

# Fight To Survive

March 10, 2014

00:00

My name is Charlie. I am a lieutenant colonel for the U.S Air Force and today I am going to train two new trainees down to Brazil. We are leaving at 02:00 and will return the next day.

01:00

I haven't slept in two days because of my preparation for the flight. As I got up this morning, I got dressed with my uniform and went to my three-year-old daughters, Teddy, room. She was sleeping safely in her bed. As I got closer, she woke up and said "Goodbye Daddy." I smiled and leaned in next to her. Her eyes seemed to glow bright but I saw her sadness that I was leaving. Then I tucked her in and walked out of my home. It was very dark and a cold breeze stung my face.

My wife, Catherine, was waiting for me at the front porch. "Be careful," she ordered.

"I will," I replied. She hugged me tight and said goodbye with a smile.

02:00

I am on my single-manned F-15 Eagle fighter jet leading the two trainees behind me. "Ready for take off?" I asked.

"Yes," they responded.

Our engines roared as the stars glimmered in the distance. As we flew higher and higher, the stars looked closer. Finally we reached our maximum height.

"Are you guys OK back there?"

"Yes," I heard over my radio.

We continued our flight peacefully, enjoying the view, not knowing what was to come.

06:00

I got another message over my radio.

There was an unidentified aircraft passing by where we were. I saw the aircraft about 100 miles east and headed toward it. My trainees followed. "We are going to fly next to this aircraft, give him a warning, and tell him to land. If he does not respond, then we give him a threat. If he continues to fly, we blow him out of the sky. Got it?"

"Got it," they responded in shaky voices. I could tell that they were nervous. Even I was nervous, but I couldn't let them know that their leader was not 100% sure about this.

06:30

We reached the unidentified aircraft and gave him the warning. The plane just followed his path. Then something incomprehensible happened; the aircraft shot my right wingman.

"I'm hit!" I heard as his plane burst into flames and he plummeted into the dark forest beneath us. Then the same thing happened to my left wingman. I was in shock as this whole practice mission turned into a nightmare. Fear struck me as both my men flew fell to their death.

I shot a missile at the plane, but missed as he maneuvered to the left. We were in an all out dog fight. My heart was racing faster than my plane. Suddenly I couldn't see my enemy. As I looked to my right, I saw a missile coming straight at me and then everything was blank.

07:00

I woke up in a place unknown.

It was dark because the trees covered the sunlight from me. I smelled the smoke from my plane and the others. The day was just a complete disaster.

The birds sang happily but I was everything but happy. I tried to get up, but my leg didn't move. I knew at that point that my leg was broken. I had never felt that much pain before. The pain ran from my leg then up my spine. It was extremely swollen and red with blood. My leg was useless; it would be all arms from here.

"Help!!!" I yelled, but it only echoed into the large forest and I heard no answer.

I knew I wasn't going to have anyone looking for me for a few days, so I needed to find help myself. I crawled forward, but the pain in my leg stopped me in my tracks. Then I remembered about my plane. It was about 100 yards to my left, but completely shattered. Inside there was a first aid kit. I used my entire strength to pull myself forward.

07:30

After a half hour, I was able to reach my plane. My leg felt like it was about to fall off. I first picked up the radio and spoke into it. There was no answer. I tried again and the same thing happened. I felt like giving up. I just felt like it was my time to die. Suddenly, I looked to my left and saw my wallet. I reached out and picked it up with my weak and bleeding hands. Inside was a picture of my daughter that I always kept with me. At that point I made a promise to myself that I needed to talk to her at least one more time, so I fought my pain and stood up. I knew my leg was broken, but my daughter was more important than my leg. I took a step but fell immediately. I just laid there and waited, praying for a rescue team.

08:00

I heard something to my left. A rustling of leaves, then a snapping of a twig. Between the bushes I saw two bright yellow eyes staring hungrily at me. I heard a growl, but I knew that was not a good sign. Fear rushed through me like a virus and I was completely still. The animal lunged out of the bushes and bit me on my right arm. It was a big gray wolf about 100 pounds pounding, biting, and clawing at me. I tore the wolf off of my arm but he took some of my flesh with him. He was angrier than before and he lunged again, but this time I was ready and as his mouth reached me, I shoved a stick down his throat and he fell stone dead. I had just survived another challenge and I wondered what challenge was next.

