001.

Fifteen of the Navy SEALs that were killed were members of the Naval Special Warfare Development Group (DEVGRU), while the other two Navy SEALs killed in the helicopter shutdown were from an unidentified West Coast-based SEAL unit. The five other Navy casualties were NSW (Naval Special Warfare) support personnel; in addition to these, three AFSOC operators, one Combat Controller and two Pararescuemen, all members of the 24th Special Tactics Squadron, died in the crash. Their deaths are the greatest single loss of life ever suffered by the U.S. Special Operations community in the 24-year history of the U.S. Special Operations Command.

Wikipedia Article,
"2011 Afghanistan Boeing Chinook Shutdown"