



YOU CAN'T KEEP A GOOD MAN DOWN

Journalist Chuck de Caro survives shoot-out, continues waging **SOFTWAR** against America's enemies.

By Marietta Holmes

Chuck de Caro chases adventure. In his career as a journalist, he has reported live from inside the eye of a hurricane, snuck into a war zone during the U.S.-led invasion of Grenada, and logged zero-gravity training rides alongside NASA astronauts.

Rather remarkable is his list of firsts: In 1983, de Caro joined budding Cable News Network (CNN) as its first special assignments correspondent. As founder of AEROBUREAU Corporation, he and his team converted a Lockheed Electra into the world's first in-flight news center. At age 39, he became the first non-government civilian to graduate from the U.S. Army's Air Assault School, and he also holds the title of first American civilian graduate of the Royal Navy's Water Survival School.

Building on his Civil Air Patrol experience as a teenager, de Caro's military training began at Marion Military Institute (MMI) in 1968-69. As a member of the Swamp Fox elite, the young cadet learned how much he could take—being hungry, cold and wet—as well as the fine art of throwing hand grenades from a SGM with three combat infantryman's badges. Successfully transferring to the Air Force Academy, a medical discharge halfway through college would end his officer aspirations. Already parachute and High Altitude Low Opening (HALO) qualified, de Caro decided he would like to "jump out of planes at night" and served with the Army National Guard's 20th Special Forces Group.

He later transitioned into journalism, starting in print in

his native Rhode Island and moving to independent news stations. As a reporter, his military background opened up adrenaline-filled assignments—flying in Hawker Hunter jets with the Royal Navy, parachuting with U.S. Army Rangers and U.S. Air Force Combat Control Teams, producing documentaries on U.S. weapons systems, and covering guerilla warfare from remote areas of Nicaragua and Suriname.

For a man who intentionally inserts himself into dangerous territory, de Caro found himself in a life-or-death situation on the night of June 30, 2015. While traveling with his wife, former CNN anchor Lynne Russell, he emerged from the shower in their Albuquerque motel room to find her being held at gunpoint. Acting quickly, Lynne slipped a handgun to her husband in a purse when the robber demanded valuables. A firefight ensued, and de Caro shot and killed the man while sustaining three gunshot wounds.

Subsequently, he spent five weeks in recovery at the University of New Mexico Hospital. Lynne stayed at his bedside. Prior to his discharge, de Caro held a local news conference to publicly thank the first responders who rushed to his aid to stabilize him, saving his life.

During our December 2015 phone interview, six months after the shooting, de Caro was still on a long road to rehabilitation, after surviving serious complications—both a pseudoaneurysm and kidney failure. He was walking with a cane, taking blood-thinners for a large blood clot in his leg and on doctor's orders to take it easy for the

next year. Not one to dwell on his medical maladies, he was in good spirits on his way to attend a Washington, D.C., writer's event that evening with Lynne.

Living inside the Beltway in McLean, Va., de Caro has built up a reputation as a military strategist in our nation's capital. For 25 years, he served as an outside consultant to Andrew Marshall, longtime director of the Department of Defense's Office of Net Assessment—the Pentagon's internal think tank. Over the past decade, as president of Sea Aerospace Ground Evaluations (SAGE) Inc., an educational non-profit, de Caro has been providing research to the U.S. government and its designated allies. Dialed into global security, SAGE analyzes future threats, not firepower: "It's not tactical at all. It's very long term, lingering between strategy and grand strategy," he summarizes.

In July 2013 he added another personal first to his list: organizing the novel 1st Joint SOFTWAR Unit (Virtual), based in Los Alamitos, Calif., under a contract with the Department of Defense. As progenitor of the concept, de Caro defines SOFTWAR as "The hostile use of global visual media to shape another society's will by changing its view of reality."

Comprised entirely of California Air and Army National Guard members, this prototype unit assembles a cross-section of young minds working in digital-based industries such as film, marketing, and computer software. "My soldiers are perfectly military, perfectly disciplined, but I've asked them to bring knowledge from their civilian jobs," says de Caro. "With their skills, we can do amazing things."

Operating in the realm of information warfare, the SOFTWAR unit excels at cinematic analysis (CINAN) in near-real time. Its personnel are trained to look at enemy propaganda and quickly derive information your average viewer can't see. For example, de Caro explains the unit's CINAN of the ISIS-produced beheading video of American journalist Jim Foley from August 2014: "All you saw was a guy in black and a guy in orange. We saw nine people." Gleaning clues from the footage, his team observes lavalier mics on both Foley and the terrorist. Eye movements suggest that both are reading off a script, with someone off-camera directing the pace. Add up the necessary production team, and it involves a sound guy, camera man, cue card holder, and field director, plus a minimum of three men pulling security—hardly an amateur project.

Understanding how terrorist organizations effectively use their most powerful weapon—video propaganda—in recruiting radicals, is of the utmost importance to de Caro and his team. In his opinion, to facilitate the war on terror, the U.S. military needs information-age minds to dismantle the terrorists' marketing system. That's why the collective skill set of SOFTWAR's citizen soldiers is invaluable; they provide a unique kind of expertise a combatant commander does not otherwise have available.

That mission was important enough for de Caro to maintain SOFTWAR operations from his Albuquerque hospital bed in July 2015, just weeks after the shooting. At the time, he told NBC News he was "looking forward to a full recovery and getting back to the business of advancing the information warfare capabilities of our country." He and his unit proceeded to simulate an ISIS attack on American soil, envisioning four to five terrorists working in tandem—the scenario they predicted looked eerily like the November 2015 Paris attacks.

Get well, Chuck. We need you on our side.

