

First-Person Singular: LtCol Todd “Friday” Caruso

LTCOL TODD “FRIDAY” CARUSO – 2010

Lieutenant Colonel Todd “Friday” Caruso was a commanding officer from 2009 through 2011 for Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron Two (VMAQ-2). This account describes the insurgent attack at Camp McCool in Bagram, Afghanistan, during Operation Enduring Freedom, May 19, 2010.



I awoke when the first couple of explosions hit. I thought: “IDF. Time to get in the bunker.” Then heard small arms fire that progressed to the towers firing (pop, crack, zip). I thought: “Shit, bad guys are in the camp shooting.” I pulled on my boots, zipped up my flight suit, grabbed my weapon, and headed out the door.

At 0334 local time, Bagram Air Base was subject to a complex

attack carried out by insurgents from the Haqqani terrorist network. The major thrust of the attack was launched on a remote portion of the base where Navy and Marine Prowlers have been housed for years (Camp McCool) in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) operations.

There are many (at least 20) in the field just over the HESCO directly in front of our guard shack. Approximately 20 yards from our guard shack, our guard heard a noise and suspected someone came over the wall. The one-eye infrared camera shows a figure crouched down chopping the fence with wire cutters. Our two Marines walk in that direction cautiously with weapons at the ready, but since it is so dark and the grass is grown between the interior fence and the HESCO, they walk right by the figure. The camera catches it all, but we are NOT linked into communications with base defense, so no one is assisted or alerted. The figure moves and our Marines turn back to the left. The figure stands and tosses a grenade. Our Marines pop off a couple rounds and back up. Blast frags hit them and they retreat to the guard shack. The next guard moves forward. PFC Craddock fires at the figure who is already hit. The bad guy (BG1) then attempts to throw another grenade and lays down on it, we suspect he was mortally wounded and attempted to blow off his vest.

SgtMaj pulls the wounded back to the bunker right next to my B-hut. As I entered the bunker, LCPL Stellick was bleeding badly but being cared for. We dressed his wound and loaded him on a litter. As we were backing up the pickup truck, the bad guys were prone on top of the HESCOs across from our gate with others on the ground just over the HESCOs. They were throwing several grenades and shooting AKs at us. I left Stellick as he was being loaded into the truck and jumped into the next bunker to assess the situation and try to locate SgtMaj. As I turned the corner into the bunker, GySgt Wilson was sitting on the bench with SSgt Jacobson holding his abdomen and leaning him forward looking for exit wounds, as couple other Marines

were holding flashlights. The pickup with Stellick and a few other Marines holding the litter in the back takes off for the front gate, small arms zipping over their heads, they blast through the gate and raced down the road toward the hospital, Luckily, the bad guys have bad aim. I inspected GySgt Wilson's wounds and we needed Doc, bandages, and a tourniquet. Not knowing where Doc was and knew time was critical, I departed the bunker and wedged open the locked medical B-hut door. More grenades were landing in our camp, and one even blew up our Chevy Blazer. I returned with supplies to Gy Wilson and started to bandage him, but I could not find a tourniquet for his leg. Just then, Doc showed up along with an Army doc and applied a tourniquet. We got another litter and truck and loaded GySgt Wilson. We noticed that he was turning white and going into shock. Before loading him in the truck, we made him talk a few times to see if he was getting a little stronger. The truck took off and was fired at, again very lucky they made it out.

BG2 made it over the wall, and BG3 was tossing RPGs and grenades over the wall resupplying BG2. BG2 shoots an RPG at our guard shack. We had one Marine in the bunker next to it who fired back at the flash that came from the RPG. The RPG went through the guard shack and exploded destroying our water tanks. Grenades kept coming. One landed behind the guard shack and foraged the JP fuel tank in front of the woman's head but luckily, no secondary explosions. SgtMaj is trying to push Marines forward to locate and ID the enemy. Remember I am telling you all this after watching the big-eye video. We had no idea what was hitting us, and we were trying to follow IDF procedures: "Keep Marines in the bunker until all clear is sounded." Had we known there were bad guys jumping the wall, we would have had 200 Marines online hosing them down – very frustrating.

