





THE PRIVATE WAR

OF ANTHONY SHAFFER

The shocking [redacted] truth behind the Pentagon's [redacted] efforts to suppress a [redacted] book that strikes at the heart of its [redacted] dysfunctional intelligence efforts [redacted]

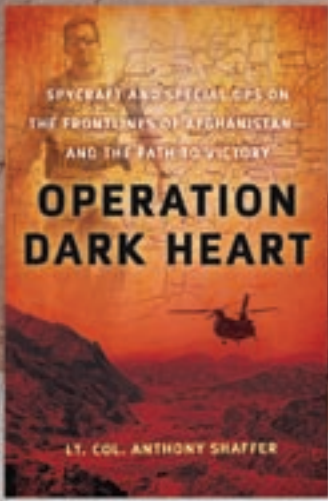
By [redacted] Peter Lance

In October 2003 Major Anthony Shaffer was on an MH-47 Chinook helicopter roaring toward a rendezvous with a Ranger assault team near Asadabad, Afghanistan about eight kilometers from the Pakistan border. Wearing 40 pounds of body armor and brandishing an M-4 carbine and an M-11 pistol, Shaffer was hunting Taliban insurgents as part of an aggressive new initiative called Winter Strike. CIA intelligence suggested that a warlord's lieutenants were holed up in a nearby village. Shaffer's mission: capture, kill or spy on any high-value targets he could find.

As he tells it in his riveting new memoir, *Operation Dark Heart*, "In the black bag between my knees was stuffed \$8,000 in \$100 and \$20 bills that my team would need for their change of mission: to go village to village attempting to recruit local informants to provide actionable information for the Rangers to use in pursuit of the terrorists."

But if you bought the book, which shot to number one on Amazon.com in late September, you would find thick black lines obliterating that quote. Why? Because seven months after *Dark Heart* had been cleared by Army censors, the Defense Intelligence Agency suddenly intervened, claiming Shaffer's account of clandestine operations and black-ops programs could "cause serious damage to national security."

Never mind that the book had already been printed. Within weeks, 9,500 copies were shredded, and news of the pulping made front-page headlines in *The New York Times*, launching the book onto its best-sellers list. *Dark Heart* was republished with 256 separate redactions—some covering as much as half a page. Apparently so desperate to ensure that Shaffer's full account of intelligence blunders leading up to 9/11 would never see the light of day, the Department of Defense had shelled out \$47,300



Cover story: Above left, the second, censored edition of Shaffer's book—the government destroyed its entire first run. Center, Shaffer standing above Kabul in 2003. He was later awarded the Bronze Star in a secret ceremony at Bagram Airfield.

in taxpayer money to destroy the first printing—an act of censorship unprecedented in publishing history.

But what exactly was the DIA trying to protect? A few journalists tried to solve the mystery, but most were stupefied. For example, the Pentagon first claimed that the identities of five undercover operatives would be blown, but that allegation soon proved to be false. The DIA excised the names of two of three centers of Al Qaeda activity that Shaffer's intelligence analyst had identified: The new book mentions only one—Wana, a town on Pakistan's tribal frontier with Afghanistan. However, anyone with a working knowledge of Al Qaeda history could spend five minutes on Google to locate the other two—Quetta, the ancestral home of Ramzi Yousef and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (the men responsible for both attacks on the World Trade Center); and Peshawar, the base of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a Pashtun warlord who helped funnel more than \$3 billion in secret CIA arms to the mujahideen rebels fighting the Soviet occupiers.

In *The New York Times*, reporter Scott Shane even puzzled over why the Pentagon censors would redact a reference to the Fort, the widely known nickname for Fort Meade, Maryland, where the National Security Agency is headquartered. At one point in the new stripped-down edition, they went so far as to edit out the letter *s* from the word *she*.

“On their face, these DIA cuts come as ham-handed throwbacks to the Cold War,” Shaffer tells me during our first interview for this piece. “But now that I’ve had a few months to assess, it appears they were much more worried about what the book has come to represent concerning the way the Afghan war has been fought.”

