



# Fight, Kill, Die, Buddy

## Words Professional Soldiers Live By

**Brigadier General Sean MacFarland,  
U.S. Army**

*"The preeminent military task, and what separates [the military profession] from all other occupations, is that soldiers are routinely prepared to kill . . . in addition to killing and preparing to kill, the soldier has two other principal duties . . . some soldiers die and, when they are not dying, they must be preparing to die."*

— James H. Toner

**T**HE WORDS, "to kill and die" are as central to the profession of arms as "to serve and protect" are to the law enforcement profession, or "equal justice under the law" are to the legal profession. The life and death nature of what we do as soldiers is what draws us together and creates the unique cohesion of the bands of brothers that Shakespeare and Steven Ambrose wrote about, which simply do not exist anywhere outside military experience. Skill, trust, shared sacrifice, and even fear bind warriors together so tightly that they are capable of acts of courage that rival those of a mother protecting her children. At the core of the willingness to kill and die for one another is trust bound up in shared sacrifices. When we examine the key attributes of our profession, we can never lose sight of this underlying truth, because it sets us apart from all others.

### Ramadi

As a brigade combat team (BCT) commander in Ramadi from 2006 to early 2007, I had the opportunity to witness what James Toner called "the preeminent military task" on a scale and frequency that I hope never to repeat. After command, I served on the Joint staff. One morning, I was running past the Iwo Jima Memorial and for the first time really thought about the words engraved on the pedestal, "uncommon valor was a common virtue." I almost stopped in my tracks when I realized that I had also experienced something like that.

In Ramadi, Soldiers, Marines, and Navy SEALs fought and died for their buddies, their leaders, and their subordinates. In the midst of it all, I

Brigadier General Sean MacFarland is the Deputy Commanding General for Leader Development and Education of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, KS.

U.S. Navy SEALs patrolling with U.S. soldiers in Ramadi, 2006. (U.S. Navy)



**Camp Ramadi Memorial Service, 2006.**

became almost numb to the routine courage and sacrifice occurring every day. Many of these acts went unrecognized at the time, but not all. In just a few days, one battalion earned a Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), three Silver Stars, several more Bronze Stars and Army Commendations Medals for Valor, and numerous Purple Hearts. A few days later, a Navy SEAL named Petty Officer Mike Mansoor, earned a posthumous Medal of Honor for his actions in Ramadi in support of our BCT. Although the awards of a DSC and a Medal of Honor were unusual, this was not a particularly intense week in Al Anbar province. Without a doubt, members of other Army brigades and Marine regiments in both Iraq and Afghanistan could equal or top this, but this is what a week at the office was like for soldiers in the 1st Battalion, 36th Infantry, in September 2006.

On 24 September 2006, the enemy attacked a dismounted patrol as it made its way through a hotly contested part of South Ramadi. Several men were wounded in the firefight. Staff Sergeant Jason

P. Trumpower, commanding a Bradley Fighting Vehicle, quickly maneuvered his track in an attempt to evacuate the soldiers. But, his vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device (IED), disabling it and critically wounding the driver. Trumpower, pinned in the vehicle, maintained security and notified higher headquarters of the situation.

Staff Sergeant David Anderson, who was also responding to the call for aid in his own Bradley Fighting Vehicle, linked up with Trumpower and began evacuating the crew as another vehicle dealt with the dismounted casualties. Anderson was directing his vehicle back to Camp Ramadi when it, too, was disabled by an IED, wounding five inside.

The explosion knocked out communications and caused a fire in the rear compartment. Anderson, after checking his gunner and driver, attempted to let down the rear ramp and the troop door, but both were jammed. Trumpower, with severe wounds to his hands and face, tried to get the cargo hatch open. With Anderson's help, the two men were able to open it wide enough to evacuate

the vehicle. Specialist Reyes, a medic, although also wounded and disoriented by the flames, found the fire-suppression handle and doused the blaze long enough for everyone to escape. Once everyone was out, Anderson took a rifle from the vehicle and single-handedly made sure there were no insurgents within a nearby building while Trumpower guarded the wounded and Reyes evaluated and stabilized them.

After they moved the wounded into the building, Anderson attempted to retrieve a radio and smoke grenade to signal their location, only to find both destroyed in the vehicle. Knowing the wounded driver was going into shock and could bleed to death without immediate evacuation, Anderson ran over 400 meters through hostile streets to wave down yet another Bradley, which he then led back to the wounded soldiers, and subsequently supervised the loading of his men.

I arrived at “Charlie Med” just as the wounded men arrived in the Bradley and were unloaded onto

waiting litters. Anderson and Trumpower were the last to accept medical attention. Trumpower’s nomex [flame resistant brand fiber] was in tatters and blackened by the fire in the Bradley. The battalion command sergeant major from Task Force 1-37 Armor, to which B Co, 1-36 Infantry, was attached, finally had to order them to enter the aid station.

