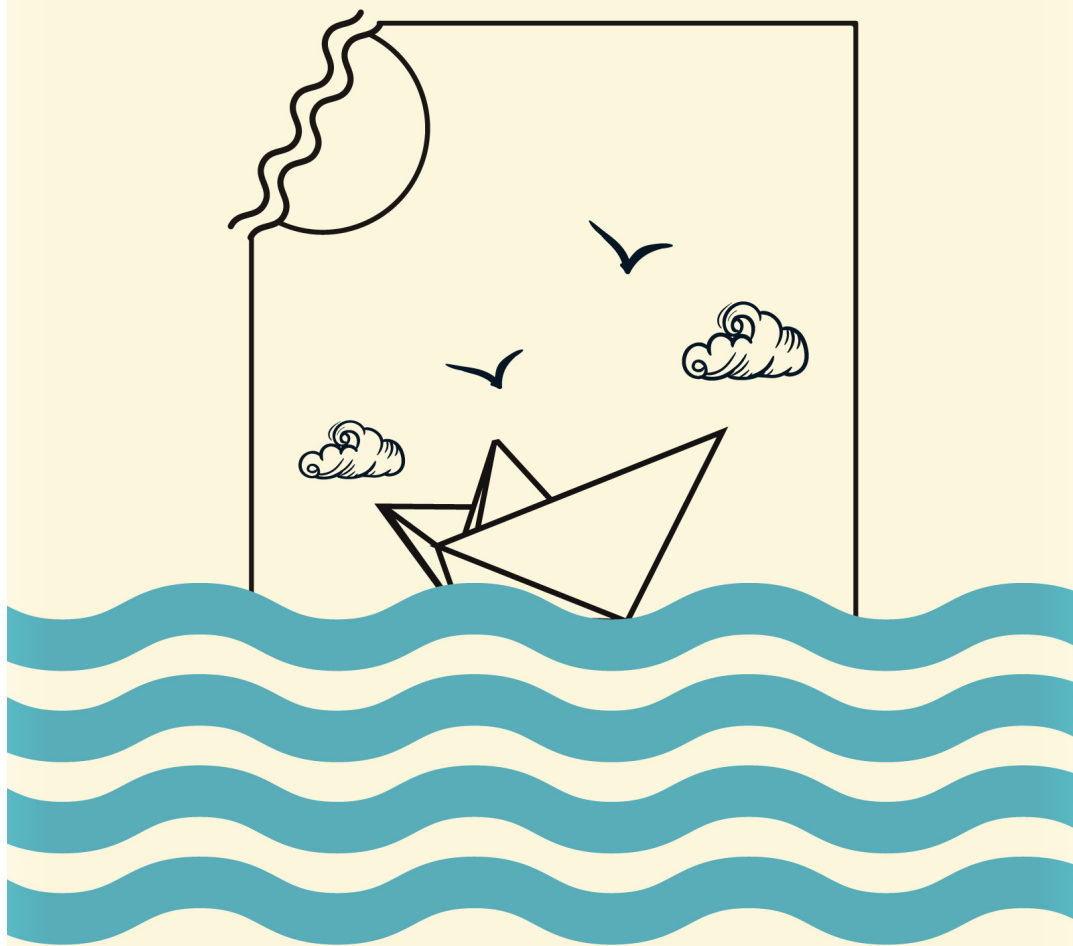


Summary ***Sea Stories***

William H. McRaven



Sea Stories: My Life in Special Operations by William H. McRaven

Through stories of harrowing events and near-death experiences, William McRaven details the lessons he's learned from four decades of service as a Navy SEAL.

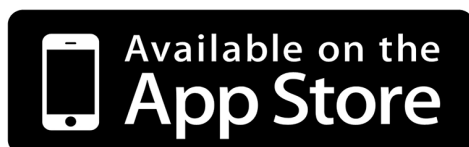


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Introduction

The son of an American Air Force Officer stationed in Fontainebleau, France, William H. McRaven would listen to stories told by his father and other officers. While he hid behind the bar, William listened intently, soaking in the glory and nobility from those who he looked up to for protection.

Little did William know that one day he would be telling even grandeur stories from his time as a Navy SEAL officer, and would be involved in some of the most momentous operations in United States history. From surviving harrowing events that were sure to kill him, to playing an integral role in capturing one of the most threatening terrorists, William H. McRaven tells captivating yet tragic stories detailing his experiences throughout his 37-year military career.

