



Taking Fire

By Lindsay McKenna

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She dances on the edge of life...and death

Not all are meant to walk in the light. Marine Corps Sergeant Khat Shinwari lives among the shadows of the rocky Afghanistan mountains, a Shadow Warrior by name and by nature. She works alone, undercover and undetected—until a small team of US Navy SEALs are ambushed by the Taliban...and Khat is forced to disobey orders to save their lives.

To go rogue.

Now, hidden deep in the mountains with injured SEAL Michael Tarik in her care, Khat learns that he's more than just an operator. In him, she sees something of herself and of what she could be. Now duty faces off against the raw, overwhelming attraction she has for Mike. And she must decide between the safety of the shadows...and risking everything by stepping into the light.

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Editorial Review

Review

"McKenna provides heartbreakingly tender romantic development that will move readers to tears. Her military background lends authenticity to this outstanding tale, and readers will fall in love with the upstanding hero and his fierce determination to save the woman he loves." – Publishers Weekly on *Never Surrender* (starred review)

"McKenna (*High Country Rebel*) skillfully takes readers on an emotional journey into modern warfare and two people's hearts." -Publishers Weekly on *Down Range*

"A fresh plot and a good blend of romance and action make this an amazing read." RT Book Reviews on *Beyond Valor*

"McKenna understands the mind of a warrior....[This] story is relevant, moving, and eye-opening."
-RT Book Reviews on *The Loner*

"McKenna...writes her stories with knowledge and compassion .. A must-read for anyone who loves military romance." RT Book Reviews on *Down Range*

"McKenna's latest is an intriguing tale...a unique twist on the romance novel, and one that's sure to please."
-RT Book Reviews on *Dangerous Prey*

"McKenna's expert knowledge of the Navy SEALs gives authenticity to a very tender and heartwrenching story. Filled with non-stop action, *Never Surrender* grabs at the heart." -RT Book Reviews on *Never Surrender*

"Strong storytelling and heated passion within a world of military ops are at the heart of these stories...one great read." -RT Book Reviews on *Course of Action*

"Realistic characters are the foundation of this romance...it's refreshing to read a story with love as the reason for passion." -RT Book Reviews on *High Country Rebel*

"Readers will find this addition to the *Shadow Warriors* series full of intensity and action-packed romance. There is great chemistry between the characters and tremendous realism, making *Breaking Point* a great read." --RT Book Reviews on *Breaking Point*

About the Author

A U.S. Navy veteran, she was a meteorologist while serving her country. She pioneered the military romance in 1993 with *Captive of Fate*, *Silhouette* Special edition. Her heart and focus is on honoring and showing our military men and women. Creator of the *Wyoming Series* and *Shadow Warriors* series for HQN, she writes emotionally and romantically intense suspense stories. Visit her online at www.LindsayMcKenna.com.

The SEAL team below, where Marine Corps Sergeant Khatereh Shinwari hid in her sniper hide, was in danger. The June sun was almost setting in the Hindu Kush mountains of Afghanistan. Khat made a slow, sweeping turn to the right with her .300 Win Mag rifle along the rocky scree slope. She spotted fifteen Taliban waiting behind boulders to jump the four-man SEAL team climbing up the nine-thousand-foot slope.

Lips thinning, Khat watched the inevitable. She knew the team was looking for Sattar Khogani, the Hill tribe chieftain who was wreaking hell on earth to the Shinwari tribe. Her tribe. Her blood.

Pulling the satellite phone toward her, she punched in some numbers, waiting for her SEAL handler, Commander Jim Hutton, from J-bad, Jalalabad, to answer.

"Dover Actual."

"Archangel Actual." Khat spoke quietly, apprising Hutton of the escalating situation. She shot the GPS, giving the coordinates of where the SEALs were located and where the Taliban waited to ambush them. She asked if Apache helos were available.

No.

An A-10 Warthog slumming in the area?

No.

A C-130 ghost ship?

No.

A damned B-52 on racetrack?

No. All flight assets were tied up with a major engagement to the east, near J-bad.

