

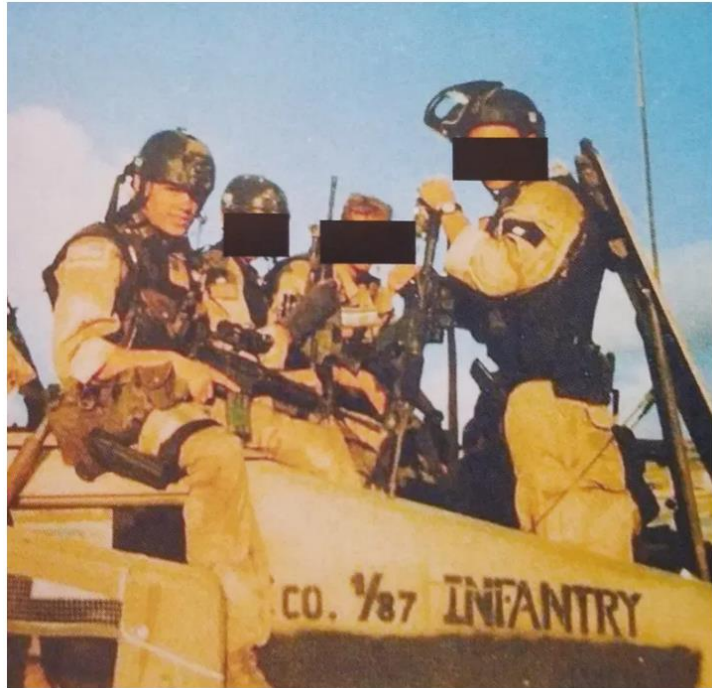
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Exclusive Interview with Delta Force Veteran CSM Tom Satterly

By Eddie Molina

Many of us — civilians and military alike — have preconceived notions of special operators. They are thought to be invincible, tough, gritty, fearless...you name it. They are the Hollywood stars of the military community. And after a career of kicking in doors and taking down bad guys, they grab their ladies' hands, jump on a horse and ride off into the sunset to live happily ever after.

Does that sound about right? Maybe. But I can tell you about one case that was not so glamorous- that of retired Delta Force Command Sergeant Major Tom Satterly. There was no riding off into the sunset; there were no parades- only the internal struggle and scars left behind.



Tom Satterly resting with 10th Mountain Division moments after returning from running the Mogadishu Mile, as seen in the end of the film Black Hawk Down

In an exclusive interview, SOFREP sat down with Tom to talk about his career and personal life during and after military service in one of the world's most elite units. Among the topics of discussion was his book [All Secure: A Special Operations Soldier's Fight to Survive on the Battlefield and the Homefront](#), his participation in the Battle of Mogadishu, the hunt for Iraq's "deck of cards," and the mental anguish that nearly led him to suicide.

This was a rare opportunity as soldiers in the Delta community simply don't talk. They are the humble warriors that no one hears about. We wanted to know what it was like to finally come out about his experiences in his book All Secure.

"I got shit upfront before anyone even read it. I got one of those 'what are you a Navy Seal now? We don't write books.'" Tom tells Sofrep. "It wasn't a 'look at me I do great things' book; it was more like 'look at all the shit I screwed up'. The stories were to keep people interested but really as you read it, you'll find that Jen (wife) is the hero of the story and I was the loser who kept stumbling over my own self."

Tom's post high-school plans included college and a job. It wasn't until he went for a long car ride to a concert with a childhood friend who enlisted and talked him into joining.

Tom said, “My plan was to enlist for 4 years and get out and go back to college.” He continued, “But then I went to German ranger school, French commando school and I was excited about doing something different and more difficult. I was approached by a couple of guys and they said ‘*hey you should try out for the unit*’ so I’m like ‘*alright what’s that, I’ll do that.*’”

Delta Force, or “the Unit” recruits from other Special Operations units, but even then the drop-rate is very high.

“People get hurt. A friend of mine went with me and his heels were one blister each and he’s going into the 40 miler. I ended up cutting out the back of his jungle boots with scissors that night so he could walk in flip flops essentially. He made it to the last mountain but fell asleep on the way up.” Tom told Sofrep.

Operation Gothic Serpent, Mogadishu, Somalia

On October 3rd 1993, the US launched an operation to capture two high level lieutenants of the Somali militia. Although the capture was achieved, two Blackhawk helicopters were shot down and a two- day firefight ensued, leading to the death of 19 US service members. The battle was retold in the blockbuster movie, Black Hawk Down.

Tom was there and told Sofrep, “I’ve never been in a firefight as scary as Somalia.”

But the planned one- hour mission, Operation Gothic Serpent, quickly went awry. But how?

