

Betrayal in Benghazi

**Phil "Hands" Handley
Colonel, USAF (Ret.)**

The combat code of the US Military is that we don't abandon our dead or wounded on the battlefield. In US Air Force lingo, fighter pilots don't run off and leave their wingmen. If one of our own is shot down, still alive and not yet in enemy captivity, we will either come to get him or die trying. Among America's fighting forces, the calm, sure knowledge that such an irrevocable bond exists is priceless. Along with individual faith and personal grit, it is a sacred trust that has often sustained hope in the face of terribly long odds.

The disgraceful abandonment of our Ambassador and those brave ex-SEALs who fought to their deaths to save others in that compound is nothing short of dereliction-of-duty. Additionally, the patently absurd cover-up scenario that was fabricated in the aftermath was an outright lie in attempt to shield the President and the Secretary of State from responsibility.

It has been over eight months since the attack on our compound in Benghazi. The White House strategy, with the aid of a "lap dog press" has been to run out the clock before the truth is forthcoming. The recent testimonies of the three "whistle blowers" have reopened the subject and hopefully will lead to exposure and disgrace of those responsible for this embarrassing debacle.

It would appear that the most recent firewall which the Administration is counting on is the contention that there were simply no military assets that could be brought to bear in time to make a difference... mainly due to the unavailability of tanker support for fighter aircraft. This is simply BS, regardless how many supposed "experts" the Administration trot out to make such an assertion. The bottom line is that even if the closest asset capable of response was half-way around the world, you don't just sit on your penguin ass and do nothing. The fact is that the closest asset was not half-way around the world, but as near as Aviano Air Base, Italy where two squadrons of F-16Cs are based. Consider the following scenario (all times Benghazi local):

When Hicks in Tripoli receives a call at 9:40 PM from Ambassador Stevens informing him "Greg, we are under attack!" (his last words), he immediately notifies all agencies and prepares for the immediate initiation of an existing "Emergency Response Plan." At AFRICON, General Carter Ham attempts to mount a rescue effort, but is told to "stand down." By 10:30 PM an unarmed drone is overhead the compound and streaming live feed to various Command and Control Agencies... and everyone watching that feed knew damn well what was going on. At 11:30 PM Woods, Doherty and five others leave Tripoli, arriving in Benghazi at 1:30 AM on Wednesday morning, where they hold off the attacking mob from the roof of the compound until they are killed by a mortar direct hit at 4:00 AM.

So nothing could have been done, eh? Nonsense. If one assumes that tanker support really was not available... what about this:

- When at 10:00 PM AFRICON alerts the 31st TFW Command Post in Aviano Air Base, Italy of the attack, the Wing Commander orders preparation for the launch of two F-16s and advises the Command Post at NAS Sigonella to prepare for hot pit refueling and quick turn of the jets.

- By 11:30 PM, two F-16Cs with drop tanks and each armed with five hundred 20 MM rounds are airborne. Flying at 0.92 mach they will cover the 522 nautical miles directly to NAS Sigonella in 1.08 hours.
- While in-route, the flight lead is informed of the tactical situation, rules of engagement, and radio frequencies to use.
- The jets depart Sigonella at 1:10 AM with full fuel load and cover the 377 nautical miles directly to Benghazi in 0.8 hours, arriving at 1:50 AM... which would be 20 minutes after the arrival of Woods, Doherty and their team.
- Providing that the two F-16s initial pass over the mob, in full afterburner at 200 feet and 550 knots did not stop the attack in its tracks, only a few well placed strafing runs on targets of opportunity would assuredly do the trick.
- Were the F-16s fuel state insufficient to recover at Sigonelli after jettisoning their external drop tanks, they could easily do so at Tripoli International Airport, only one-half hour away.
- As for those hand-wringing naysayers who would worry about IFR clearances, border crossing authority, collateral damage, landing rights, political correctness and dozens of other reasons not to act... screw them. It is high time that our "leadership" get their priorities straight and put America's interests first.

The end result would be that Woods and Doherty would be alive. Dozens in the attacking rabble would be rendezvousing with "72 virgins"... and a clear message would have been sent to the next worthless POS terrorist contemplating an attack on Americans that it is not really a good idea to "tug on Superman's cape."

Of course all this would depend upon a Commander In Chief that was more concerned with saving the lives of those he put in harm's way than getting his crew rest for a campaign fund raising event in Las Vegas the next day. As well as a Secretary of State that actually understood "What difference did it make?", or a Secretary of Defense whose immediate response was not to the effect that "One of the military tenants is that you don't commit assets until you fully understand the tactical situation." Was he not watching a live feed from the unarmed drone... and he didn't understand the tactical situation?

Ultimately it comes down to the question of who give that order to "stand down?" Whoever that coward turns out to be should be exposed, removed from office, and face criminal charges for dereliction of duty. The combat forces of the United States of America deserve leadership that really does "have their back" when the chips are down.