

# The Siddur That SEAled Bin Laden's Fate

What does a *yungerman* from Lakewood have in common with the team of tough, battle-hardened Navy SEALs that assassinated Osama bin Laden in 2011? The answer is a leather-bound *siddur*! Learn how a siddur forgotten on an airplane came to be carried around on missions by the elite Navy SEALs Team Six through some of the most harrowing moments they would ever face.

Shimon Rosenberg  
Yitzchok Wagschal



Inside a compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, 30 miles north of the capital Islamabad, a group of elite American fighters was busy at work. These men from Team Six of the legendary Navy SEALs had just carried out one of the most daring commando operations in US history.

Suddenly, their radios crackled with life. They were to stop everything they were doing and be back at the landing zone within five minutes.

These commandos had just helped rid the world of America's #1 enemy, Osama bin Laden. Even after 9/11, the terror leader was involved in numerous other attacks. In the last few months, he had written letters to his cells of loyal Al Qaeda fighters in Algeria, Iraq and Yemen to remind them that America remained their enemy. He was planning assassinations of President Obama and General David Petraeus, who had severely damaged Al Qaeda in Iraq. In one of his letters, bin Laden called for 10 recruits to study aviation and prepare for a suicide mission in an apparent attempt to repeat the "success" of September 11. He also ordered his Al Qaeda underlings to plan terror attacks against major US cities such as Chicago, Washington, New York and Los Angeles.

The commando operation to eliminate him had run into several obstacles. An entire group of SEALs had narrowly avoided death when their helicopter had crashed during the nighttime landing. Despite being badly shaken, the men rallied themselves and ran into the fray in perfect synch with the exquisitely detailed plan.

They raided the compound, found the archenemy and dispatched him with two bullets. Still, there remained several urgent tasks to complete inside the compound before they could leave. The ordinary-looking compound with its tall security wall contained a goldmine of intelligence information that the US was wanted desperately.

This included computers, hard drives, flash drives and recording devices housing



Osama bin Laden delivering trademark tirades against the West.

tens of thousands of critical documents, files and recordings. Any one of them could provide a glimpse of the varied activities of Al Qaeda and its affiliates around the globe. But the SEALs had only managed to gather half of what they were looking for when the order came to abort further activity and return to their helicopters.

To make matters worse, the crippled helicopter that had crashed was now lying helplessly at one edge of the compound. It was loaded with literally hundreds of secrets, including some of the most sophisticated intelligence gathering and stealth technology ever developed. The helicopter would have to be destroyed before they could leave or they would risk compromising some of America's most sensitive military secrets.

An explosive ordnance disposal technician and a Navy SEAL had already been working on the helicopter for a while. They had loaded it with sufficient explosives to guarantee that the helicopter would be demolished without leaving behind any usable trace. But then they heard the voice on the radio again cutting through their work. It was Mike, the squadron's master chief which made him the most senior SEAL



Aftermath from one of the four Al Qaeda terror attacks in London on July 7, 2005.

in the unit. "Drop what you're doing and move exfil [extraction operation] HLZ [to the helicopter landing zone] now!"

The Black Hawk and CH-47 Chinook military helicopters that had to carry them back still had a long return flight over enemy territory and there was a very real concern that they might be chased by the Pakistan air force, whose base was less than a mile away. The SEALs could not afford to spend an extra minute there.

The Navy SEAL quickly activated the charger that would soon detonate the explosives on the broken helicopter. He was ready to dash back out to the waiting rescue helicopter when he saw the beat-up leather *siddur* they called "Chaim's prayer book." It had joined the Navy SEALs on a lot of missions in the Near East. The SEAL made sure to grab it on his way out. For all his toughness and skill, he and other commandos felt this *siddur* had protected them.

### The Siddur is Lost

Erev Pesach, 2011. Chaim Sorotzkin of Lakewood and his wife were preparing to spend their *Yom Tov* with Mrs. Sorotzkin's

parents in Chicago. They had purchased tickets for the whole family to fly Spirit Air, a low-budget airline that shuttled between Atlantic City, New Jersey and Chicago.

While much of the family's baggage was checked in, the most valuable and urgent items came aboard the flight as their carry-ons. They brought along numerous extra pieces to accommodate the children during the flight. Chaim's own knapsack held a number of items, including his *tallis*, *tefillin* and *siddur*. These were valuables that he could not let out of his sight.

The flight took off uneventfully, and in the middle Chaim had a sudden urge to recite *Tehillim*. He took out a beautiful leather-bound *siddur* with his name "Chaim Dov Sorotzkin" stamped in gold on the cover. It was a wedding gift from his wife. When he was finished using the *siddur*, Chaim kissed it and placed it in the pocket of the seat in front of him.

When the plane landed in Chicago, the Sorotzkins got busy gathering their many bags which were spread among the overhead compartments throughout their section of the cabin. At the same time, they had to be extra mindful of their children, each of whom



Aftermath of the terror attack in Bali, Indonesia, in 2002. It was masterminded by Al Qaeda's Southeast Asia chief, Nurjaman Riduan bin Isomuddin (a.k.a. Hambali).