

# A Deal With The Devil

Shimon Rosenberg

*A Detailed Report on the Taliban Prisoner Exchange Scandal that Rocked the Obama Administration*

On May 31, 2014, President Obama announced amid great fanfare that the last American serviceman held in captivity had been released by the Taliban. Americans were just beginning to celebrate the good news when they learned that it had come at a hefty price: five Taliban leaders who were incarcerated at the Guantanamo Bay detention facility had been freed in the exchange.

Not only that, but the soldier in question, Bowe Bergdahl, was not the hero the White House made him out to be. He was a deserter who declared that he was ashamed to be an American and willingly turned his back on his fellow soldiers—some of whom subsequently died in the efforts to locate Bergdahl. Rather than garnering praise, the Obama administration now came under harsh criticism for what many believe was a severe lapse of judgment.





**I**t came like thunder on a clear day when the news broke in July 2009 that the Taliban had kidnapped a US serviceman. Americans responded with shock and a measure of wonder at how the enemy succeeded in nabbing a US soldier. Had they lured him into an ambush, or did they boldly attack an American convoy and make off with one of its members?

A few days passed, and more information emerged. It turned out that the Taliban had not acted as bravely as had been previously assumed. The missing soldier had walked right into their waiting arms.

It was a very odd case. An American soldier deep in enemy territory, surrounded by thousands of fanatic extremists who would not flinch at killing a US soldier, had wandered off from his post. Why did he do that? Did he intend to join the Taliban? Or did he wish to leave the fighting behind him



A young Bowe Bergdahl.



Bergdahl enjoyed trekking through the hills and mountains of Idaho, by foot and by bike.



President Obama proudly announces Bowe Bergdahl's release, with Bergdahl's father standing next to him.

and take up the wanderer's staff? To date, these questions have not been satisfactorily answered.

## Restless Youth

Deep in the hills of Sun Valley, a conservative Christian region of Idaho, lives a family named Bergdahl. They are familiar to the town of Hailey and its population of 8,000, who describe them as friendly, if a bit unusual.

The Bergdahls live far from the tumult of the city. Around 30 years ago they moved from Santa Barbara, California, to Sun Valley. There they built themselves a small home on 40 acres of farmland. Bob Bergdahl worked first in construction for a while. Later he got a job delivering packages for UPS.

The Bergdahls never sent their two children, Bowe—who suffers from dyslexia—and his sister, Sky, to school. Instead, they chose to home-school them. They inculcated their children with their religion and moral beliefs. Bob Bergdahl also taught his young son to ride a horse and instructed him in the use of firearms. When Bowe Bergdahl turned five, he was already a competent shooter.

As Bowe grew older, he became bored of his home studies. He preferred going out to see the world. Seeking adventure, he went



Bird's-eye view of the National Training Center.

on a trip to cross the Panama Canal. Then he bought a motorcycle so he could drive the length of the California coast.

When Bergdahl turned 20, he wanted to join the French Foreign Legion, a military unit composed mainly of foreigners looking to “begin a new life.” He traveled to Paris and began studying the French language, but the Legion turned down his application.

The rejection was a deep disappointment for Bergdahl, who decided to enlist in the US Coast Guard upon his return home. This was not his dream, but he thought it would offer him an opportunity to satisfy his thirst for adventure.

In 2006, a friend took Bergdahl to a military base in Idaho Falls where he was given a routine exam and began training. However, after just 26 days he was discharged and sent home. When his friends asked him why he was back, he replied that he had feigned insanity in order to obtain a discharge. Bergdahl's friends suspected, however, that he had not feigned anything.

According to them, he is not insane but he does suffer from delusions and behaves oddly. Much of his time among others is spent sitting apart and writing in his diary.

Two years later, Bergdahl informed his friends that he had enlisted in the Army. This



A mock Afghan village built in the Mojave Desert to train US soldiers before sending them to the front.

came as a surprise, as they couldn't believe the Army would accept him after Bergdahl had already been discharged from the Coast Guard for psychological reasons.

The Army sent Bergdahl to Fort Benning, Georgia, where he spent 16 weeks in training before he graduated infantry school in autumn 2008. Bergdahl was already proficient with a rifle from his youth, so he didn't need much training in marksmanship. Upon completing the course, Bergdahl was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division, which is stationed in Richardson, Alaska, not far from Anchorage.

At first he was very enthusiastic about

