

THE FIRST RULE OF THE FIGHT CLUB...

I've been waiting to comment on the news that one of the SEALs that killed Osama bin Laden has a book coming out on September 11.

The publication will undoubtedly be yet another telling episode in our government's asymmetric treatment of secrecy, but thus far it is too soon to say how. After all, when a SEAL wants to "correct the story," does he plan to engage in a little JSOC score-settling (I heard rumors the Rangers and the SEALs had competing versions not long after the operation). Will he reveal details that change our understanding of Pakistani knowledge of the operation? Or will he significantly upend the myth Obama's team has spun about it? All were—and probably still are—possible.

In any case, the book publication will present an interesting challenge for the Obama Administration, which has gone to great lengths to prevent or disincent publication of other books revealing secret information. Nevertheless, the completely arbitrary system for prepublication review seems to encourage people to bypass the system. (This SEAL has already planned to donate much of the proceeds of the book, following a lead set by Ishmael Jones, which takes away one of the tools the government might use against him.)

Finally, there's the political problem Obama will have. It'll be hard for the Administration to villainize this SEAL the way it has given others. After all, the SEAL played a key role in half of Obama's re-election bumper sticker: "Osama bin Laden is dead, GM is alive." Either he's a hero for killing OBL, or he's not, right?

It's against that background that I read the exposure—first by a Fox News Pentagon reporter, citing "multiple sources," and then by Craig Whitlock, citing "Pentagon sources"—of the

SEAL's real identity. Given that the Pentagon was sharing (or at least confirming) the SEAL's identity to the WaPo, then this line from the SOCOM spokesperson is rather ominous.

And Col. Tim Nye, a Special Operations Command spokesman, said the author "put himself in danger" by writing the book.

"This individual came forward. He started the process. He had to have known where this would lead," Nye said. "He's the one who started this so he bears the ultimate responsibility for this."

That is, the first DOD source to go on the record has effectively told this guy, "it's your fault if you become a target." (Though we're at least supposed to assume that Fishel and Whitlock are working with different sources, because Fishel reported that DOD had not yet confirmed the SEAL's identity, whereas the lead of Whitlock's story is that they had.)

Then there's this detail: Whitlock notes that the OBL raid, was, technically, a CIA covert op, meaning the CIA might get to complain about the information in the book even though DOD has no prepublication process.

Pentagon and Navy officials said they were unaware of Bissonnette's plans to write the book until Dutton announced its publication Wednesday. They said he did not submit an advance copy to military officials for review to ensure that it does not contain classified information that could jeopardize national security.

But it was unclear what, if any, restrictions Bissonnette faced. Navy officials said there is no blanket rule requiring active-duty service members or veterans to obtain permission to publish, although they can be prosecuted after the fact by the Justice Department

if they disclose classified information.

Bissonnette, however, was technically on assignment for the CIA, which oversaw the bin Laden operation. The spy agency routinely requires its personnel to sign non-disclosure agreements, particularly in the case of sensitive missions.

The CIA has said that "No Easy Day" was not submitted for pre-publication review.

If the CIA did claim the SEAL violated prepublication requirements, it would be the height of cynicism. As I understand it, CIA had the lead on this solely to make it legally a non-military op, changing the legal status of it. While it was technically a covert op, the readiness with which the Administration has discussed it since should strip it of its covert status.

Finally, note this dynamic, which never ceases to be of interest: the guy who was ultimately in charge of the "covert op" to kill OBL Leon Panetta, now heads the Pentagon, where all this chatter about the SEAL's identity seems to be coming from.

Update: I hadn't seen this Eli Lake story before I wrote this. He quotes Admiral McRaven suggesting this SEAL wrote the book for his own self-enrichment.

The pending publication of the book, *No Easy Day: The First Hand Account of the Mission that Killed Osama bin Laden*, so stirred Admiral William McRaven, chief of the Special Operations Command, that he sent a letter Thursday to special-operations forces **warning against using their elite military affiliation for personal gain**, according to Pentagon officials who asked not to be named.

In the letter, McRaven said that while it was within the rights of former

special-operations soldiers to “write books about their adventures, it is disappointing when these actions either attempt to represent the broader [special-operations forces] community, or expose sensitive information that could threaten the lives of their fellow warriors.” [my emphasis]

That impugns what this SEAL at least claims his motive is: to tell the truth. Moreover, since he has already donated most of his proceeds, he doesn't seem to be trying to get rich off this book (though now that he's been outed, it is likely he'll get follow-up deals).

If there are inaccurate details out there, how is it self-serving to try to correct those inaccuracies?

We still don't know that's what the book is about, but DOD seems quick to hang this guy out.