Americans Want A Chance To Talk To SEALs

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Patrons in bars across the country are raising toasts in the air, hoping the gesture of gratitude would somehow reach the clandestine Navy SEAL team that took down Osama bin Laden. Millions others are turning to social networks with their thoughts.

For many of them, it feels frustratingly incomplete to be deprived the chance to see the faces of those they consider heroes for killing the world's most-wanted terrorist.

Scores of people responded to the question posed by The Associated Press on its Facebook page: "What would you tell the Navy SEAL team that killed Osama bin Laden if you could convey a message?"

"I don't know what is more impressive — that you did this with such excellence and secrecy, or that this was just another day at the office," Pamela Jardieu-Aderman responded. "Thank you to all of the SEALS for a lifetime of sharp swords and full hearts... you guys make America extremely proud, even though we never get to tell you to your faces."

The 40-year-old freelance grant writer and photographer from Utica, N.Y., said in a follow-up e-mail to the AP that she is glad the SEALs' identities are not being revealed to protect them, but she wishes there was some way the nation could show its gratitude on a large-scale. She suggested a tribute in the form of a White House electronic bulletin board for messages, or a national day of volunteerism, or a ceremony for the SEALs.

Leader Of Geronimo's Tribe Seeks Apology

WASHINGTON (AP) — The leader of Apache warrior Geronimo's tribe is asking President Barack Obama for a formal apology for the government's use of the revered figure's moniker as a code name for Osama bin Laden.

Fort Sill Apache Tribal Chairman Jeff Houser sent a letter to the president Tuesday, saying equating the legendary Apache warrior to a "mass murderer and cowardly terrorist" was painful and offensive to all Native Americans.

The letter was posted Wednesday morning on the Oklahoma tribe's website.

"Right now Native American children all over this country are facing the reality of having one of their most revered figures being connected to a terrorist and murderer of thousands of innocent Americans," Houser wrote. "Think about how they feel at this point."

Houser noted Obama was elected on a message of compassion and change. Forever linking the memory of Geronimo to "one of the most despicable enemies this country has ever had" shows neither compassion to Native Americans nor change in perception of Indians or their struggle, he said.

Anxiety Rises With Water On The Mississippi

HICKMAN, Ky. (AP) — People along the lower Mississippi River and its tributaries packed up their belongings and emergency workers feverishly filled sandbags as high water pushed its way downstream Wednesday in a slow-motion disaster that could break flood records dating to the Depression.

From Illinois to Mississippi, thousands of people have already been forced from their homes, and anxiety is rising along with the mighty river, even though it could be a week or two before some of the most severe flooding hits.

"I've never seen it this bad," said 78-year-old Joe Harrison, who has lived in the same house in Hickman since he was 11 months old.

Floodwaters from the Mississippi turned his house into an island — dry but surrounded by water. He has been using a boat to get to his car, parked on dry ground along a highway that runs by his house.

Up and down the Big Muddy, farmers braced for a repeat of the desperate strategy employed earlier this week in Missouri, where Army engineers blew up a levee and sacrificed vast stretches of farmland to protect populated areas upstream.

Afghan Taliban Likely To Rethink Al-Qaida Ties

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Osama bin Laden's death is likely to revive a debate within the Afghan Taliban about their ties to al-Qaida — a union the U.S. insists must end if the insurgents want to talk peace.

The foundation of their relationship is believed to be rooted in bin Laden's long friendship with the Taliban's reclusive one-eyed leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, who might now find it more palatable to break with al-Qaida and negotiate a settlement to the war. Much may depend on the newly chastened power-broker next door: Pakistan.

"I think now is an opportunity for the Taliban to end their relations with al-Qaida," said Waheed Muzhda, a Kabul-based analyst and former foreign ministry official under the Taliban regime that was toppled in late 2001.

Zabiullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the Afghan Taliban, said it was too early to comment.

But the death of the world's top terrorist gives momentum toward finding a political solution to the nearly decade-long war, according to analysts familiar with U.S. officials' stepped-up effort this year to push a peace agenda.

US Appeals Asked To Strike Down Health Care

ATLANTA (AP) — More than two dozen states challenging the health care overhaul urged a U.S. appeals court on Wednesday to strike down the Obama administration's landmark law, arguing it far exceeds the federal government's powers.

The motion, filed on behalf of 26 states, urges the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta to uphold a Florida federal judge's ruling that the overhaul's core requirement is unconstitutional. The judge, U.S. District Judge Roger Vinson, said Congress cannot require nearly all Americans to carry health insurance.

Allowing the law to go forward, the states argued in the 69-page filing, would set a troubling precedent that "would imperil individual liberty, render Congress's other enumerated powers superfluous, and allow Congress to usurp the general police power reserved to the states."