Since 9/11 there has been a running battle—for the most part far from the public eye—between desk jockeys who would conceal mistakes made during the war on terror and field operatives who seek to reveal the truth in hope of fixing a broken intelligence system. For a few extraordinary weeks this struggle finally burst onto the main stage, even if the reasons for the butchering of the book were obscured by the blundering desperation of the DIA. Now, thanks to my relationship with Shaffer, we are—for the first time—able to show exactly what had the DIA running scared.

Shaffer's book rips the lid off several stories the bureaucrats wanted to suppress: the role of a program named Able

Danger in yielding information that could have uncovered the 9/11 plot; Operation Dark Heart, which could have nabbed Al Qaeda's number two leader; and early indications that Pakistan's spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence, or ISI, actively supported the Taliban. These are the incendiary bombs the censors tried to defuse. And this is the real story of Tony Shaffer's book.

I've known Shaffer since 2005, when I devoted multiple chapters of my latest book on counterterrorism (*Triple Cross*) to Able Danger, the hypersecret data-mining operation he was part of in 1999 and 2000. Despite Pentagon denials, Shaffer maintains that Able Danger identified four of the September 11 hijackers who had entered the U.S. months earlier than the 9/11 Commission reported. Though he'd been promoted to lieutenant colonel since then, Shaffer's decision to go public about Able Danger in 2005 cost him his secu-

"Management bosses use [redacted] secrecy and national security as a [redacted] smoke screen."

rity clearance and almost tanked his career. Now, five years later, Shaffer is again in the Pentagon's crosshairs. In early October I'm roaring around the Beltway in Shaffer's Ford F-150 pickup as he races to one of the 20 media appearances on his schedule. In an eight-hour stretch he'll do 15 radio interviews and show up on Fox News, MSNBC, the BBC and *Russia Today*. But in between greenrooms we have a bonding moment about the nature of secrecy.

“What you discovered when you audited the FBI,” says Shaffer, “is exactly what I learned after 25 years in the military: that the operations people on the ground—the FBI street agents and the DIA officers in the field—get the job done with creative thinking and risk taking, while the management bosses back home ride their desks, keep their heads down and play cover-your-ass at all costs. They're the ones who move (continued on page 140)

ANTHONY SHAFFER

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up the food chain, and they use secrecy and national security as a smoke screen to cover up their f..." He stops himself.

Shaffer, a boyish-looking 48, was a leader of Boy Scout Troop 859 in Springfield, Virginia and rarely swears. So he uses the word *screwups*. But it's clear what he means.

"This is true in all the three-letter bureaucracies," he says. "The Agency, the Bureau, the DIA, NSA. Once you're a headquarters animal, the promotions come faster and you live to play the political game. It's easier to support a failed policy than to create a new one, so you justify bad operations even it means putting good men and women in uniform at risk."

I told a similar story about the FBI in *Triple Cross*. Then I spent 20 months fighting U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald, who tried to kill the paperback edition (I believe) for my revelations about his tenure directing the Bin Laden squad in the FBI's New York office. Shaffer was so incensed by that censorship campaign that he spoke at the National Press Club launch of the paperback in 2009. Now he has given me insights into his war over *Dark Heart* that haven't appeared in any of the media coverage since the scandal erupted.



Sun Tzu said it best more than 2,000 years ago. He who is victorious in war needs two things: the strongest army and the best spies. Tony Shaffer is the rare breed who embodies both disciplines: A Bronze Star winner for the Army, he was also trained in clandestine operations at the CIA's legendary "Farm," Camp Peary, Virginia. Thus, he's a soldier and a spy, operating programs, he says, that were "so black we couldn't talk about the existence of the operations on any computer network, even at the top secret level."

In Afghanistan his *nom de guerre* was Chris Stryker, a pseudonym based on a character in a John Wayne film. Now, as he thinks back to when he was chasing the Taliban in 2003, he writes, "To maintain concentration, I literally had to take a step outside myself. This is Chris playing me in a movie, I told myself. It was a way of detaching to get over the shock of what just happened."

Based 40 miles north of Kabul, he got along well with the FBI agents who were engaged in the Taliban hunt, but he still regarded the CIA types as independents, nicknaming them the Klingons—reluctant members of the Star Trek federation.

