

The background of the cover is a photograph of a soldier in full combat gear, including a helmet and camouflage uniform, aiming a rifle. The image is overlaid with large, bold, yellow text. The text '13' is at the top, 'HOURS' is in the middle, and 'IN BENGHAZI' is at the bottom. The author's name 'MITCHELL ZUCKOFF' is at the very bottom, followed by 'with the Annex Security Team'.

# 13 HOURS IN BENGHAZI

Exhibit 1

THE INSIDE ACCOUNT OF WHAT REALLY HAPPENED  
IN BENGHAZI

MITCHELL ZUCKOFF with the Annex Security Team





**Mark "Oz" Geist**—At forty-six the oldest member of the team, the laid-back Oz spent a dozen years in the Marine Corps, including work in an intelligence unit, then became the police chief in the Colorado town where he grew up. After running a private investigation company, in 2004 he became a security contractor to the State Department in Iraq. Twice married, Oz had a son with his first wife and a teenage stepdaughter and an infant daughter with his second wife.

*(Courtesy of Mark Geist)*

**Kris "Tanto" Paronto**—A former member of the Army's 75th Ranger Regiment, the voluble Tanto had a personality as colorful as the many tattoos on his muscular body. At forty-one, he'd spent a decade working as a contract security operator—a job he considered part of a battle between good and evil—in countries throughout the Middle East. Tanto held a master's degree in criminal justice, owned an insurance adjusting business, and had a son and a daughter with his second wife.



**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

**Jack Silva**—A former Navy SEAL, Jack spent a decade in the service, carrying out missions in Kosovo and the Middle East. Introspective and smart, Jack left the SEALs to spend more time with his two young sons and his wife, who learned while Jack was in Benghazi that she was pregnant. At thirty-eight, Jack divided time between contract security work and real estate, buying, renovating, and selling properties. Jack often partnered with fellow former SEAL Tyrone “Rone” Woods.



*(Courtesy of Jack Silva)*

**John “Tig” Tiegen**—Tig was thirty-six, a former Marine sergeant from Colorado who spent several years as a security contractor for Blackwater. He worked for the company in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq, before going to work for the CIA’s Global Response Staff. Quiet and precise, the married father of infant twins, Tig was in the midst of his third trip to Benghazi for GRS, making him the team member with the most experience in the city. He often teamed with Mark “Oz” Geist.



*(Courtesy of John Tiegen)*

## A NOTE TO THE READER

This book documents the last hours of an American diplomatic outpost in one of the most dangerous corners of the globe. Based on exclusive firsthand accounts, it describes the bloody assault, tragic losses, and heroic deeds at the US State Department Special Mission Compound and at a nearby CIA base called the Annex in Benghazi, Libya, from the night of September 11, 2012, into the morning of the next day.

It is not about what officials in the United States government knew, said, or did after the attack, or about the ongoing controversy over talking points, electoral politics, and alleged conspiracies and cover-ups. It is not about what happened in hearing rooms of the Capitol, anterooms of the White House, meeting rooms of the State Department, or green rooms of TV talk shows. It is about what happened on the ground, in the streets, and on the rooftops of Benghazi, when bullets flew, buildings burned, and mortars rained. When lives were saved, lost, and forever changed.



The men whose experiences comprise the soul and spine of this book are well aware of the political storm surrounding Benghazi. They recognize that the word itself has become unmoored, no longer simply the name of a dusty Mediterranean port city on Libya's northeastern coast. They know that some Americans use Benghazi as shorthand for US government malfeasance or worse. They also understand that their explanations and revelations will be used as evidence to fit arguments and accusations in which they have chosen not to participate.

It's not that they don't care about those issues. It's just not their purpose. Their intent is to record for history, as accurately as possible, what they did, what they saw, and what happened to them—and to their friends, colleagues, and compatriots—during the Battle of Benghazi.

Although written as a narrative, this is a work of nonfiction. No scenes or chronologies were altered, no dramatic license was taken, and no characters were invented or created from composites. Descriptions from before, during, and immediately after the battle came from the men who were there, from verified accounts, or both. All dialogue was spoken or heard firsthand by primary sources. Thoughts ascribed to individuals came directly from those individuals.

The main sources of this book are the five surviving American security force contractors, known as "operators," who responded to the surprise attack on the Benghazi diplomatic Compound, spearheaded the counterattack, and carried out the rescue of State Department personnel and residents of the CIA Annex. Several names have been

changed or withheld for privacy or security reasons, but all descriptions and information included about individuals is true. Classified details were omitted, in keeping with standard nondisclosure agreements among clandestine government employees and contractors. Those changes and omissions had no material effect on the story and did not misrepresent the known facts. The individual accounts of the operators were fundamentally in sync, but occasionally they diverged on details, such as when a particular radio call was sent. Whenever possible the narrative reflects the varying perspectives, which can be attributed to the fast-moving nature of events, the fog of war, and team members' overriding concerns about remaining alive rather than keeping track of chronologies.

