



## The Red Circle: My Life in the Navy SEAL Sniper Corps and How I Trained America's Deadliest Marksmen

By Brandon Webb, John David Mann

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BEFORE HE COULD FORGE A BAND OF ELITE WARRIORS... HE HAD TO BECOME ONE HIMSELF.

Brandon Webb's experiences in the world's most elite sniper corps are the stuff of legend. From his grueling years of training in Naval Special Operations to his combat tours in the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan, *The Red Circle* provides a rare and riveting look at the inner workings of the U.S. military through the eyes of a covert operations specialist.

Yet it is Webb's distinguished second career as a lead instructor for the shadowy "sniper cell" and Course Manager of the Navy SEAL Sniper Program that trained some of America's finest and deadliest warriors—including Marcus Luttrell and Chris Kyle—that makes his story so compelling. Luttrell credits Webb's training with his own survival during the ill-fated 2005 Operation Redwing in Afghanistan. Kyle went on to become the U.S. military's top marksman, with more than 150 confirmed kills.

From a candid chronicle of his student days, going through the sniper course himself, to his hair-raising close calls with Taliban and al Qaeda forces in the northern Afghanistan wilderness, to his vivid account of designing new sniper standards and training some of the most accomplished snipers of the twenty-first century, Webb provides a rare look at the making of the Special Operations warriors who are at the forefront of today's military.

Explosive, revealing, and intelligent, *The Red Circle* provides a uniquely personal glimpse into one of the most challenging and secretive military training courses in the world.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“What you're about to read is not just the making of a Navy SEAL sniper, but the story of one guy who went on to help shape the lives of *hundreds* of elite special forces warriors. Brandon has a great story to tell, and it is living proof that you can achieve anything you put your mind to.” ?Marcus Luttrell, Navy SEAL and bestselling author of *Lone Survivor*

“Brandon's story hits center mass! If you want to know what makes up the DNA of a Navy SEAL and have a behind-the-scenes look at the best sniper program in the world, then *hold I right for wind* and read *The Red Circle*.” ?Chris Kyle, USN (Ret.), SEAL Team 3 Chief and bestselling author of *American Sniper*

“An impressive and well-written account of the most elite snipers in the world. Webb recounts with heartfelt and vivid description the training, trials, and heartache that are all costs of choosing this lifestyle. Like all true warriors, he does no chest thumping, but rather gives an honest account that proves that, after all, SEAL snipers are only human. *The Red Circle* is a great book.” ?Howard E. Wasdin, Navy SEAL and bestselling author of *SEAL Team Six*

“Another forceful statement from the Brotherhood of SEALs, Brandon Webb’s *The Red Circle* illustrates why he wanted to be a SEAL, what it takes to be a SEAL, how you survive the life of a SEAL, and the value of mind over matter. A valuable read for anyone aspiring to reach goals that seem unattainable?in any walk of life.” ?CDR Richard Marcinko, USN (Ret.), founding father and first commanding officer of SEAL Team Six and bestselling author of *The Rogue Warrior*

“The story of today's Navy SEALs is Brandon Webb's to tell, and *The Red Circle* does it masterfully. This definitive work at once proves and explodes the myths behind Navy Special Warfare and the men who meet its challenges. Strap in for a wild ride.” ?CDR Ward Carroll, USN (ret.), editor of *Military.com*

#### About the Author

**Brandon Webb** is a former U.S. Navy SEAL; his last assignment with the SEALs was Course Manager for the elite SEAL Sniper Course, where he was instrumental in developing new curricula that trained some of the most accomplished snipers of the twenty-first century. Webb has received numerous distinguished service awards, including the Presidential Unit Citation and the Navy Commendation Medal with a "V" for "Valor," for his platoon's deployment to Afghanistan following the September 11 attacks. He is editor for *Military.com*'s blog *Kit Up*, *SOFREP*'s Editor in Chief, and a frequent national media commentator on snipers and related Special Operations Forces military issues.