William's Childhood

William learned several lessons throughout his childhood while living at Lackland Air Force Base, also known as Medina Annex, located in San Antonio, Texas. After suffering a minor stroke, William's father moved his family to Texas from Fontainebleau, France, in 1963 at the height of the Cold War, meaning one area of the complex was strictly off-limits. But William, who loved adventure, was planning his own operations and he concocted a plan that would get him into this top-secret area. The scheme to trespass in a high-security area was just the beginning of a life-long military career for William and led to an important lesson that he would soon learn.

With his two friends, Billie and Jon, William planned out the details for "Operation Volcano," aptly named after the volcanic-shaped Gravel Gertie bunkers where the ammunition was stored inside of the facility. Their goal? To find out the various threats to their country. The area they planned to trespass on was surrounded by eight-foot-high barbed wire fences and was rumored to house dangerous nuclear weapons. William and his friends were going to be the ones to find out.

Armed with toy guns and hot dogs, William and his friends set out on their mission. Why hot dogs? They were for the k-9 guards, of course. They planned it all, and they were ready. The boys found an area of the fence that was somewhat hidden along a forested area and began their attempt to penetrate the high-security area. Once placing wooden planks to create a makeshift bridge, Jon and Billie backed out of the plan, but William was determined. He continued his climb until he found himself standing at the top of the third fence.

With sirens blaring and dogs going into a frenzy, William was faced with a decision. Air Police announced over a bull horn that William was trespassing and that he would be met with lethal force if he continued his ascent. Fearing the worst, William aborted the mission and quickly fled the scene, his Roy Rogers pearl-handled six-shooter cap gun left behind amidst the chaos.

Days later, William was confronted by his father asking him if he knew about the trespass attempt on the high-security area. Not wanting to admit to his treacherous scheme, William did the only thing he thought to do. He lied. Tears welled in his father's eyes and William was met with a look of pure disappointment, but he was free to go without further questioning.

That night, as William was crawling into bed, he found the Roy Rogers toy gun on his nightstand. His heart sank. He knew he had been caught. So, William learned an important lesson to never lie to his father, it was never worth it to betray the trust of his father. However, while he learned an important lesson from Operation Volcano, he also sparked a love for adventure and knew that joining the military would help quench that thirst.

Never Give Up

We have all been through trying times in life. We deal with losses of loved ones, losing jobs, and struggle with the everyday obstacles that life throws at us. However, many times we come out on the other side a better person having a lesson from these obstacles. William is no different. In fact, becoming a Navy SEAL taught him some of the most important life lessons that he recounts throughout this book.

It's certainly no secret the difficulties of becoming a Navy SEAL with some of the most rigorous training of any military sector. William goes through mental and physical exhaustion during the six-month Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S). With less than half of all trainees making it through, the trainees are brought to their breaking point on a daily basis, but they can easily quit by ringing a bell...three times.

Perhaps some of the most important lessons William learned were during the infamous Hell Week of training. Consisting of six days with no sleep and constant harassment, William's mental and physical strength was constantly tested. During the week, William found himself directing a boat crew and accidentally caused the crew to capsize. The water was cold and their gear was wet, but by encouraging his teammates they successfully got back on that boat and finished their exercise.

Another time, William went through a harrowing experience during their final exercise involving helicopter cast and recovery. Trainees were expected to jump from a twin-bladed CH-46 helicopter into the Coronado Bay and then climb back into the aircraft using a rope ladder. One of the most difficult exercises, William's experience didn't go well.

Upon re-entering the aircraft, William realized immediately that there was a problem. Water was beginning to pour in, one of the engines failed, and the crew was struggling to regain control of the aircraft. Once ordered to exit the aircraft, William dove into the water as far down as he could possibly go, knowing he had to avoid the helicopter's spinning blades. Upon resurfacing, a fellow trainee urgently shouted at William to get out of the way, and he quickly realized the aircraft was coming straight for him. Swimming as fast as he could, William barely escaped with his life. So, what could he have possibly learned from a week of Hell? Even the strongest, most intelligent, and fastest trainees could fail during training. It wasn't about being the strongest, but instead, it's about being the one that is most willing to succeed. With the help of your teammates and with an encouraging mindset, the true winners were those who persevered and didn't give up in the face of failure.

