



Written by [Eric Egan](#) on January 11, 2014

“Lone Survivor” — A Moving Testament to the Bonds of Brotherhood

It has been said that a man can be judged by the quality of the friends he keeps. Perhaps, in the same vein, a film can be judged by its audience. This thought occurred to me as I stood in line for the latest Mark Wahlberg flick, *Lone Survivor*. I was surrounded by men with white beards and weathered faces, wearing earth-tone clothes and combat boots. I felt that if I'd called out “Hooyah!” the whole line just might “Hooyah!” back. It dawned on me then that I hoped that *Lone Survivor* would be what its audience promised — a solid military flick that would arouse vague feelings of patriotism and brotherhood. I am happy to say that the film surpassed the promise of the company it kept.



Lone Survivor, based on the autobiographical book of the same title by former Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell, portrays the events of “Operation Red Wings” — the failed Afghanistan SEAL mission to kill a regional Bin Laden ally named Ahmad Shah.

The film starts off with a montage of actual home video footage of BUD/S — the hellish training that all SEAL hopefuls must pass if they want the privilege of calling themselves a Frogman. This opening montage immediately sets the tone for the rest of the film with shots of the intense training inter-cut with the helmets of those who don't quite make the cut being placed on the ground. Not everyone gets to be a SEAL. Only those who have the right mix of will power, genius, and an admirable touch of insanity get to be SEALs. It's important that the audience feel that SEALs are really a cut above the rest in the beginning because what the film goes on to depict is truly unbelievable and probably pales in comparison to the real thing.

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After the opening montage and before the mission kicks off, the film spends plenty of time giving us glimpses into the lives of the four SEALs — Marcus Luttrell (Mark Wahlberg), Team Leader Michael P. “Murph” Murphy (Taylor Kitsch), Danny Dietz (Emile Hirsch), and Matthew “Axe” Axelson (Ben Foster) — who will go on the ill-fated mission to eliminate Shah. These little glimpses into the lives of the men involved with Operation Red Wings serve to build a sense of camaraderie and connect the audience with the characters. This makes things all the more painful when, in grandma-safe military parlance, the blank hits the fan.

And when it does I don't think I've ever seen four men in a prettier predicament than Murph, Dietz, Luttrell, and Axe. Nor have I seen too many more expertly crafted cinematic gun battles. This is where the film earns its R rating for strong, bloody war violence and pervasive language. This is also where I'll



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insert my warning for the faint of heart: This film is not for you. Due to pitch-perfect sound design and skillfully constructed effects, every shot and bullet wound is felt. *Lone Survivor* just might have you wincing before the defecation stops hitting the oscillation (for grandma's sake). This violence, however, does serve to hammer home just how tough these guys actually are. Axe for instance, perfectly performed by Ben Foster with just the right touch of grim wit, was shot multiple times, including in his head, and still was able to muster enough will to fight on for some time before succumbing to the enemy. It is also easy to imagine that Axe really was the type of guy to say something like, "You can die for your country. I'll live for mine," as he takes out an enemy combatant (a real one).

It is during these adeptly filmed battle sequences — which make up the bulk of the film — that one realizes what these guys fight for. It isn't patriotism that gets these guys through the fight, though that may be why they sign up. It's sheer brotherhood. Dedication to getting the guy next to you home is what allows the SEALs to take such a lickin' and keep on tickin'.

It says reams about everyone involved in the making of this film that no one element outshines any other, thus maintaining a necessary, delicate balance. If Mark Wahlberg's celebrity, for example, had outshone the presence of the lesser-known actors, then the sense of brotherhood that the film is able to evoke would have collapsed. The same goes for the universally strong performances by all the other players involved.

The film also does not gloss over the complexities of the situations our soldiers find themselves in as they struggle with the rules of engagement and come into contact with Afghans who turn out to be truly generous men. This provides a third dimension to a film that could have easily turned into a two dimensional, us-versus-them oversimplification.

The film ends with a montage of real photos of the men whom the film depicts — a moving tribute indeed. You could hear a pin drop in the theater full of white beards and grizzled faces and, although I don't think that audience would own up to it, there were more than a few audible sniffles.

Lone Survivor is a truly stirring testament to the bonds of brotherhood that, in the words of Matthew "Axe" Axelson, will leave you with a "full heart." And I think we can all say "Hooyah!" to that.



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