09:00

My right arm was red with blood and both my legs were useless. I used my left arm to reach some wires from the plane and I was able to start a fire. I was starving and beginning to see things. I'm not sure if they are real or not. I see my wife, telling me to stay awake because I have work to do. I see my daughter crying from her room for my help. Then as my daughter spoke, I heard a drumming sound. My vision disappeared and I was still in the forest as a plane passed over my head.

"Here!!!! I'm right here!!!!!!," I yelled, but the plane continued to move further and further. My heart seemed to stop. I was beginning to think I might be here for the rest of my life which wouldn't be much longer.

12:00

My fire was dying out, just like my will to live. I had made a promise to myself and I was thinking I couldn't keep my own promise. But looking at the picture of my daughter again gave me a spark of life, a reason to live. I crawled deeper into the forest determined to find help. I could only use my left arm but that was all I needed. I advanced slowly. Soon, I couldn't see my plane anymore. The sun was still covered by the trees. I just kept moving forward repeating my daughters name in my head.

**"Teddy, this is Daddy. Teddy, can you hear me? I'm here for you, Teddy."**

**14:00**

**I heard the sound of water near me. A river, It must be a river! I headed toward the water. Then, there it was, a beautiful waterfall with crystal clear water. I hurried towards it at a slow pace and drank. It was my savior. Then I headed down river because I knew that civilizations thrive near water. This could be the luck I needed.**

**16:00**

**The sun was setting but in the distance I saw a small hut and my eyes grew wide. I yelled out to see if anyone could hear me.**

**"Could this be real or was I dreaming? Will I be able to see my daughter again?" I asked myself. I crawled through the dirt and got closer and closer to the hut. As I reached the hut, a man with torn jeans and a truckers hat came toward me and asked if I was okay. I told him everything while a tear dripped from my eye and my blood stained the ground. Then he put me on his truck and rushed me to the hospital.**

**18:00**

**They gave me antibiotics and covered my wounds with stitches. I was thankful that I was alive.**

**They told me they could take me back home so they called the U.S. Air force which came and picked me up immediately. I was taken on the plane in a wheel chair and with a cast on my arm. I felt so weak and tired. Every part of me was sore, but I was still alive so I shouldn't complain.**

**They told me the attack was a terrorist attack and that my two partners were found dead in the forest. The group that had attacked us knew we were going on a practice mission and were not prepared for combat.**

**"Have you found the man who attacked us?" I asked. There was no reply.**

**I couldn't believe my partners' fate. They were so young and had their whole lives ahead of them. "I should have been the one lying dead on the ground. It was my fault they're family's would suffer," I thought to myself, but thinking like that wouldn't bring them back so the least I could do is be thankful that I was alive and remember them as Heroes.**

**20:00**

**I arrived at my house and my daughter ran and gave me the biggest hug ever. Then my wife did the same. I was home and happy again because I could see my daughter. Deep inside of me I knew that the only reason I survived was because of my daughter. I learned that no matter how hard the situation is that you are in, your family will always help you overcome it.**

**That day, I decided to remember not as a terrible day, but a day to recognize how lucky I am to be alive with my beautiful family and a day to recognize the brave Men and Women who risk their lives everyday serving their country.**

**March 13, 2014**

**14:00**

**I attended the funeral for my two wingmen and honored them for their bravery. The rain poured outside, but not as hard as their families cried. I paid my respect to these men and prayed for their families. Not one ray of sunlight got passed these dark clouds of sadness.**

17:00

I was back on another plane leading another team of trainees just to Mexico. I promised myself that I wouldn't let anything happen to them, and as I have seen, I keep every promise no matter how hard it is.

As my plane took off high into the sky, I felt so alive. Here in the sky, this is where I belong.