So far, three federal judges, all Democratic appointees, have upheld the law. Vinson and the Virginia judge, both Republicans appointees, ruled against it. It seems certain that the broad health care challenge will be resolved only by the nation's top court, and Vinson suggested in a March ruling that the "Supreme Court may eventually be split on this issue as well."

The filing comes about a month after the Justice Department formally appealed Vinson's ruling, arguing that Congress had the power to require most people to buy health insurance or face tax penalties because Congress has the authority to regulate interstate business.

Nurse Gets Jail Time In Suicide Encouragement

FARIBAULT, Minn. (AP) — A former nurse who helped persuade two people he met online to kill themselves was sentenced Wednesday to nearly a year in jail, a punishment tailored to force him to return to jail each year for a decade to spend the anniversaries of his victims' deaths behind bars.

William Melchert-Dinkel was convicted of two counts of aiding suicide under a rarely used Minnesota law. Prosecutors said he posed online as a suicidal nurse and encouraged a Canadian woman and a British man to commit suicide.

Judge Thomas Neuville's sentence was less than the maximum 15 years Melchert-Dinkel could have gotten for each count. Neuville officially sentenced Melchert-Dinkel to six-and-a-half years in prison — but stayed execution of that sentence, meaning Melchert-Dinkel will go to prison only if he violates terms of his probation, which includes the jail time. He'll be on probation for 15 years.

Neuville compared Melchert-Dinkel's conduct to stalking, describing it as calculated, intentional, and fraudulent. But he also said that while Melchert-Dinkel's conduct was directly related to the deaths, he wasn't the sole reason the victims took their lives.

Melchert-Dinkel declined a jury trial, leaving Neuville to decide whether he was guilty. He was convicted in the death of 32-year-old Mark Drybrough, of Coventry, England, who hanged himself in 2005; and 18-year-old Nadia Kajouji, of Brampton, Ontario, who jumped into a frozen river in 2008.

Why The US Had The Hideout Wrong

BY MATT APUZZO AND ADAM GOLDMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The dramatic raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in a Pakistani suburb this week capped a decade-long manhunt, but it also revealed just how wrong the U.S. had been about where the world's most wanted terrorist was hiding.

Time and again, the nation's top national security officials told each other and the world that their best intelligence suggested that bin Laden was living along the mountainous, ungoverned border of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In reality, bin Laden was living comfortably in the bustling town of Abbottabad, known for its good schools and relative affluence. He was living in a walled compound in a military town, hundreds of miles from the mountainous, lawless tribal regions. There were no heavily armed security guards, as some intelligence officials assumed there would be. Thanks to a satellite dish, which officials believe was for television reception only, bin Laden would have been able watch American security forces chase him around the wrong part of the country.

America's belief that bin Laden was hiding on the Pakistani frontier was based on two assumptions, former intelligence officials said. The first was that bin Laden would stay close to his devotees for protection, and al-Qaida has thrived in the tribal areas of North and South Waziristan. The second was that if bin Laden had ventured into more civilized areas, his presence would be noticeable, first by locals and then by Pakistani and U.S. intelligence services.

But bin Laden realized that there are two primary ways the U.S. catches terrorists: from electronic surveillance and spies. And for years, he managed to distance himself from both.

He kept phone and Internet lines out of his house. Rather than employ legions of armed guards whose patrols could be noticed by satellites, he surrounded himself with high walls and only his most trusted aides. The U.S. could interrogate his foot soldiers and managers all it wanted. He'd still be safe.

Soon, the idea of bin Laden hiding in a cave become part of his mythology. And with so little intelligence coming in, the CIA's best analysts continued to say bin Laden was probably in the tribal regions. Occasionally there were indications to the contrary, but they were never anything solid.

In 2007, for instance, when bin Laden issued a video, some in the CIA's Counterterrorism Center believed his face did not show the strain of someone who had endured years of airstrikes, moving furtively across rough terrain, former senior intelligence officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss secret intelligence.

In hindsight, they were right. By then, bin Laden had likely been living in Abbottabad for roughly two years, with easy access to groceries and medicine.

But at the time, that hunch didn't prove anything. Bin Laden would be well fed, protected and cared for, even along the hostile border with Afghanistan, the analysts concluded. With no reliable informants and no electronic surveillance, there was simply not enough to change the prevailing wisdom. Some in the Counterterrorism Center believed bin Laden was hiding in Dir, a far-flung town on Pakistan's northern border.

Goss said he was always confident that bin Laden was in northern Pakistan but never had any indication he was in a densely populated area so far to the east.

While the CIA was wrong about the location of bin Laden's hideout, it was absolutely right about how the U.S. would someday get the terrorist mastermind. CIA officers believed for years that bin Laden's vulnerability was his reliance on couriers. In fact, sometime in 2006 or 2007, the agency all but stopped chasing reported bin Laden sightings, which had always been dead ends, and made the couriers the primary focus of their hunt, a former senior intelligence official said.

