

undergoing special therapy to help his broken bones heal.

Eventually, he was declared well enough to make the 4,000-mile trip home to America. He was greeted with a hero's welcome at the airport, and again upon his arrival in his hometown of Huntsville, Texas. The navy gave him a promotion.

On July 18, 2006, a special ceremony was held at the White House where President Bush presented Marcus Luttrell with the navy's second-highest medal, the Navy Cross.

All of the SEALs killed in Operation Red Wings were given, posthumously, the highest awards offered by the US military. Lieutenant Murphy was awarded the Medal of Honor.

In the end, Operation Red Wings was considered a success in the sense that the army gathered critical information regarding Ahmad Shah, which led to disrupting his operations. Of course, it came at an extremely heavy price. Still, as a result of the operation, Shah was forced to flee to Pakistan.

After a few months in exile, Shah felt safe

enough to return to Afghanistan and renew his attacks on the American and Coalition forces there. The US military responded with Operation Whaler, in which nearly all of Shah's men were eliminated. Shah himself escaped, but in April 2008, he was killed during a gun battle with Pakistani forces, bringing an end to the "Most Wanted Terrorist in Kunar Province." ■

A Zman Exclusive Interview

Afghan Hero's Jewish Lawyers

Jewish Lawyers Defend the Man Who Saved Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell

They are Torah-observant Jews who daven with a minyan three times a day, eat kosher and observe Shabbos... and they are among the most respected immigration lawyers in the country. Their clientele includes a colorful array of diplomats, foreign government officials and popular figures, on the one hand, and defectors and spies, on the other. More than once this has meant secret meetings with shady figures in dark corridors to work out agreements between them and the US government. Meet Leon (Levi) and his son Michael (Moshe Yosef) Wildes, the observant Jewish immigration lawyers who represent people like Mohammad Gulab, who risked their lives to rescue Americans.

In his wildest dreams, Mohammad Gulab never imagined the scene that greeted him: a wounded American soldier hiding in the shadows, his rifle pointed directly at Gulab. The American was tall, broad-shouldered and bearded, indicating he belonged to a commando unit. However, his uniform was filthy and torn, his feet blackened with sand and

blood-crusted wounds. It was obvious that without urgent aid, the American would not survive much longer.

The American was Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell, one of a team of four who had taken part Operation Red Wings (see main article).

Gulab was in a dilemma. His peoples' sacred creed demanded that he offer

**Shimon Rosenberg
Y. Lefkowitz**

wounded man protection and hospitality, even at the cost of his life and that of his family and neighbors. Over the next days, local Taliban-affiliated leader Ahmad Shah sent a series of messengers to Gulab's family trying to convince them to hand the American over. When huge bribes failed, he threatened the entire village with reprisals. But Gulab was stubborn. He protected the American until a rescue squad came to get him a few days later.

The nightmare was over for the commando, but just beginning for Mohammad Gulab. The Taliban burned down his home, murdered his cousin, shot at him and even fired an RPG into the house where he stayed afterward.

Meanwhile, while journalists and private patriots in America created a movement to help him, the US government turned a blind eye to his ongoing predicament.

One man who refused to forget the good deed was a Torah-observant Jew named Michael Wildes. To Wildes, gratitude is central to his religious belief system and an integral part of the upbringing he received in the home of his father Leon Wildes, one of America's first renowned immigration lawyers.

Michael Wildes recognized in the story of Mohammad Gulab a unique opportunity to make a *kiddush Hashem*, and to repay his debt to America for opening its doors to his family when they were suffering from persecution in Russia. He decided to take on the case *pro bono*, not for compensation.

"This is not the first time," Michael Wildes tells *Zman*, "that our office has showed appreciation and helped, without compensation, a hero who risked his life to save others. As Orthodox Jews we feel it's our duty to show the way for others."

One of Dozens of Stories

Mohammad Gulab is just one of many noteworthy figures who are counted among the clients of Leon Wildes and his son Michael. The Wildes cater to a colorful array of clientele that includes diplomats, foreign

officials and popular figures, on the one hand, as well as spies and defectors, on the other.

Often these are people who possess information vital for America's security, but they will not share it until they are assured that they will be protected. On more than one occasion, Michael Wildes has had to meet with shady characters in dark corridors to work out an agreement between them and the federal government.

"I have a bulletproof vest in my trunk," Michael Wildes tells us, "and when it's necessary I hire bodyguards. We are actively involved in making sure that immigration is used as a critical tool in the War on Terror to protect our soldiers and agents in enemy countries."

Some of his clients have disappeared, only to reappear under a new identity in some remote town somewhere in the United States where neighbors pay little attention to them.

As Michael explains to *Zman*:

We have represented many foreign whistleblowers in the War on Terror. Some of them were officials who held high positions in foreign governments and they witnessed how their governments financed terrorism. Others were diplomats and ambassadors who had information that was critical for America's security interests and we helped them defect under Section 13 of the immigration laws. Only a handful of such defections are authorized each year.



Michael Wildes with Michael Oren, former Israeli ambassador to the US.

Zman visited the striking office of the Wildes in a luxurious skyscraper on Manhattan's East Side. They shared with us the dramatic story of their family and how they climbed so quickly so high up the ladder of success—including Michael's career as the first Orthodox Jewish mayor in the history of the United States.

Did America Betray a Friend?

After Mohammad Gulab rescued Marcus Luttrell, the Afghan villager wanted to return to his pastoral life. However, matters did not proceed as planned. As Gulab told an American reporter, Luttrell called him to his bedside before the commando's medical evacuation to the United States and offered him \$200,000 to begin his life anew. Gulab turned down the offer, saying, "I didn't do it for money."

At the time, Gulab could not have foreseen the difficult turn of events. His home was torched, his property stolen, his family members were attacked and he was very nearly killed in an assassination attempt in 2009. Gulab was forced to relocate with his family to Asadabad. Still the Taliban continued sending him death threats, promising that one day they would kill him.

Michael Wildes shared with *Zman*:

Mr. Gulab showed me a letter that the local government sent him, which read: "Your Jewish handlers are not capable of helping you. Soon the Taliban will send you to your grave." A fatwa was issued that every proper Muslim had to kill him on the spot.

The US military hired Gulab as a construction worker on its base in Asadabad, for which he was paid \$280 per month. Over the next few years, he visited America several times to meet Luttrell in his Texas ranch. The first visit took place in 2010, after Luttrell helped Gulab obtain a temporary visa and paid the cost of his visit. They spent close to three weeks together on the ranch.

Unfortunately, Gulab did not apply for



Marcus Luttrell with the man who saved him, Mohammad Gulab, during a meeting at Luttrell's Texas ranch.



Rescuer and rescued are reunited in America.

asylum in the States. "If he had filed his request then, it would have been much easier to arrange it," Wildes tells us. Gulab was hesitant to apply because he was under the impression that if he did so he would never be able to return home.

After returning to Afghanistan, Gulab's situation deteriorated drastically. With the withdrawal of US troops in late 2014, he lost his protectors. His friends in America reported that he lived in constant fear and was forced to go into hiding. According to *Newsweek*, Gulab remained sequestered away throughout the day and only visited his family late at night.

One day a bomb detonated just a few feet away while Gulab was walking near his home. In an even more frightening incident, a group of