Operation Desert Storm

Throughout William's training and 15 years of naval service, William still craved the adventure from his childhood. He craved to go on meaningful missions, like Operation Volcano, and accomplish something that would give his life meaning, more importantly, he desired to serve his country. He had experienced much loss and tragedy over the years, but his sense of adventure never extinguished.

He was finally given the opportunity in 1990 when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. William was deployed and was stationed on the USS Okinawa, an amphibious assault ship. Over the next few weeks, President Bush ordered Operation Desert Shield to create an increase of troops to defend Saudi Arabia. Aboard the USS Okinawa, William was given the duties of Naval Special Warfare Task Unit commander and senior special officer.

The USS Okinawa quickly became the lead ship for Amphibious Squadron Five, which formed the Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) paired with the Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU). Stationed in the Indian Ocean, Okinawa received intelligence that the Amuriyah, an Iraqi supertanker, was transporting something of importance to Saddam Hussein. There was a reason to believe the tanker was transporting chemical or nuclear weapons and US forces quickly took action. Of course, this task was given to the ARG/MEU team, and William was ready to lead his team into the trenches of battle.

Luckily, the battle was unnecessary. William led a troop of Marines and Seals onboard the Amuriyah via helicopter, and while the shipmaster and crew initially resisted, they were able to come to an agreement without any casualties. Turns out, nothing was found onboard the Amuriyah that would arouse suspicions and they allowed the supertanker to continue onwards to Iraq.

However, the tanker became more significant in 1991 when US intelligence received intel that Saddam Hussein would be attempting to sink Iraqi oil ships to cause ecological disasters to the Arabian Gulf. However, before Saddam Hussein could put his plan into action, US forces bombed a fleet of ships before oil was loaded onto them. Of course, the Amuriyah was among the fleet.

A Near-Death Experience

Sometimes it seems that when life is going well, something comes along to knock us off our feet again. Leaving us wondering why life tends to force us to overcome obstacles that we think we don't necessarily deserve. Often times you might find yourself wondering "why did this have to happen to me?" William was just like the rest of us in that as soon as his career seemed to be progressing, a tragic experience thwarted his plans unexpectedly.

In 2001, William was serving as the Commodore of Naval Special Warfare Group One, a section of the US Special Operations Command. His career was going well and his boss, Eric Olson, the commander of Naval Special Warfare Command Admiral, was positioning William to become an admiral. William's next assignment was to serve on the Navy Staff at the Pentagon.

However, William was quickly met with tragedy during a freefall training jump. With 15 other SEALs, William was freefalling through the air when a SEAL beneath him pulled his parachute, causing William to become enveloped in the parachute canopy. The force of the parachute sent William spiraling out of control in the sky, losing his sense of direction and position. His only option was to pull his own ripcord without realizing the two nylon straps connecting the canopy to the harness were wrapped around his feet. The force of the parachute deployment caused his legs to internally become separated from his body.

After a somewhat successful landing, William was in excruciating pain. Not only had his pelvis become separated by a full five inches, but also the muscles in his abdomen and legs had been separated from his bones and he suffered from a slight back fracture. He underwent emergency surgery, and with the support of his wife, William was able to make a successful recovery.

But William knew the health requirements for the Navy were strict. Even after making a full recovery, would he still be able to pass the test? His career was supposed to be moving forward and this near-death experience had stopped William's career in its tracks. He truly thought his career was over. Knowing that William was destined for success and knowing he would serve the country well, Admiral Eric Olson failed to send William's medical examination papers to Washington. William knew what this act of kindness meant, and never failed to pay it forward throughout his career.

Additionally, Admiral Olson allowed William an extra 30 days for recovery before reporting to the Pentagon. These 30 days were most crucial as, during this time, William found himself and his wife were glued to the TV as they witnessed the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

The War on Terrorism

Following the 9/11 attacks, the White House created a new organization called The Office of Combating Terrorism. William was given the title of Director of Strategy and Military Affairs as he was better off fighting the war on terrorism from the White House than from the Pentagon. Ever wonder why you have to remove your shoes and laptops when going through security at the airport? Well, you can thank William McRaven for this practice.