"They remained insular," Shaffer later wrote in a journal he kept, "with their own separate fleet of warships, their own separate way of doing things, refusing to be 'integrated' into the rest of Starfleet." As such, Shaffer mistrusted the CIA and felt apprehensive that its agents would share intelligence with the Taliban-friendly Pakistani ISI.

His worst fears would be realized during the planning stages for the aborted mission he calls *Dark Heart*. Riding with me now in his pickup, Shaffer flashes back to it: "It never came out in the book, because they made me lose it, but if Operation *Dark Heart* hadn't been stopped, we might have broken the back of Al Qaeda."

Though the magnitude of the mission is impossible to decipher in the book's current censored form, we can now give the story its proper treatment. It boils down to a brilliantly crafted mission Shaffer designed that—if it had been allowed to run as is—would have made headlines rivaling those about the book's pulping. Save for a decision by an Army general, Operation Dark Heart may well have led to the capture of Osama bin Laden's right-hand man, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri.

The original edition of Shaffer's manuscript, which I obtained, told of a savvy female analyst who in 2003 had stumbled upon "the Al Qaeda hotel," a hornet's nest of Taliban and high-value target activity in Wana, Pakistan. Shaffer quickly mapped out a mission to penetrate the location using a combination of informants and spies, electronic intel and psychological operations. It was the kind of bold, multidiscipline move that marked his career. But it involved a cross-border move and the unilateral restriction of intelligence from the CIA. Shaffer feared the agency would leak the operation to the ISI, and, as he writes, "once the Paks knew, the Taliban would find out."

After getting the mission approved by Lieutenant General John Vines, chief of Task Force 180, Shaffer had to clear it with Lieutenant General David Barno, who had just taken over as commander of the combined coalition forces. Sitting stone-faced following a briefing by Shaffer and Colonel John Ritchie, a senior intelligence officer, Barno not only nixed the mission but naively suggested that Shaffer share his information with the Pakistanis.

Reacting with shock, Shaffer and Ritchie informed the general that a female ISI agent had been rolled up during a Taliban raid. Not only had NSA traffic analysis confirmed her links to the enemy, "she was being processed to move to Guantánamo." But, according to Shaffer, Barno was unimpressed, describing the woman as "an exception...probably a rogue."

As Shaffer's jaw dropped, Ritchie jumped in. "What Major Shaffer is telling you is absolutely true. There is solid intelligence that the Pakistani intelligence service is at best compromised and at worst a co-conspirator with the Taliban."

But as Shaffer tells it, "General Barno shrugged it off. 'I don't care,' he said. 'We've

got to give the Pakistanis a chance to pull their own weight.' His chest seemed to puff up as he sat forward to emphasize his point. 'I see myself as a General MacArthur type of commander. It is my job to use all the capabilities I have as the combined forces chief.'" Shaffer continued to argue to the point of insubordination, but Barno put his foot down.

And with that, Operation Dark Heart was effectively dead. Shaffer later speculated that "someone on the U.S. side" passed the intelligence on Wana to the CIA.

Cut to months later. When Pakistani forces engaged the Taliban in the bloody battle of Wana, leaving dozens dead, the media reported the forces had surrounded a high-value target believed to be al-Zawahiri.

Then suddenly, Shaffer writes, "most, if not all, of the Al Qaeda-allied foreign mil-

itants fighting alongside local tribesmen escaped. Goddamn it, I thought. We had it right. We had suspected a Tier One HVT—someone at the level of al-Zawahiri—because of the patterns of activity and communications in Wana. If we were right about Wana, I was betting we were also right about the identification of Quetta and Peshawar as the other two key safe havens. The Paks had let him escape. Probably deliberately."

In that sentence the words *communications*, *Quetta* and *Peshawar* were redacted. "Since the world knows that those two Pakistani cities are the centers of gravity for Bin Laden," says Shaffer, "my guess is that the DIA forced the cuts to minimize this incredibly bad call on a mission that might have led to the capture of Al Qaeda's number two."