When I presented him with a Silver Star a few months later for his actions that day, Anderson said, “I’m just glad I was there to take care of my soldiers and bring them home safely. To me, I was just doing my job and what I was trained to do.”<sup>1</sup>

Just two days later, 2nd Lieutenant Bryan Jackson was on his way back from a meeting in the nearby city of Hit, at which I’d informed all the officers of Task Force 1-36 Infantry that our BCT had been extended by 45 days. A vehicle in his convoy became disabled while maneuvering in response to enemy fire. Jackson was helping to recover it, when he and those around him



J.D. Leopold (ARNEWS)

**1LT Walter Bryan Jackson is the seventh soldier to receive the Distinguished Service Cross since 1975. He is flanked by Secretary of the Army Pete Geren and his former commander, LTC Thomas C. Graves.**



came under heavy machine gun fire, resulting in several soldiers being wounded, to include his company commander and first sergeant. An insurgent's bullet ripped through Jackson's thigh, but did not take Jackson out of the fight. Regaining consciousness after the initial shock of the injury, his first thought was about his severely wounded comrades. Jackson alternated between returning fire on the suspected enemy position and administering first aid to his compatriot with life-threatening wounds. Ignoring his own severe injuries and relying on his tenacity and strength, Jackson carried his first sergeant to a Bradley 30 feet away for evacuation. Even as he was hit a second time by enemy fire, Jackson never faltered. Once clear of the engagement and despite the severity of his own injuries, Jackson still refused medical aid until the man he helped save was treated. At the aid station, the first words to come from him were of concern for the wounded man he had rescued. When the Secretary of the Army presented him with his Distinguished Service Cross, then-1st Lieutenant Jackson said simply, "I believe I just had to do what I had to do in that situation . . . I think many Soldiers would have done the same thing."<sup>2</sup>

## Shared Sacrifice

What is truly impressive about these two stories is that Staff Sergeant Anderson and Lieutenant Jackson were both right. They were just doing their jobs, and many other soldiers not only would have done the same, but routinely did. Uncommon valor was indeed a common virtue. Thanks to the courage of the junior leaders cited above, no Americans died in these engagements. As for killing, I am not sure how many enemy were killed or wounded; it is always difficult to know in urban combat. However, Americans seem to fight with unmatched ferocity when their comrades in arms are at risk. That the enemy paid a heavy price is probably safe to assume.

And soldierly virtues are not confined to the Army. Our soldiers in Ramadi were joined by "soldiers of the sea." At any given time, our BCT included a U.S. Marine Corps rifle battalion and was supported by two platoons of Navy SEALs who shared in their brothers' tears, sweat, and blood. Three short days after Lieutenant Jackson's firefight, on 29 September, Master-at-Arms 2nd Class Michael Mansoor, saved

***Thanks to the courage of the junior leaders cited above, no Americans died in these engagements.***

the rest of his sniper team by throwing himself on a live grenade. His sacrifice occurred just a few blocks away from where Sergeant Anderson made his run through an enemy gauntlet to save his men five days prior. The relationship between the men of SEAL Team 3 and the soldiers of 1st BCT, 1st Armored Division, was so close, that the SEALs proudly called themselves "Army SEALs" and the soldiers they fought alongside will forever remember them as part of their band of brothers—as fellow soldiers. Three different services were united by a common ethos, that of the American warrior.

Major General (Retired) Bob Scales recently said of his own experience in Vietnam:

Soldiers suffer, fight, and occasionally die for each other. It's as simple as that. What brought us to fight in the jungle was no different than the motive force that compels young soldiers today to kick open a door in Ramadi with the expectation that what lies on the other side is either an innocent huddling



(Photo courtesy of author)

**Camp Ramadi Memorial Service, 2006.**

with a child in her arms or a fanatic insurgent yearning to buy his ticket to eternity by killing the infidel. No difference. Patriotism and a paycheck may get a soldier into the military, but fear of letting his buddies down gets a soldier to do something that might just as well get him killed.<sup>3</sup>

Four words largely sum up what it means to be a soldier: fight, kill, die, and buddy. No other job, occupation, career, or profession entails the intimacy wrapped up in those four words. Aspiring to make soldiering a profession, one has to master the first two, prepare for the third, and be worthy of being called the fourth. A deep respect for one another, stemming from honed skills, implicit trust, and shared sacrifice rests at the foundation underlying these four words. Anderson, Trumpower, Jackson, and Mansoor attained all four. An army that gets these four things the most

right will win its wars, all things being equal, and sometimes even when other things are not equal.

Let us remember what sets American soldiers apart from many other armies. Our equipment is good but not the reason; our soldiers have their ethos, one that compares to the best that have existed in the history of civilization. General (Retired) Fred Franks said after Desert Storm, even if we had switched our equipment with the enemy, we still would have won. What are we doing today, to develop the Jacksons, Reyes's, Andersons, and Trumpowers of tomorrow? If we cannot satisfactorily answer that question, we are failing in our duty to be stewards of our profession, to leave it better than we found it. Whatever else we do to as part of the profession of arms, we need to make sure that ours is always an army of buddies, who will fight, kill, and die for their country and for each other. **MR**

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#### NOTES

1. 2 February 2007, Multi-National Force-West Public Affairs, Army News Service.
2. 2 November 2007, J.D. Leipold, ARNEWS.

3. 12 September 2009, speech by MG Robert Scales, U.S. Army (Retired) at Truman Library.



(Photo courtesy of author)

Awards ceremony for SSG Anderson, SSG Trumpower, and SPC Reyes, Camp Ramadi, 2006.