Throughout his time at the White House, William received intel about a man named Richard Reid who attempted to detonate an explosive created out of his shoe while onboard an American Airlines flight traveling from Paris to Miami. Realizing that this kind of explosive would pose a dangerous threat to airline passengers, William took the issue to his superior General Wayne Downing. He informed General Downing that US-bound flight passengers should be required to remove both their shoes and their laptops during the security check. While the practice might be more time consuming, the practice ensures that flight passengers stay safe throughout their journey. In fact, all passengers are still required to remove their shoes and laptops today when traveling to and within the US.

Not only was William named Director of Military Affairs, but he was also the new head of the Interagency Hostage Coordination Group, meaning that he was responsible for negotiating and liaising between government agencies to bring American hostages home safely. Just months after the 9/11 attacks, William received a top-secret document detailing the kidnappings of Americans Martin and Gracia Burnham, who was completing mission work on the Philippine island of Palawan.

While America keeps a “no ransom” policy, the terrorist group that kidnapped the Burnhams, Abu Sayyaf, was an affiliate of Al-Qaeda, thus forcing William to argue that this particular hostage rescue could potentially help dismantle the extremist organization of Al-Qaeda. William proposed to President Bush that the deployment of the Special Forces unit known as the Green Berets would serve as useful to the Philippine Army as they provide training and support. Next, the plan involved air surveillance provided by the CIA to locate the two hostages. And lastly, FBI Director Robert Mueller agreed to provide an FBI negotiator to bring along the mission. With a plan like this, President Bush agreed and the plan was quickly put into action.

The mission took months, but finally, on June 7, the Filipino Special Forces successfully tracked down the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group and located the two American hostages. Ready for recovery, the Special Forces took action but the mission didn’t go as smoothly as expected. While Gracia was successfully rescued, Martin was unfortunately killed by gunfire during the rescue mission.

The hostage rescue mission became important for William throughout the following years as he continued his career. He learned another important lesson from this mission and realized more than ever that he was meant to serve the American people.

The Capture of Saddam Hussein

William McRaven not only longed to serve the American people, but he also believed that he had a calling to save the people of the Middle East from the likes of terrorist leaders like Saddam Hussein. In 2003, William was deployed to Baghdad and was assigned to command the Army's special operations unit. This unit was tasked with capturing and killing the United States' Top 50 High-Value Targets and among that list? Saddam Hussein.

That December, while William was flying a C-130 military aircraft, he suddenly became overwhelmed with the feeling that they were encroaching on Saddam Hussein and that he would become face-to-face with the terrorist leader that same night. As soon as he arrived back in Baghdad, William was informed that the Special Operations C-Squadron had successfully captured Saddam's close associate, Mohammad Ibrahim Omar al-Muslit. Not only that, al-Muslit had given the intel that Saddam was hiding in his cook's house in Tikrit.

This seemed like it was it. The Americans would be capturing the infamous terrorist after years of unsuccessful attempts. William commanded the troops 50 miles away at a military base camp called Camp NAMA as the forces made their way to Tikrit. They easily found the cook, Qais, but Saddam was nowhere in sight and Qais denied knowing his whereabouts.

The plan came to a halt; however, little did William know that al-Muslit was leading the C-squadron Colonels to another house just down the road. Once inside the house, al-Muslit tapped the floorboards indicating that something was underneath. William could hear the sound of the rapid footsteps of the soldiers, but he was unable to see anything coming through on the screen. He immediately called Lieutenant Coultrup to figure out what was happening. Coultrup informed him of the good news. Underneath the floorboards was a spider hole, and in that spider hole? Saddam Hussein. Alive. After nine months of searching, they finally had him.

Saddam Hussein spent the next 30 days at camp NAMA under the supervision of William. Then, three years later on December 30, 2006, the Iraqi people hanged Saddam for his crimes against humanity. While there is still much violence in Iraq, William believes that his efforts in capturing Saddam and other terrorists have saved the lives of many citizens living in both America and the Middle East.

The Capture of Osama bin Laden

In 2011, William McRaven was now a three-star admiral and the commander of the Pentagon's Joint Special Operations Command. Throughout the years, American special forces have been trying to hunt al-Qaeda founder and leader Osama bin Laden but have only experienced false leads and frustration. However, William was introduced to new surveillance footage of a man matching bin Laden's profile walking around Abbottabad, Pakistan, and he knew that this attempt would be different.