I contacted Barno and sent him the text

of Shaffer's account, asking for his response. But he never got back to me. At this point he may have little to fear. The first three quarters of a page in that chapter are blacked out, and there are six other redactions.

Back in a greenroom at the Fox News bureau in D.C., Shaffer shakes his head when he thinks about it. "My hope now is that with these revelations in the *PLAYBOY* piece and the lawsuit that my lawyer is going to file against the Pentagon, the full story can come out."

Still, despite the cuts in the book, much of the tradecraft and action of Shaffer's six months in Afghanistan still shine through. Take, for example, his 90-mile-an-hour convoys from Bagram Airfield to Kabul, particularly the episode in which his team is delayed after a chilling roadside IED explosion. Then there's the *Mission Impossible*-like penetration of the Afghanistan Post Telephone and Telegraph Company, where a gutsy target-exploitation analyst downloads "100 percent of the entire country's phone infrastructure" while Shaffer holds off a dozen locals wielding AK-47s. There are even some late-night sexcapades as Shaffer connects with Sergeant Kate Reese, a young Natalie Portman look-alike who rode shotgun on his convoy team. For obvious reasons, Shaffer changed her real name—one of the few redactions he made on his own.

But there are other sections of edition two that you need edition one to understand, such as Shaffer and an FBI agent's two-day interrogation of Arash Ghaffari. An Afghan U.S. citizen, Ghaffari was caught with his brother bringing \$65,000 in cash into Afghanistan from Iran. They were suspected of smuggling the money for the Taliban. Shaffer devotes two chapters to the grilling of Ghaffari at a base near the city of Gardez.

Eventually they broke him using a mix of trickery and guile—rather than resorting to an "enhanced interrogation technique" such as waterboarding, which Shaffer insists rarely works. Ghaffari revealed the existence of a possible sleeper cell in Virginia, where he lived. But in the sanitized edition of *Dark Heart*, the \$65,000, the location (Gardez) and any references to Virginia or Ghaffari's citizenship are blacked out.

That sequence takes on new meaning with a front-page *New York Times* story in late October that reports how Iran has been funneling millions of dollars to President Hamid

Karzai's chief of staff—money designed to “drive a wedge between the Afghans and their American and NATO benefactors.”

Still, despite the best efforts of the Pentagon to edit Shaffer's story, the most damaging incident in his Afghan tour comes through with shocking clarity: the meeting he had at Bagram Airfield in fall 2003 with Philip Zelikow, executive director of the 9/11 Commission. It was an encounter that would prove to be Shaffer's undoing.

In 1999 General Peter Schoonmaker, head of the U.S. Special Operations Command, had asked that Shaffer be “read into” Able Danger, a groundbreaking data-mining project aimed at collecting global intelligence on Al Qaeda. “Able Danger had a dual purpose,” says Shaffer. “After the African embassy bombings, it was clear to the Pentagon that Al Qaeda was our new enemy and that eventually we would have boots on the ground against them. So the idea was to identify their members and to take them out. The operation wasn't called Able Fun or Able Picnic. It was Able Danger because we needed to get these guys before they could get us again.”

Based at Fort Belvoir, Virginia (known as “spook central”), the operations officer was a decorated U.S. Navy captain named Scott Phillpott. “You would ask them to look at Khalid Sheikh Mohammed,” says Shaffer, “and these search engines would scour the Internet, looking for any number of open-source databases, from credit-reporting agencies to court records and news stories. Once a known KSM associate was found, they'd go through the same process for him.” One analyst later describes it to me as “Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon on steroids.”

Told to “start with the words *Al Qaeda* and go,” the data crunchers began an initial harvest in December 1999. The data grew fast and exponentially, and before long it amounted to two and a half terabytes—equal to about 12 percent of all printed pages held in the Library of Congress. Within months, Shaffer says, Able Danger had uncovered some astonishing information. “We identified lead 9/11 hijacker Mohamed Atta, in addition to Marwan al-Shehhi, who flew UA 175 into the south tower of the Trade Center, and two of the muscle hijackers aboard AA 77, which hit the Pentagon.”