"What the hell *can* you give me, Dover?"

Khat was only a Marine Corps staff sergeant, and her handler, a navy commander, but she didn't give a damn at this point. Four good men were going to die on that scree slope really soon.

"No joy," Hutton ground back.

"You're going to lose four SEALs," she snapped back in a whisper, watching through her Nightforce scope. "Do you want another Operation Redwings?"

She knew that would sting him. Four brave SEALs had walked into a Taliban trap of two hundred. They were completely outmatched and without any type of support because their radio failed, and they couldn't call for backup help.

It had been one of the major reasons she'd gotten into her black ops activity and become involved. Khat didn't want any more fine men murdered because a drone wasn't available, or a satellite, or a friggin' Apache combat helicopter.

More men had died that night when a hastily assembled QRF, Quick Reaction Force, was finally strung together out of J-bad. The MH-47 Chinook had taken an RPG, rocket-propelled grenade, into it, and it had crashed, killing all sixteen on board. More lives were wasted. She had cried for days after it happened, unable to imagine the tragedy inflicted upon the families involved. None of their husbands, brothers or fathers were coming home.

It can't happen again. She wouldn't allow it. Khat knew without a sat phone, radio calls into this area were DOA, dead on arrival. The radio call would never be heard. She wasn't sure the leader of the patrol had one on him.

"There are no assets available."

"You said this team is out of Camp Bravo?"

"Affirmative. I'm initiating a QRF from Bagram. But it will take an hour for them to arrive on scene."

"What about a QRF from Camp Bravo?" Khat wanted to scream at this guy to get off his ass and get involved. Sometimes she wondered why they'd given her Hutton. He was a very conservative black ops handler. She wished she still had Commander Timothy Skelling, but he'd just rotated Stateside. Hutton reminded her of a slug; as if he didn't know what to do quickly, when pressed.

"I'm calling them, too. They can be on scene, providing they aren't already engaged elsewhere, in thirty minutes."

"Roger," she said, her voice hardening. "Get a call patched through to that platoon and warn them." *Like fucking yesterday.* She felt her rage rising. It always did in situations like this. She didn't want to lose Americans.

"I've sent a call over to Chief Mac McCutcheon of Delta Platoon."

"I'm waiting five minutes," Khat growled. "If I don't see that team stop and hunker down for an incoming call from Bravo, I'm engaging. The least I can do is warn off the SEALs, and they'll take appropriate action."

Shifting her scope, she saw more of Khogani's men sneaking up on the other side of the ridge. There had to be twenty of the enemy in all. Smaller boys with the Taliban group held the reins of the horses far below the slope. Sweat ran down her temples, the heat at this time of day unbearable.

"Archangel, you are *not* authorized to engage. Repeat. Do not engage. Your duty is to observe only.

Over."

She cursed Hutton in her mind. "Roger, Dover Actual. Out." She hated Hutton's heavy, snarling voice. All they did was spar with one another. *To hell with him.*

Khat wasn't about to take on thirty or so Taliban with one sniper rifle. But she could fire some shots before the muzzle fire from her rifle was seen by the Taliban. They would be fourteen-hundred-yard shots, and she set up to take out at least two or three of the hidden tangos. A .300 Win Mag didn't have a muzzle suppressor. Khat knew she could become instant toast when the sharp-eyed enemy spotted her location.

In the back of her mind as she checked elevation and windage, she knew Hutton would get a QRF up and pronto, if one was available. A quick reaction force would be needed because she knew Khogani's men would attack these four SEALs. Camp Bravo, a forward operating base, sat about thirty miles from the Af-Pak border, near where she was presently operating.

She knew SEALs carried the fight to the enemy, but sometimes it was wiser to back off and wait another day. Frustration thrummed through Khat.

Settling the rifle butt deeply into her right shoulder, her cheek pressed hard against the fiberglass stock, she placed one of the Taliban in the crosshairs. They were in a rocky stronghold waiting to spring the trap on the unsuspecting SEALs. Khat wished she could contact the team directly. She didn't have their radio code because it changed daily. And that's what she'd have to have in order to call that lead SEAL and warn him of the impending ambush.