**John David Mann**, who collaborated with Webb in writing *The Red Circle*, is an award-winning author whose titles include the *New York Times* bestseller *Flash Foresight* and the international bestseller *The Go-Giver*.

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## ONE

### RITE OF PASSAGE

Every culture has its rites of passage.

Native American adolescents journeyed into the wilderness for days on end in vision quests aimed at gaining life direction from an animal spirit, or totem, through a fast-induced dream. For Australian aborigines it was the walkabout, young males trekking the outback for as long as six months to trace the ceremonial paths, or dreaming tracks, taken by their ancestors. Mormon boys ages nineteen to twenty-five are sent around the world for two years to do full-time mission work.

For me, it was shorter and simpler. My rite of passage came when I was thrown off a boat in the middle of the Pacific Ocean by my dad, a few weeks past my sixteenth birthday. I had to find my own path home from that oceanic wilderness, and it turned out to be a path that ultimately led to the most elite sniper corps in the world.

I don't know if you'd call that a dreaming track, exactly, but you *could* say it was a path taken by my ancestors, at least in one sense: My father was thrown out of the house at age sixteen by *his* father, too. And I suppose the only way to make sense out of my story is to start with him.

\* \* \*

Jack Webb grew up in Toronto, short, strong, and stocky. A talented hockey player and avid drummer, he was always a bit of a wild man. A true child of the sixties, Jack grew out his full black beard as soon as his hormones would cooperate. His father hewed to old-fashioned values and threatened to kick Jack out if he didn't cut his beard and long hair. When my father refused, out he went.

My grandfather may have thrown his son out, but he didn't succeed in changing his mind. To this day my dad still sports a full beard, though its black is now flecked with gray.

Now on his own, Jack made his way from Toronto to Malibu, where he picked up landscaping jobs and soon had his own company. Driving home from a job one day, he picked up three young hippie girls hitchhiking. One of them, a free spirit named Lynn, became his wife.

After they married, my parents moved up to British Columbia to the little ski town of Kimberley, just north of Vancouver, where he took a job as a guide at a hunting lodge, despite the fact that he knew absolutely nothing about hunting. The guy who hired him said, "Look, don't worry about it. Stay on the trail, and you'll be fine." He was. His first time out, he took a small group into the Canadian Rockies, pointing out all sorts of wildlife along the way. When they got back, the group told my dad's boss he'd hired the greatest guide in the world. They didn't know he was flat-out winging it.

Soon Jack was working construction, and on the job he taught himself everything there was to know about building houses. In those days, if you were a builder you did it all—pouring the foundation, framing, wiring, drywall, plumbing, roofing, everything from A to Z. Jack had never graduated high school, but he was a resourceful man with a big appetite for learning, and he soon became an accomplished builder with his own company, High Country Construction.

It was about this time that I came into the picture, followed a few years later by my sister, Rhiannon, and once I arrived on the scene my mother's life became considerably more complicated.

Free spirit though she may be, my mother has always been fiercely loyal to me and my sister, and to my dad, too, as far as that was possible. I always felt completely loved and supported by her, even through the difficulties to come.

My mother has also always been very entrepreneurial. She opened up a restaurant with my dad's sister, and later, when we lived in Washington for a while, she had her own boat maintenance business, sanding and varnishing the boats and keeping the woodwork in good condition. She wrote and published her own

cookbook for boaters, *The Galley Companion*. Later still, when I worked on a California dive boat in my teens, she held a job there as head cook.

One more thing about my mom: She has always had a great sense of humor.

She would have had to, to cope with me.

\* \* \*

I was born on June 12, 1974, screaming at the top of my tiny lungs, and I screamed for weeks. For the next ten months I stayed awake every night from ten till seven the next morning, yelling my head off, at which point I would sleep blissfully through the day while my mom recovered from the night's battle fatigue. My parents did everything they could to keep me awake during the day so they would have a shot at getting me to sleep at night. Didn't matter. It wasn't going to happen.

According to my mom, I was as wild as the Canadian landscape. I started crawling at six months and crawled *everywhere*. My mom talks about a study she heard about, where they put babies on a glass counter to see how far they would crawl. Nearly all the babies would stop when they got close to the edge—but the last 1 percent went crawling off into thin air every time.