The Able Danger data was so significant that ex-FBI director Louis Freeh later wrote that if shared with other agencies, the findings “could have potentially prevented 9/11.” But by April 2000 Department of Defense lawyers told personnel involved with the Able Danger project that this vast amount of open-source data may have violated Executive Order 12333, designed to prevent the Pentagon from indefinitely storing files on American citizens. As a result, the 2.5 terabytes were ordered destroyed.

“Imagine,” said then-congressman Curt Weldon of Pennsylvania, the number-two-ranking Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, in 2006. “You've got the names of four of the hijackers in the spring of 2000, almost a year and a half before the 9/11 attacks, and then it gets destroyed. Well, there was no legal justification for it whatsoever.”

As the DIA liaison to Able Danger, Shaffer

had pushed hard in 2000 to share what had been found on the four hijackers. However, lawyers from the Special Operations Command canceled three scheduled meetings he had set up with the FBI.

Once Zelikow and the 9/11 Commission staff showed up in Afghanistan in 2003, Shaffer was anxious to share his experience with them. “I wanted to make sure that what was broken in the system got fixed,” he says. “So I talked for a little more than an hour, going through the operation: who was involved, how we executed it, our intent to talk to the FBI and the destruction of the data. After I got done, there was stunned silence in the room. It was pretty clear that these 9/11 investigators had never heard about Able Danger.”

After the briefing Zelikow gave Shaffer his business card and urged him to contact his staff for a follow-up meeting once he got back stateside. In early January 2004, Shaffer called one of Zelikow's assistants.

“I told him I had copies of the Able Danger documents. I had tracked them down at my DIA office: two boxes of material, a leather briefcase where I kept the most sensitive docs, three large charts, including one with a photo of Mohamed Atta, and smaller charts rolled up in a tube. I told him I was willing to bring it

“The report trashes the reputations of officers who had the courage to describe important work they were doing to track Al Qaeda prior to 9/11.”

all over if he wanted it.” The assistant thanked Shaffer and told him they'd get back to him. As Shaffer later tells it in *Dark Heart*, “I had no way of knowing what I'd just unleashed.”

Within months Shaffer, to his surprise, found himself as the object of a DIA investigation.

First it was alleged that Shaffer, who had been awarded a Bronze Star in Afghanistan for his service against the Taliban, had unduly received a Defense Meritorious Service Medal for the Able Danger operation, among other work.

“The second allegation was that I misused a government phone to the tune of \$67 and some odd cents,” says Shaffer. The third charge seemed even more specious. “They said I filed a false voucher claiming local mileage to go to a staff college course at Fort Dix, New Jersey. But the records showed that I *did* go to the course and I graduated,” says Shaffer. “The total cost was \$180.”

In point of fact, Shaffer is so scrupulous that he hired a former *Washington Post* reporter to make sure every intelligence reference in *Dark Heart* could be found in the open-source media. But those three petty charges were indicative of just how far forces in the Pentagon seemed willing to go to discredit him.

In spring 2004, after returning from Afghanistan, Shaffer walked back into DIA headquarters in Clarendon, Virginia, expecting to get back to work. But when he met with an Army sergeant at the front door to exchange his “Chris Stryker” credentials for his security pass, he was stopped. Minutes later, after being led into a sixth-floor office, Shaffer was summarily fired.

Stripped of his security clearance, he was escorted out of the building and denied access to his office, where he'd left those volatile Able Danger files. “It was all over,” writes Shaffer in *Dark Heart*, “My career and my days as a clandestine officer were finished. Even if the accusations didn't match the severity of the punishment.... This was a death sentence.”

It wasn't until July 2005 that Shaffer began to suspect why he'd lost his clearance. “When I talked to Congress about our Able Danger findings,” says Shaffer, “they heard back from DIA that all my files—the link charts, the documents confirming what we'd found—were now missing. There wasn't a word about the operation in the entire 604-page 9/11 Commission Report. As far as Zelikow and company were concerned, Able Danger didn't exist.” From then on the DIA did whatever it could to turn Shaffer from Jack Bauer into Fox Mulder.