The SEAL patrol members were all carrying heavily packed rucks and wearing Kevlar vests and helmets, which meant they were going to engage in a direct-action mission. Usually, she saw some patrols with SEALs wearing black baseball caps, or field hats, their radio mics near their mouths and carrying light kits, making swift progress toward some objective in the night.

Not this patrol. These guys were armed to the teeth. The lead SEAL's H-gear, a harness that held fifteen pockets worn around the man's chest and waist, held a maximum load of mags, magazines, of M-4 rifle ammo where he could easily reach it. These guys knew they were going into a firefight. But in broad daylight? Who authorized that kind of crazy mission? SEALs worked in the dark of night to avoid being seen by the enemy. It was rare they would be out on a daylight mission. What a FUBAR. Whoever put this op together was crazy.

Taking a deep breath, prone on her belly, she was glad she had on a Kevlar vest so she wouldn't have small stones biting deeply into the front of her chest. She had a 24X magnification on her Nightforce scope and could clearly see in the late-afternoon sunlight the man she'd chosen to kill. Glancing at her watch, she had two minutes before those five minutes were up. Hutton had better damn well have gotten his SEAL ass in gear.

The sun's slant was changing. Khat patiently watched her target. Every once in a while, she'd twist her head, glancing toward the SEALs slowly making their way up the steep slope. They blended in, but the Taliban had sharp eyes like her.

Two minutes.

Nothing from Hutton.

Nostrils flaring, Khat settled the scope on the nearest man holding an RPG casually over his shoulder. There were seven tangos in total who had RPGs. That was more than enough to kill these four SEALs. And they were a hundred feet of being in range of them. Slowing her breathing, she sighted, her finger brushing the two-pound trigger. Exhaling, she allowed her lungs to empty naturally. There was a one-second beat between inhale and exhale. The snipers referred to it as the still-point. And that is when she took the shot.

The booming sound of the .300 blasted through the silence. The jerk of the rifle rippled through her entire body. Khat instantly shot again. And a third time. She released the spent mag and slapped in another with the butt of her palm. All the Taliban targets went down. Jerking her rifle around, scope on the SEALs, she saw

them instantly flatten out against the rocks. They were looking in *her* direction! *Damn it!*

She didn't have to wait long. RPGs launched, even if out of range, toward the SEALs. Khat swung the scope toward the Taliban. A number of them were angrily pointing her way. Yeah, they had her location. But she was fourteen hundred yards out of range, and those SEALs were four hundred yards from the enemy. Were they going to send tangos after her or not? Her heart started a slow beat as she scoped the enemy.

There was confusion among their ranks. They were yelling at each other.

And then her blood iced. There was Sattar Kho-gani, the young punk of twenty-four years who'd just taken over his father's leadership as chief of the Hill Tribe. His father, Mustafa, had recently been killed by a SEAL sniper. She'd celebrated. Sattar was in the center of his commanders, too short to take a shot at.

There were a lot of arms and hands waving, and she could see his lieutenants yelling and pointing at the SEALs and some pointing in her direction. Who to go after? She was counting on that confusion among the enemy.

Smiling grimly, Khat settled down again, muzzle and sights on the Taliban. She heard the throaty answer of the SEALs M-4 rifles as they engaged, firing off careful shots at the Taliban hidden behind the walled, rocky fort.

Not waiting, she began to fire into the crowd of Taliban officers, picking them off. Her shoulder felt bruised after firing nine rounds, the buck of the Win Mag terrific. Below her, her hearing keyed on the SEALs, they continued to return fire, spread out in a diamond formation on the scree to protect their flanks.

The Taliban suddenly surged out of the fort, waving their AK-47s, firing wildly at the SEALs. The RPGs were launched.

Khat swung her rifle, sighting on the closest man, taking him out before he could lob an RPG into the SEAL team. Damn! There were too many for her to stop! Cursing softly, she heard the RPGs explode. The pressure waves reached her, but she was spared, hunkered down a hair beneath the ridgeline.