Secondary sources include additional interviews, photos and videos, the voluminous record of public documents, congressional reports and testimony, and media reports. Those sources, credited where appropriate in the text and cited in the Select Bibliography, were used to provide context, fill gaps during periods when the primary sources weren't present, and to confirm or elaborate upon the participants' recollections. Further discussion of sourcing can be found at the end of the book, in "A Note on Sources" (page 305).

Previous accounts of these events, in books, magazines, and other media, have disturbed and even disgusted the men whose story is told here. Versions with fictionalized dialogue, imaginary incidents, false or exaggerated claims, and sensationalized allegations serve no purpose other than to inflame and obfuscate. The goal of the real security team members is to recount the Battle of Benghazi through as transparent a lens as possible. They and the family of a



## **A NOTE TO THE READER**

sixth operator have a financial stake in this book, but their only editorial demand was that the story be told truthfully.

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It would be folly to think that this or any other account would be the last word on events with such wide-ranging implications. But after so many words have already flowed, with many more to come, consider it the first word directly from the battlefield, from men who know from hard experience and seared memories what actually happened during those harrowing thirteen hours.

—Mitchell Zuckoff

SEPTEMBER 11, 2012

machine gun with a bandolier of ammunition. He knew that there were other, similar bandoliers already in the car, in case he needed more ammo. The GRS Team Leader remained outside near Building C, talking on a cell phone.

Several of the operators demanded to know what they were waiting for. The Team Leader pulled away from his phone: "We need to come up with a plan," he said, referring to how they'd coordinate with the 17 February militia. Also standing outside the vehicles talking on phones were Bob the Annex chief and his second-in-command, a CIA officer who'd earned the operators' esteem by treating them with respect.

Inside the vehicles, the five GRS operators triple-checked their gunsights, tightened their armor, and tried to figure out why they hadn't already left. They likely could have reached the Compound on foot in the time they'd been waiting. Most sat quietly, but Tanto tried to keep the atmosphere light by complaining that he had nowhere to put the coffee cup he'd brought with him. "Spend \$250,000 on a damn Mercedes and there's no cup holder? What kind of bullshit is that?"

As minutes passed and they grew tense listening to the conversations outside the cars, the operators got the distinct impression that the rescue plan being discussed somehow didn't include them.

Standing outside the Mercedes, Tig called out, "Hey, we gotta go now! We're losing the initiative!"

"No, stand down, you need to wait," Bob the base chief yelled back.

"We need to come up with a plan," the Team Leader repeated.



"It's too fucking late to come up with a plan," Tig yelled. "We need to get in the fucking area and *then* come up with a plan."

Tanto got out of the Mercedes and approached the Team Leader and Bob. He asked them to request US military air support, specifically an unmanned ISR drone, named for its ability to provide intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. Tanto also asked them to call in a heavily armed AC-130 Spectre gunship, a four-engine, fixed-wing plane designed for lethal ground assaults. In the meantime, Tanto told the bosses, he and the other operators were overdue to move out.

The CIA chief looked at Tanto, then at the Team Leader, then back to Tanto. Tanto felt as though the chief was looking right through him. "No," Bob said, "hold up. We're going to have the local militia handle it."

Tanto couldn't believe his ears. He turned to the Team Leader: "Hey, we need to go."

"No," the T.L. said, "we need to wait. The chief is trying to coordinate with 17 Feb and let them handle it."

"What do you mean, 'Let them handle it?'" Tanto demanded. He had little confidence in the 17 February militia, whose members he and several other operators considered as liable to turn on them as to serve alongside them. Tanto especially wouldn't trust the militia on its word when the objective was to save American lives. "We need to go. We're not letting 17 Feb handle it."

Tanto's memory flashed back to the airport stand-off months earlier. He believed that Bob was repeating the go-slow, stand-down, let-the-friendly-militia-handle-it approach he'd taken when hostile militiamen held up Rone and another GRS operator. That incident was resolved

## 13 HOURS

tension. The operators imagined bloody scenes of what was happening to their countrymen less than a mile away. And the longer they sat idle, the more likely the same fate awaited them.

As the hour neared 10:00 p.m., with the operators' radios tuned to the same frequency as those at the Compound, they heard the voice of one of the DS agents in the Compound TOC, Alec Henderson or David Ubben.

"We're being attacked!" one yelled, his voice tight with stress. "There's approximately twenty to thirty armed men, with AKs firing. We're being attacked! We need help! We need help now!"

Adrenaline surged through the operators' veins, but again they were told to wait. They were used to following orders, and they knew that insubordination could mean their jobs or worse. But a shared thought took hold in both vehicles: If they weren't given permission to move out soon, they'd take matters into their own hands.