A month later, in August 2005, the story of the Army's secret data-mining operation, the rejection of its findings by the 9/11 Commission and Shaffer's involvement broke in a spectacular series of stories in *The New York Times*. A month after that the Pentagon prevented Shaffer, Navy captain Phillpott and other Able Danger operatives from testifying before a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing. That prompted then-committee chair Senator Arlen Specter to charge that the muzzling might have amounted to an “obstruction of the committee's activities.”

A year later the Department of Defense's inspector general issued a report telling the Able Danger story a different way. “We concluded that prior to September 11, 2001, Able Danger team members did not identify Mohamed Atta or any other 9/11 hijackers,” the report stated. It concluded that “DIA officials did not reprise against LTC Shaffer, in either his civilian or military capacity, for making disclosures regarding Able Danger.”

Reaction from former representative Weldon was swift: “The Department of Defense IG cherry-picked testimony from witnesses in an effort to minimize the historical importance of the Able Danger effort,” said Weldon. “The report trashes the reputations of military officers who had the courage to step forward and put their necks on the line to describe important work they were doing to track Al Qaeda prior to 9/11.”

But soon, Weldon himself would pay a price for his unbridled support of Able Danger. On October 13, 2006, while facing the first serious challenge to his congressional seat in years, word leaked to the media that Weldon, a Republican, was being investigated by the Bush Department of Justice for allegedly trading his political influence for lucrative lobbying and consulting contracts for his daughter Karen.

Three days later FBI agents raided Karzen's home and five other locations of Weldon

associates in Pennsylvania and Florida. Two days after that *The Washington Post* reported that a grand jury had been impaneled as part of the investigation.

In the November election, Weldon lost to former Navy admiral Joe Sestak, who, ironically, defeated Specter in the Democratic primary for Senate in 2010 after Specter switched parties last year. On July 17, 2007, the *Post* reported that as of that spring federal investigators were still examining Weldon's official actions taken on behalf of his daughter's lobbying clients.

Stemming from the same Department of Justice investigation, Russ Caso, a former Weldon aide, pleaded guilty in December 2007 after reportedly failing to disclose \$19,000 in income that his wife received for doing work for a nonprofit company tied to Weldon. In an interview for this piece, Caso insisted all these lobbying-related charges were politically motivated by "forces in the government that wanted to punish Curt for having the guts to back Tony [Shaffer] and tell the truth about Able Danger."

Charges were never filed against Weldon himself. "But you have to wonder about the timing," says Mike Kasper, a computer programmer who runs abledangerblog.com. "The Justice Department in the administration of his own party takes the preemptive action that costs him his seat. Weldon was so powerful that he was in line to become chairman of House Armed Services. Now, post-Able Danger, he was out."

As a measure of the ongoing power of the government to control the Able Danger debate, Weldon declined to be interviewed for this piece. "Curt is still scared they'll come after him," says ex-aide Caso. As for the Pentagon, in a statement released to *PLAYBOY*, a spokesperson insisted the latest move against Shaffer's book "has nothing to do with Lieutenant Colonel Shaffer's Able Danger claims, all of which were investigated by the DoD's inspector general and found to be without merit."

But the credibility of the inspector general's report can now be measured against declassified evidence I've obtained regarding Shaffer's career and competence. In assessing Shaffer's involvement in Able Danger, the inspector general described him as "a delivery boy" who was "minimally qualified."

However, Shaffer's Officer Evaluation Report, dated February 2003, confirms he was "Responsible for worldwide spying, assessing and developing clandestine agents via bilateral and unilateral platforms in direct support of CENTCOM, SOCOM and GWOT [Global War on Terror], providing oversight of all aspects of [operating base] Alpha activities...and...collection platforms located in CONUS [Continental United States]."

In 1998 Shaffer was singled out by Lieutenant General Patrick Hughes, the then-DIA director, for demonstrating "extraordinary knowledge, skill and ability." A year later Brigadier General Robert Harding, the DIA's director of operations, commended him for the "outstanding support provided for the Joint Special Operations Command."