Khat couldn't look to see how the SEALs were doing. She was taking out the enemy systematically, one at a time. There were more than thirty of the enemy and it seemed more and more arrived, and they started realizing they were caught in a deadly crossfire.

Khat pulled out two more mags of three bullets each. She released the spent mag and slapped in the full mag, settling in, swiftly looking through her sites. She saw one man shoulder the RPG. She shot before he did. Sweat was rolling down her face, burning into her eyes, making her blink, her vision blurring momentarily. With a hiss, she remained focused, continuing to pick them off.

The Taliban grudgingly retreated.

Khat waited, taking a deep breath, watching them through the scope. Lifting her head, she checked down the slope at the SEALs. They were quickly retreating in diamond formation. Smart guys. *Get the hell outta Dodge because you are way outnumbered, guys...*

Wiping her face with the back of her cammie sleeve, she quickly focused on the stone fort. More hand waving and shouting among the Taliban officers. The group had just lost half its men. More fists waved

angrily in the air.

Sattar was still surrounded, and she couldn't draw a bead on him. *Damn*. She'd really like to take out the little bastard. Partial payment for what his sick monster father had done to so many innocent young boys and girls over his one-year reign as chief. He'd turned into a sex slave trader, and had so many young Afghan children kidnapped and sold across the border in Pakistan. She hated Mustafa, and she was sure his son was going to pick up where his sick sexual-predator father left off.

Mike Tarik ordered his men to retreat. He'd made calls to Camp Bravo, finding out the QRF was out on another run in the opposite direction from where they were located. There were no flight assets available. Worse, no drone or satellite was available over their area to understand the field of battle.

They were essentially blind in the fog of war, and engaging a much larger force than was anticipated. And they were caught out in the open on the scree with no place to hide.

Breathing hard, he kept watch over the other three men that he had responsibility for. Their comms man, Ernie, couldn't raise shit in this dead zone. The sat phone he had in his ruck had taken a bullet earlier. They were in a bad situation. The only thing they could do with the sun setting was retreat and then melt into the landscape of darkness and wait for pickup sometime later. They *had* to get off this scree ASAP.

Tarik heard a scream. Then more screams. He was playing rear guard to his men, higher on the slope than they were. Lifting his M-4, he saw at least fifteen Taliban charging them. Fuck!

He moved backward, slipped and fell among the rocks. Rolling, he managed to hang on to his rifle that was clipped to a harness across his shoulder and chest. He stopped his slide at the edge of the ridge, a hundred-foot drop into a wadi, or ravine, below.

Sighting, he began to slow fire, choosing his targets, remaining crouched. Again, he heard the booming sound of a Win Mag far above him. Who the hell was that? He wasn't aware of any SEAL sniper assets in the area. Who, then? Whoever was firing was helping his team out a helluva lot. The sniper was giving them a chance to retreat.

Tarik heard the dreaded hollow *thunk* of an RPG being fired. He jerked a look up and saw the damn thing sailing lazily through the air—right at him. Cursing, he dived to the ground, the rocks biting and bruising him. He automatically put his hands behind his head, buried his face in the rocks, opened his mouth and waited. If he didn't open his mouth, the blast pressure waves would make Jell-O out of his lungs, the air in his chest not equalizing with the air surrounding him.

The blast went off. The last thing he remembered was flying through the air.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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Book is to be different for each grade. Book for children until adult are different content. To be sure that book is very important usually. The book Taking Fire seemed to be making you to know about other expertise and of course you can take more information. It is quite advantages for you. The reserve Taking Fire is not only giving you much more new information but also to become your friend when you feel bored.

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In this 21st hundred years, people become competitive in each and every way. By being competitive today, people have do something to make these individuals survives, being in the middle of typically the crowded place and notice by means of surrounding. One thing that occasionally many people have underestimated this for a while is reading. Yes, by reading a e-book your ability to survive raise then having chance to remain than other is high. In your case who want to start reading some sort of book, we give you this specific Taking Fire book as beginner and daily reading publication. Why, because this book is more than just a book.

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Donna Valdez:

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