"That 1 percent?" she says. "That was Brandon."

I started walking at nine months, and there was not a gate or door that could hold me. My mom bought every childproof lock she could find, but evidently "childproof" did not mean "Brandon-proof." She had doorknobs that even she couldn't open, but I always managed to get through them. She would lock me into my high chair, but if she stepped into the bathroom for even a moment, I'd be gone when she returned.

By eighteen months I discovered the joys of climbing and found I could climb up, over, and into pretty much anything. This ability, combined with my easy friendship with locks and predilection for drinking anything I could get my hands on, added up to quite a few visits to the emergency room to have my little toddler-sized stomach pumped. Among the beverages I sampled during those early years were kerosene, bleach, and Avon honeysuckle after-bath splash. I'm not saying this is a method I would endorse or recommend, but I am convinced that this is why I have always been able to hold my liquor and have never had a problem with addiction. By the time I was three, the hospital emergency room staff and my mom knew each other on a first-name basis.

When my mom was pregnant with my sister, my dad built an enclosure with a swing and what he thought was a Brandon-proof gate. (There's that term again: "Brandon-proof." Hadn't they learned?) My mom still doesn't know how I got out, since she was sitting right there reading a book—but she looked up and I was gone: I had crawled under a barbed-wire fence, scooted down a steep hill, and was out of sight.

My mother was wild with fear. Seven months pregnant, she knew there was no way she could get under that barbed-wire fence, and she didn't have any wire cutters. The night before, she and my father had seen a pack of coyotes ranging around, and now all she could think of was how her tiny son would make a tasty little coyote meal. The only reason she spotted me was that I was wearing a red sweatshirt. Somehow she managed to coax me back up the hill and under the fence so she could grab me, crying hysterically and at the same time wanting to beat me.

From my earliest years, I always had a penchant for danger and physical extremes, and it made my poor mother's life a living hell. She likes to say that when I was little, she was the victim of parent abuse. She once called Social Services on herself when I had driven her to the edge with my behavior. She explained to the poor lady on the phone that her two-year-old son was driving her so crazy, she was about to hurt him. The social worker spent a week at our house observing, but I behaved like an angel for those seven days, and she left thinking my mom must *be* crazy.

It didn't take long for my parents to figure out that while they couldn't control my wild energy, they *could* channel it. Once they saw how madly in love I was with skiing, they knew they'd stumbled on the parenting strategy that would serve us all well for years to come: If they could get me involved in every sports activity possible, maybe it would keep me out of trouble. It did, too—at least for a while.

By age five I was on a ski team, and by age seven I had piled wrestling, football, baseball, swim, and track teams onto my athletic schedule. Later, as an adult, I found I have a love of extreme sports. The steeper the

ski slope, the larger the wave, the higher the cliff, the more difficult the jump from the plane or helicopter—the more danger and adrenaline involved, the more I want to try to conquer it. In my thirties, I would channel that same impulse into a drive to conquer huge goals in the entrepreneurial world. At the age of five, my Mount Everest was a 2,500-foot hill called North Star Mountain.

My earliest memories are of the crisp cold in my face and the sibilant *schuss* of the snow under my skis as I flew down the face of North Star. Every day, during the long months of ski season, my mom would pick me up from kindergarten and drive us straight out to the slopes. We had a season pass, and we used up every penny of it.

Less than half the height of its more famous neighbors, Whistler and Blackcomb, North Star is not really much of a mountain, but I didn't know that. To me, it seemed vast and inexhaustible. When I think back on my early childhood, what I remember most are the countless afternoons on my bright yellow Mickey Mouse K2 skis, exploring every trail and out-of-the-way patch of what seemed to me an endless world of snow and adventure.

My best friend at the time was a kid named Justin, who was as devoted to skiing as I was. We would spend every afternoon we could exploring North Star together. Justin and I got into ski racing and joined a team. By the time we were in first grade, our team was competing in tournaments at...

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