It was around that time that the CIA had learned the true identity of a trusted courier known by the nom de guerre Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti. Piecing together intelligence gathered from captured terrorists over the course of several years, the agency was confident that if it found al-Kuwaiti, it could be the best shot at finding bin Laden.

Finally, in the middle of last year, al-Kuwaiti was caught on a wiretap. He was far from bin Laden's compound, but it was enough to put the CIA on his tail. Last fall, he unwittingly led the agency to bin Laden's doorstep.

When President Barack Obama announced bin Laden's death, former officials said the years of fruitless searches were wiped away.

Goss said he got a courtesy call on Sunday, cryptically telling him to watch the news that night. He said it was clear what was about to be announced.

"My feeling was it was certainly worth the wait," he said.

What has happened to al-Qaida's leaders

The status of some senior leaders of al-Qaida and affiliated groups since Sept. 11, 2001:

Link to terror attacks
▲ Sept. 11 ▼ USS Cole □ U.S. embassies, East Africa ① Other

At large / LEADER	ROLE	STATUS	▲	▼	□	①
Ayman al-Zawahiri	Second in command	*Believed to be in hiding near Afghan-Pakistan border*	▲	▼	□	
Saif al-Adil	Security chief	*Reported to be in Iran*				
Sulaiman abu Ghaith	Al-Qaida spokesman	*Reported to be in Iran*				
Shaikh Saiid al-Masri	Al-Qaida financier	*Unknown*				
Killed		**How they were killed**				
Osama bin Laden	Al-Qaida founder, leader	By U.S. Navy SEALs in raid at Abbottabad. Pakistan, May, 2011	▲	▼	□	
Abu Musab al-Zarqawi	Connected to 2004 Madrid train bombings	By U.S. airstrike north of Baghdad, June 2006				①
Saad bin Laden	Osama bin Laden's son, once seen as possible successor	Believed to have been killed by U.S. drone strike in Pakistan, 2009				
Mastafa al-Yazid	Ran training camps	By U.S. drone strike in Pakistan, May 2010				
Mohammed Atef	Military commander	By U.S. airstrikes in Afghanistan, Nov. 2001			□	
Qaed Salim Sinan Al-Harethi	Yemen operations chief; tied to USS Cole attack	By U.S. airstrikes in Yemen, 2002		▼		
Abdulaziz Issa Abdul-Mohsin al Moqrin	Al-Qaida leader in Arabian peninsula	In shootout with Saudi forces, June 2004				②
Captured		**Where they were captured**				
Kahlid Shaikh Mohammed (KSM)	Coordinator, Sept. 11 plots	Pakistan, March 2003	▲	▼		③
Ramzi Binalshibh	Sept. 11 plotter, aide to KSM	Pakistan, Sept. 2002	▲			
Abu Zubaydah	Operations chief	Pakistan, March 2002				④
Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani	Key figure in 1998 Africa embassy bombings	Pakistan, July 2004			□	
Tawfiq Attash Khallad	Suspected chief of Cole bombing	Pakistan, May 2003	▲	▼		
Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri	Persian Gulf operations chief	Yemen, 2002		▼	□	
Mohammed Naeem Noor Khan	Ran global communication links	Pakistan, July 2004				
Ibn al-Shaykh al Libi	Training camp commander	Pakistan, 2001				
Abu Eisa al-Hindi	Suspected of casing U.S. financial targets	Britain, Aug. 2004				
Mohammed Haydar Zammar	Part of Sept. 11 plotters' Hamburg cell	Morroco, 2002	▲			
Hassan Ghul	Aide to KSM	Iraq, Jan. 2004				⑤
Riduan Isamuddin ("Hambali")	Part of Jemaah Islamiah group, Indonesia	Thailand, Aug. 2003				⑥

1. Believed to be responsible for 2002 assassination of U.S. diplomat Lawrence Foly, 2003 U.N. Baghdad headquarters bombing, 2004 murder of U.S. citizen Nicholas Berg

2. Suspected of involvement in bombings of foreigners' compounds in Saudi Arabia, May 2003; execution-style murder of U.S. citizen Paul Johnson in 2004

3. Indicted for role in 1996 Philippines-based plot to blow up airliners over Pacific Ocean; suspected in other attacks

4. Suspected involvement in numerous terrorist acts, including attempted "millennium" attacks in U.S., Jordan

5. Suspected of plotting attacks on U.S. troops, other targets in Iraq

6. Alleged mastermind of bombings in Bali, Indonesia, in Oct. 2002 that killed 202 people

Sources: McClatchy Washington Bureau, FBI, U.S. State Dept.
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