And when it came to his performance in Afghanistan, the narrative in support of his Bronze Star said, "Major Shaffer is an

outstanding intelligence collection officer whose skill, leadership, tireless efforts and unfailing dedication were instrumental to the success of Task Force 180's mission." His actions contributed, said the narrative, "to the killing or capture of more than 100 Taliban fighters." Hardly the work of a delivery boy.

Further, as I thought about it, I realized how fundamentally flawed the DIA's logic was in its criticism of Shaffer: He was a product of the government's most rigorous training and intelligence programs, a trusted asset in which the Department of Defense had made a huge financial investment. If Shaffer was nothing more than a misguided errand boy, what does that say about everyone else at the Pentagon?

But by the time he went public on *Able Danger*, in 2005, Shaffer had lost both of his rabbis at the top of the DIA. Hughes and Harding had retired, and as his immediate boss in Afghanistan, Colonel Jose Olivero told me, "Somebody at DIA clearly had it in for this man." Four years later, fired from DIA and unable to get any comparable intelligence work with his security clearance pulled, Shaffer's last resort was to tell his story. Little did he know it would prove to be his most controversial mission yet.

"I visited St. Martin's Press in February 2009," says Shaffer, "and showed them the journal I had kept in Afghanistan. Thomas Dunne, who runs a division there, was taken by it, along with a video I'd done of my photographs called *The Real War*. He signed me on the spot. Since I am still an officer in the Army Reserve, I was acutely aware I had a duty to clear the manuscript with my immediate chain of command, and as a former intelligence officer I went out of my way to make sure there was nothing in the book that couldn't be confirmed by open-source material—in other words, it wasn't classified."

On January 4 Shaffer got a letter from his immediate Army boss, who wrote that "based on our review, I interpose no objection on legal or operational security grounds for the publication of your book." It's significant that this colonel, who asked not to be identified in this piece, has a civilian job with the Director of National Intelligence. "As such, he has access to top secret systems in his day job," says Shaffer. "It made him uniquely qualified to sign off on the book."

Approval in hand, St. Martin's set August 31 as the pub date for *Dark Heart*. The initial print run was set at 9,500 copies, indicating modest sales expectations. Then on August 6, less than a month before publication, after the first edition had been printed and shipped to a warehouse for distribution, the DIA weighed in with a threatening letter: "The U.S. Special Forces Command, the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency have determined that the manuscript contains classified information concerning their activities. In the case of NSA, this includes information classified at the top secret level." Charging potential "serious damage" to national security, the letter from Ronald Burgess Jr., director of the DIA, requested that the Army revoke its approval and order Shaffer to formally submit the manuscript for a new review.

"But that was nothing compared to what happened next," says Shaffer's lawyer, Mark

Zaid. “On August 16, three officials from the Pentagon, including David Ridlon, the senior human intelligence official, showed up at St. Martin’s office in New York.”

“Ridlon told my publisher flat out that he had found the names of five operatives in the book who were undercover,” says Shaffer. The implication was clear: If the book was distributed, their lives might be at risk. “Keep in mind,” says Zaid, “that the entire Valerie Plame scandal was over the release of a single non-official cover’s name. This was Plamegate times five.”

At the time Shaffer got the news, he was in uniform, driving to a week’s Reserve duty at Fort Lee, Virginia. “I’m in my truck heading through Fredericksburg,” he says, “when I literally pull into a gas station and get on a conference call with Mark, Thomas Dunne, St. Martin’s attorney, and John Sargent, the CEO of Macmillan [St. Martin’s parent company].”

Shaffer says, “The publishers couldn’t have been more supportive. Sargent told me, ‘We’re going to give the Pentagon a very short deadline to turn this around,’ but he made sure they knew St. Martin’s didn’t believe the book violated national security, and they were prepared, if necessary, to ship every copy of the first edition sitting in the warehouse.”

Within days Shaffer was back at the Pentagon listening to complaints from the CIA, NSA and DIA about material he believed was unclassified. “But out of an abundance of caution, we agreed to make changes,” he says. “At first the Pentagon demanded 18 ‘surgical edits,’ but as the days passed, it soon turned into more than 250.”