“It was underestimating the enemy. Tactically we were profound but when the enemy doesn’t go along with your tactics because they’re not trained and they’re just crazy people running around with guns trying to shoot something, it’s a little bit difficult to manage something like that.” Tom continued, “We had rehearsed for a downed helo but not two. We were never ready for spending the night. We didn’t bring night vision, didn’t bring water. We were an ‘in and out’ unit. It changed the way we did tactics. Our training is what saved us, launching rockets and mini guns like there’s no tomorrow, that’s kind of what kept people at bay.”

Tom took the lessons learned in the Battle of Mogadishu and later carried them into Iraq. But because it was a different mission in a different campaign, there was still a learning curve. Tom said, “In Iraq we’re still using hostage rescue tactics- burst in the door, take down the bad guys and sort out what you have left. We were losing a lot of people using those tactics.”

However, his role has changed because he was no longer just another soldier. “Now I’m in charge. Now all these souls are underneath me and ‘*did I make the right decisions*’... it’s the weight of making decisions that took its toll on me more than any firefight,” Tom said.

Healing

Tom spent 25 years in the Army, 21 of them in Delta Force. There’s no doubt he has seen just about everything a special operator could see in combat- to include the death of friends. That’s a lot of grief to overcome.

“I dealt with it (grief) before I really dealt with it by almost killing myself.” Tom said.

But nearly killing himself was long after he started working in the unit. Not all service men and women who deploy in theatre experience direct combat action. In fact, less than 20% do. His deployments were non-stop missions and no time was ever spent dealing with the loss of friends. Tom tells Sofrep about the reality of the grieving process.

“So you come back and it’s a party, a remembrance and everybody’s acting tough and nobody’s processing the real grief. That ‘*no time to grieve*’ thing just piles up and piles up but you have to make a plan down the road to deal with it.” Tom said.

But for a long time, he didn’t deal with it. Everything he’s been through, everything he’s seen and done just piled up and suppressed deep until it all came to a head.

“It was me thinking I was burden to everybody around me and that it would be a lot better for them if I wasn’t causing problems the rest of my life.” Tom said.



In Tom's own words: "The night before I attempted to kill myself. I didn't know how visible my misery was until I saw this picture years later."

One afternoon in 2013, Tom and his co-workers, Jen among them, arrived to the hotel parking lot in route to the bar for their night out. Tom told them to go ahead without him and that he'll catch up. As soon as they walked off, he sat in the rental car alone, gun in hand.

“I got a bullet in the chamber halfway up to my head and I'm thinking ‘*mouth or the head*’. If I felt bad about something, it was making a mess for the rental car company to have to clean it up.”

Jen, knowing that Tom was never late to anything sent him a message, “WHERE ARE YOU!!!”

He put the gun away.

Jen knew something wasn't right. It was the start of a very long recovery process dealing with demons that almost took over. Now he openly talks about his experiences in an effort to help people like him.

“When I first started, I thought it was really hard to help people, guys like me, they don't want help, they don't want to talk about it.” Tom said.

Tom regularly visits Ft. Bragg to meet with the next generation of operators to give them some worldly advice. Tom tells Sofrep about the occasional difficulty getting through to them by reciting his usual speech, “I know your sitting there thinking ‘*this won't happen to me*’. I know, I sat there thinking ‘*this old guy... he doesn't know anything, what's he talking about.*’”

Tom's goal isn't to convince them they will experience the same difficulty. His message is more about being aware of themselves.

“So long as its in the back of their heads that it's a possibility, once it starts to happen to them, they'll recall back ‘*oh I remember that day Tom was telling me about.*’” Tom said.

But Jen and Tom have helped. In fact, they've helped over 60,000 people- veterans, first responders, active- duty operators, and so on. They will never turn anyone away. Yet, their therapeutic programs are designed for the special operations community.

Tom said, “We hope to grow our staff and grow our donations to help all veterans.”

Tom and Jen recently created Virago, a resource for the spouses of warriors. “Virago was started for those female spouses that need help with their husbands that don't want to be on a public forum.” Tom said.

Post- Traumatic Stress is not a disease. It's merely a human reaction to something traumatic and extreme. And it's not permanent, it just needs treatment like any other ailment that can heal. Tom fought relentlessly to survive the Battle of Mogadishu, to survive countless door-kicking missions in Iraq and to survive the battle against his own demons and proved once again, it CAN be done.

Never.Stop.Fighting.

You can get more information by visiting their website, www.AllSecureFoundation.org.

About the writer: Eddie Molina is the author of A Beginner's Guide to Leadership available on Amazon. He also writes articles to keep military personnel informed on important issues. Go to www.eddiemolina.com for more information.