



# SMALL WARS JOURNAL

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## Into Thine Hand I Commit My Spirit

Michael Yon



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**Arghandab, Afghanistan  
New Year's Eve, 2009**

On this small base surrounded by a mixture of enemy and friendly territory, a memorial has been erected just next to the Chapel. Inside the tepee are 21 photos of 21 soldiers killed during the first months of a year-long tour of duty. The fallen will belong forever to the honor rolls of the 1-17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, and they will join the sacred list of names of those who have given their lives in service of the United States of America.



The symbol of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division is the Indian Head. At night, soldiers of the “Indian Head Division” can be seen passing by the tepee, sometimes stopping to peer inside before walking into the darkness.



Sometimes the soldiers walk by carrying lights that are red or green, or sometimes white. Tonight, Cobra Battery was firing illumination rounds from the cannons, which boom from the darkness, arcing a round into the night, where miles away a canister unsheathes, and the parachute opens, and brightness floats silently, shimmering over the valley where these soldiers died.



The firing is not done in remembrance, but to support ongoing combat operations.



Inside the tepee are the 21 photos, and a Bible. The book is opened to Psalm 31.



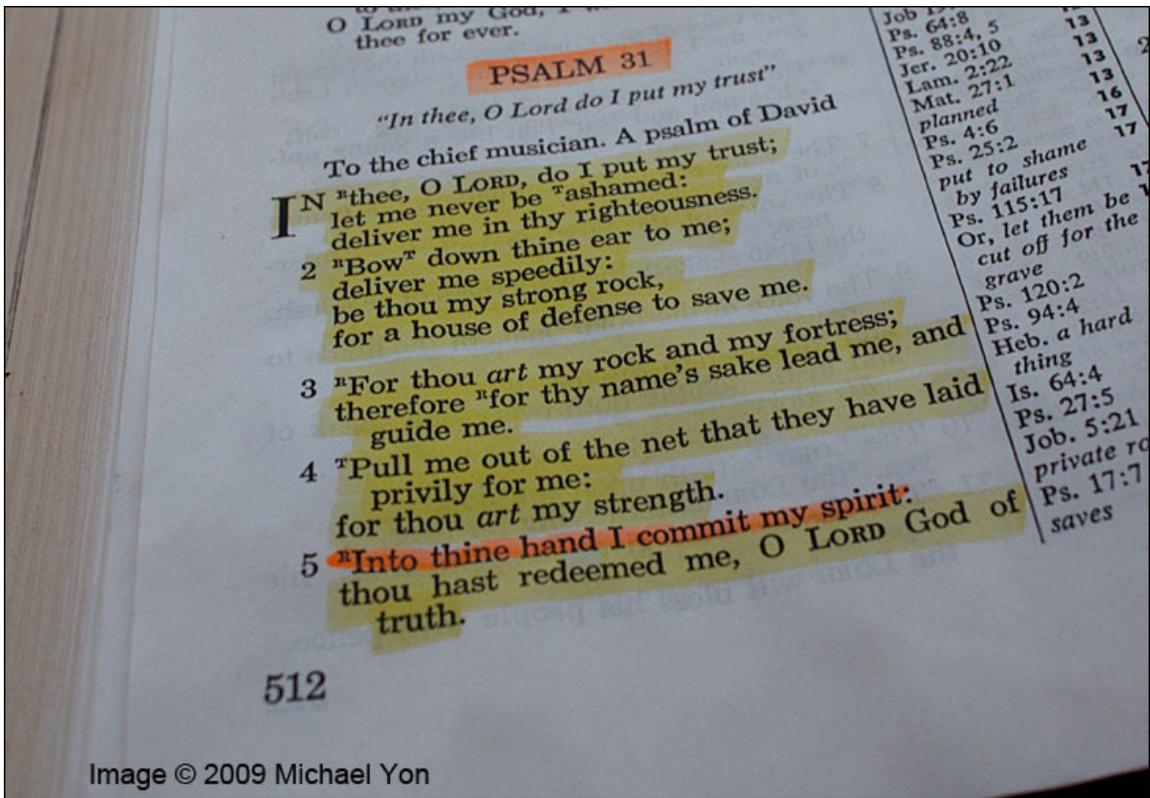
In front of each photo, electric candles flicker through the night.



Mostly there is silence.



Soldiers put cigarettes in front of each photo, though they say that many of the fallen did not smoke.



...for thou art my strength.



Only during such times are strong men and women of greatest importance. At all other times we have Hollywood.

Today we need soldiers who never forget their brothers, while they carry forward with devotion and strength.

*Michael Yon is a former Green Beret who has been reporting from Iraq and Afghanistan since December 2004. No other reporter has spent as much time with combat troops in these two wars. Michael's dispatches from the frontlines have earned him the reputation as the premier independent combat journalist of his generation.*

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