By this time, we located the bad guys' positions and Marines fired upon them. They hosed off another RPG, it skipped into

the front of an ISU-90 and never exploded (again very lucky).

BG3 jumps up on top of the HESCO. A few more small arms fire and grenades are coming over the wall. BG3 ends up in the prone position on top of the HESCO. Someone blew his head off. Could have been VMAQ-2 Marines, could have been helos, there was so much gun fire it was impossible to tell.

We pulled our Marines back to the bunker because all BGs that were inside the wire were killed. S0F forces were now outside the wire, they killed several outside the wire. One S0F stepped on a mine and lost his leg from the knee down.

The SgtMaj and I went from bunker to bunker checking on Marines, and we assessed the damage to the camp. We pulled small working parties forward to do things like secure and sandbag the leaking fuel tank and jam shut the gate. We posted Marines in fighting positions high on the bunkers and manned up the guard shack.

Attack began at 0334, it was now about 0730. SgtMaj and I assessed that the camp was secure, and we had a good handle on accountability.

The airfield was closed. One Prowler was airborne overhead, just tanked and had another tanker available. They had been airborne for about 6 hours. With no estimation of field open time, we coordinated with Kandahar to catch them if they needed to divert. I did not want to force them to stay airborne more than 10 hours. If fatigue or gas became an issue, they had a clear path with coordination to divert. They hung out for another tank and landed a couple hours later.

SgtMaj and I visited our Marines' bedsides. I have seen it in the movies, I have seen it in photos, I have seen video of senior officers, CMC, President, etc., stand by the bedside of wounded Marines. Now I was doing it, holy shit! They were both in ICU, intubated, sedated, and unconscious. I visited with Stellick. I held his hand and told him he was a hero, saved

lots of lives, squeezed with no response.

I moved to Gy Wilson's bedside. He still had blood all over his face, the same blood that was all on my sleeve and leg of my flight suit. I held his hand too and said the same stuff with no response. SgtMaj did the same. We took a moment to sit down and write a note to each of them and stick it in their packs. We exited the hospital and went to the flight line. Marines on the flight line were in bunkers, Os in the RR, jet was SOD, security perimeter established. I gathered all the Marines in a school circle and said some encouraging words (I'm sure, I don't remember). I told them we fought hard and GySgt Wilson and LCPL Stellick saved many lives and are heroes, that they are in good condition on their way to Germany via medivac.

I spoke personally one-on-one to several Marines. They were motivated, ready for anything. *What a great feeling it is to have 200 badass Marines as your bodyguard.*

SgtMaj and I departed to return to McCool. We developed a plan for camp: recovery, rest, refortify, secure, and then get back up FMC by 0100 (approximately 14 hours away). We completed a full on shoulder-to-shoulder police call from HESCO to camp perimeter. We identified all rounds, brass, and any unexploded ordnance, assess damage, and clean bunkers for MRE trash, clothing, bloody bandages, etc.

SNCOs then snapped into action like they do best: Within a couple hours we had fighting positions built, sand bag refortified the guard shack, all damage under control, and Marines were showering and hitting the rack.

By approximately 1400, things seemed pretty normal, and then intel reports began to come in describing the depth and complexity of the attack. The bad guys were wearing Army BDUs, some had glow belts on, and all of them had explosive vests. Their plan was to bust through the wire and fight their way

in. They would probably roll grenades into bunkers, RPG anything they could, then get as deep into camp as possible and blow themselves up.

XO put together a fantastic letter to the families describing the situation and reassuring them we are safe. I reviewed and signed it and posted it on our webpage. It really helped the families and the frantic phone calls from home just about stopped.

VMAQ-2 Marines will remain holding the high standards I am continually impressed with each day and have proven once again the old saying "Every Marine a Riflemen."