With three proposals by the CIA, the top proposal involves William McRaven's leadership in a raid of a building that is believed to be Osama's hiding place. William concluded that his best option was to approach the area via helicopter and try to capture and kill bin Laden as quickly as possible. After being approved by President Obama, William begins his three-week training session with the Navy SEALs. Named Operation Neptune's Spear, training took place in a mock-up compound to ensure that the plan would go on without a hitch. As expected, the planning went perfectly and soon after, William was flying with the SEALs and helicopter assault forces to the US army base in Jalalabad, Afghanistan.

The team was ready to begin the mission. While William stayed behind on base, he trusted his team to do the groundwork. Of course, the plan didn't start out smoothly. Upon trying to land the first helicopter, a vortex created by the compound's 18-foot wall caused the Black Hawk helicopter to lose control. However, the skilled pilot successfully maneuvered the helicopter onto the ground and the team was off.

The team headed into the building while a second Black Hawk made its way onto the compound. Inside, they quickly found Osama bin Laden on the third floor using an older woman as a shield. Without hesitation, Senior Chief Petty Officer Rob O'Neill aimed and fired. Within seconds, bin Laden was dead, but their mission wasn't over.

Retrieving both bin Laden's body and some electronics, the team of SEALs quickly made their way to the second Black Hawk to make their way back to base. The moments were filled with suspense as they didn't know how the Pakistani government would respond to knowing US forces were on their soil and in their territory. Luckily, they didn't respond and the second Black Hawk successfully reached the third Black Hawk for refueling. They made it back to the base at Jalalabad and were safely back on Afghan soil with the body of infamous Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

Lessons Learned over a 37-year Career

After almost four decades of service, William McRaven finally retired in August of 2014. During his retirement ceremony, William noted all the people gathered around him for support. People from all stages of his career, fellow SEALs, teammates from the CIA and Green Berets, even his high school football coach came out for support. At that moment, William realized the people surrounding him now were more important than any mission that took down al-Qaeda.

In fact, William took the opportunity to share stories not from his four decades of service, but instead stories that involved his biggest supporter and most important teammate, his wife Georgeann. He recalled the time he was serving in the Naval Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) at the University of Texas. Executive officer Rummelhart called William into his office and expecting the worst, William finds out that his own mother called Rummelhart as she was concerned about her son's dating life. He seemed to be a bit of a player and was dating two girls at the same time and she needed Rummelhart to put William in his place to teach him respect.

Embarrassed more than anything, William realized that his mother was right...as mothers tend to be. He had been dating one girl long-distance for a while but was also starting a relationship with Georgeann, and William tells how he made the most important decision of his life that day by ending things with his long-distance girlfriend. He chose Georgeann and they have now built a life together and created a loving family. Not only did Georgeann give him three children that he loved and adored, but she was his biggest cheerleader. She was there for him when he was injured, she gave him courage when he felt that his career was over, and more importantly, she was always there for him while he was overseas fighting for his country, saving the lives of others. William knew his wife was his most important teammate despite all that he had been through with SEAL, CIA, and White House teammates. Everything he achieved wasn't attributed to William's hard work and colleagues, it was all due to Georgeann and her support.

Of course, William took the opportunity to tell of his experiences throughout his career as well. He got to know a number of people throughout the past four decades, he played an integral role in taking down some of the fiercest leaders of al-Qaeda, but despite all that, he remembers the good of humanity the most. For all the hatred, death, and torture that William witnessed through the Taliban death squads and al-Qaeda's torture houses, he remembers the love and caring acts of mothers and fathers. Love and kindness will always be greater than all the bad in the world.

At the end of the ceremony, Admiral Eric Olson presented William McRaven with the Bull Frog award, honoring him with the longest-serving SEAL on active duty. After four decades of service, William recalled accepting his retirement as hard to believe but knows that the stories of his life will only continue, while different in nature, they will be filled with love and kindness for his family.

Final Summary

Throughout William H. McRaven's four-decade career, he experienced it all. He not only survived two near-death experiences, but he also played an integral role in taking down two of al-Qaeda's leaders, Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. He made many friendships along the way and learned countless life lessons. But most importantly, he realized the importance of teammates. From basic training when he realized his teammates will help him succeed, to realizing that his biggest teammate is his wife, Georgeann, he believes that success isn't measured by accomplishments and awards, but by the love and kindness surrounding you once your career is over.



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