In a series of meetings, Shaffer struggled with the Department of Defense censors, who demanded the excision of a series of terms, names and locations that were readily available via open sources. “They took out all references to SIGINT,” says Shaffer. “It means ‘signals intelligence,’ and you can find it in any Tom Clancy novel. They refused to let me identify Camp Peary, the CIA’s ‘farm’ where I did my training.”

The Pentagon censors went to almost comical lengths, demanding that *The Sands of Iwo Jima*, the John Wayne movie that spawned Shaffer’s cover name, be stricken. And as the vetting went on it became clear to Shaffer that the original charge regarding the

five names was specious. “I confronted Dave Ridlon on that allegation,” says Shaffer, “and he admitted to me that he really didn’t know if they were undercover or not.”

In response, the Pentagon’s statement to PLAYBOY asserted, “The DoD representatives who met with...the publisher on August 16 did not specifically identify anyone ‘undercover,’ because neither of the publisher’s two representatives was cleared to receive classified information.”

One of the five names was Jose Olivero, Shaffer’s boss in Afghanistan, who is now a civilian worker for the Army. “I gave Tony permission to use my name,” Olivero tells me. “But in the end, they insisted he change it. Now in the book I’m known as Juan Negro.”

As a measure of the DIA’s animus toward Shaffer, Olivero told me he’d been contacted by an official who actually questioned whether he’d signed Shaffer’s Bronze Star nomination. “That’s when it seemed to me that they were after him,” says Olivero.

The Pentagon’s decision to pulp the first edition turned *Dark Heart* into a publishing phenomenon. From the moment the story broke on page one of *The New York Times*, the day before the ninth anniversary of 9/11, the book ignited a firestorm of interest. One first edition reportedly sold on eBay for \$2,000. After St. Martin’s outflanked the Pentagon by rushing the second edition to press, sales exploded. The book hit number seven on the *Times*’ best-seller list two weeks after its release. It’s now in its fifth printing.

More than a page-turning war memoir, *Dark Heart* is an indictment of failed policies spanning the administrations of Clinton, Bush and Obama. During his Afghan mission, Shaffer based his tactics on three now-undeniable conclusions about Afghanistan: The ISI is in league with the Taliban, the only effective military strategy is to fight the Taliban in their Pakistani safe havens, and the ultimate solution to the longest war in U.S. history is a Northern Ireland-like peace process.

“Every single one of those points has now been adopted by the White House,” says Zaid, Shaffer’s lawyer. “They’re all in the first edition of *Dark Heart*, but many are blacked out in the second. How many U.S. lives might have been saved if this strategy had been followed

in 2003? That’s a question I don’t think the DIA wanted the public to consider.”

As to the Pentagon’s purported objective—protecting national security—the fact that 60 to 70 advance copies of the first edition were mailed to reviewers and reporters prior to the demand for a second review ensured that the book-pulping plan would backfire.

“Any effort to selectively censor the manuscript at this late date would actually tend to *highlight* those sections of the text agencies believed were sensitive, not *conceal* them,” says Steven Aftergood, who runs a project on government secrecy for the Federation of American Scientists.

Still, the Pentagon had a temporary victory. The redacted edition of *Dark Heart* lacks much of the color of Shaffer’s original. Consider this passage from the highly edited edition:

“I always wanted to be a spook. Black ops—the most top secret class of clandestine operations—became my specialty for 16 of my 25 years as an intelligence officer. ██████████

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As this piece hits newsstands, Shaffer’s attorney has gone to federal court with a lawsuit so the original edition can be published. If that happens, you’ll be able to read what was under that redaction:

“During my time in the field, I had more than 40 different aliases. I posed as a stunt man, an arms dealer, a writer, the hard-charging owner of a business out to make a buck by doing deals with bad guys and a few other less-savory occupations. On one assignment, I had four different identities.” As a final litmus test on the validity of that cut, readers can ponder whether they can find anything in that sentence that would violate national security.

Until the Pentagon had the supremely bad judgment to underestimate this warrior-spy it had spent 25 years training, Shaffer’s book had lacked a happy ending. Now, with its metaphorical book burning, the Department of Defense has given Shaffer his last act and—as he cashes his royalty checks—the last laugh as well.

