Inside Able Danger – The Secret Birth, Extraordinary Life and Untimely Death of a U.S. Military Intelligence Program

By Jacob Goodwin

In a wide-ranging exclusive interview with GSN on August 23, Lt. Col. Anthony Shaffer, the military intelligence operative who collaborated with Rep. Curt Weldon (R-PA) to draw worldwide attention to the Able Danger intelligence unit, described Able Danger’s origins, explained how it tracked terrorists as they visited individual mosques around the world, discussed the CIA’s refusal to cooperate with the program, acknowledged the supporting technical role played by the Raytheon Company, and described Able Danger’s ultimate demise.

Shaffer said Able Danger was begun in 1999 at the request of General Hugh Shelton, then the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff and under the direct supervision of General Pete Schoomaker, then the commander of the Special Operations Command (SOCOM), based in Tampa, FL. Shaffer described how he was personally recruited to the newly-created unit by General Schoomaker.

After briefing the CIA’s representative stationed at SOCOM headquarters, and explaining that Able Danger would not be competing with the CIA’s own separate mission to find and kill Osama bin Laden, Shaffer was surprised by the CIA rep’s stern resistance to sharing any information, said Shaffer.

“T clearly understand the difference,” the CIA rep told him, according to Shaffer. “I clearly understand. We’re going after the leadership. You guys are going after the body. But, it doesn’t matter. The bottom line is, CIA will never give you the
Shaffer told GSN that one key to Able Danger’s success in identifying suspected terrorists was its willingness to buy information from brokers that identified visits by individuals to specific mosques located around the world. By crunching data about such visits during a six-month period, Able Danger’s data miners were able to spot illuminating patterns and identify potential relationships among alleged terrorists, Shaffer explained.

Much of this data crunching was facilitated by private contractors, including Raytheon Company, of Waltham, MA, and Orion Scientific (now part of SRA International, Inc., based in Fairfax, VA) which helped execute the sophisticated data mining software packages, said Shaffer. When queried by GSN, a Raytheon spokesperson would neither confirm nor deny the company’s involvement with Able Danger.

In a detailed recounting of a face-to-face confrontation with his then commanding officer, Major General Rod Isler, now retired, Shaffer described how the then deputy director of operations at the Defense Intelligence Agency essentially pulled the plug on his involvement with Able Danger. When contacted by GSN, General Isler said he did not recall ever having had such a conversation with Shaffer.

Shaffer also told GSN that the ultimate goal that he and his Able Danger colleagues are pursuing is the re-establishment of a similar data mining capability, in a newly-formed program the military is calling Able Providence. Such an effort would require less than $50 million to be launched, said Shaffer, and the military has enlisted the support of Rep. Curt Weldon (R-PA), who has taken a keen interest in the history of Able Danger.

GSN:
I’m down on a reserve tour as a reserve U.S. Army major, doing my active duty requirement for my annual training. During this training, I was asked to brief [General Pete] Schoomaker, the four-star commander of Special Operations Command on my full time job as a GS 14, regarding "Stratus Ivy," the special mission unit that I was running.

During this briefing -- I’d given a full mission rundown of what I was doing -- General Schoomaker stopped in the middle of the briefing and said, “I know about one of the programs you work,” and he named it to me. It’s still classified. I said, "Yeah, I work that,” and he says, “I need you on a special project that we’re working on.” He looked over at the Special Technical Operations Office Chief, who was in the briefing, and said, "Read him into Able Danger." So that was when I was first made aware that something was being done, and General Schoomaker turned to me and said, "I want you as part of the team doing this.”

GSN:
When was this?

SHAFFER:
September of ’99.

GSN:
The Able Danger program itself was ongoing already?

SHAFFER:
No, it was just being tasked. It was still being formulated.

They were just getting it together because apparently one of the issues they were negotiating with General [Hugh] Shelton [the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] was what the scope and parameters would be for this program. This was groundbreaking. This was an entrepreneurial concept. They were looking for partnerships based on what made the best sense, rather than what is normal in military doctrine. [General Shelton] wanted to have "out-of-the-box" thinkers. He
GSN:
Who came up with the idea originally to set up Able Danger?

SHAFFER:
I’d have to defer that question to either General Schoomaker or General Shelton. I honestly don’t know that answer, but I know that between the two of them, the tasking was to SOCOM, Special Operations Command, as the supported CinC [military short-hand for Commander in Chief of a unified command]. This was the first time ever that Special Operations Command was the supported CinC, which means that they were the prime CinC. They were the lead CinC to do something. This was the first time the Special Operations Command wasn’t supporting someone else.

GSN:
And what did you take to be the mission as it was defined that day?

SHAFFER:
Simply, to target Al Qaeda globally. All of Al Qaeda. It’s mission, functions and capabilities, so that on call -- one directed by national command leadership – the U.S. could do something to attack them. [To develop] an offensive capability so once we define what Al Qaeda is, we can find a way to stop them, to counter them overseas.

GSN:
Did you take that to be the first time that mission was defined and given to some unit or were there already intelligence operations that were trying to pull this Al Qaeda information together.

SHAFFER:
I was made aware of, at that point in time -- my lawyer always tells me to reference this for background – that there has already been information in the press regarding the fact that the CIA had a finding to kill Bin Laden. A finding to conduct an assassination of him. I was aware of that at the time.

So, one of the issues was we did not want to compete -- or be seen as competing -- with the CIA in what their mission was, or what they were already assigned to
represented [CIA Director] George Tenet there in the command. My task was to explain to the rep that we’re not competing with him and explain to him Able Danger.

**GSN:**

Isn’t there a difference between the CIA having the mission of killing Osama Bin Laden, and Able Danger having the mission of finding where the Al Qaeda terrorist cells are located? It would seem to be two very different missions.

**SHAFFER:**

Yes, two very different missions. Distinctly different by the fact that they were going after the “head” and we were going after the “body.” Because even if you get the head, the body is still going to be there. Our argument was that no matter if you get him [Osama bin Laden], great. But someone else is probably going to take his place. Therefore, if you’re focusing on the head, we’ll focus on the rest.

**GSN:**

What did the CIA representative say when you explained that Able Danger was not competing with him?

**SHAFFER:**

He told me, “I clearly understand the difference. I clearly understand. We’re going after the leadership. You guys are going after the body. But, it doesn’t matter. The bottomline is, CIA will never give you the best information from ‘Alex Base’ or anywhere else. CIA will never provide that to you because if you were successful in your effort to target Al Qaeda, you will steal our thunder. Therefore, we will not support this.” [Alex Base was the CIA’s covert action element which was conducting the Osama bin Laden finding.]

I believe he was being a friend. I believe he was sincerely telling me this because it was the truth. He said, short of General Schoomaker calling George Tenet directly, the best information would never be released. To my knowledge, and my other colleagues’ knowledge, there was no information ever released to us because CIA chose not to participate in Able Danger.

**GSN:**
What reaction did you bring back to your guys at Able Danger after that conversation?

**SHAFFER:**
I was frankly shocked, but I figured the best thing we could do as a country was to go after Al Qaeda, because it was a developing, looming threat. We’d already been attacked twice with the [U.S.] embassy bombings [in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998]. There was a record of Al Qaeda doing things. We were concerned and, again, the two principal generals, Schoomaker and Shelton, were concerned that this was a developing threat that we needed to look at.

**GSN:**
So, at the time Able Danger got started, at least the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Hugh Shelton, knows it was established because he supposedly was in on creating it.

**SHAFFER:**
Right, right, right, right.

**GSN:**
To your direct knowledge, did the civilian leadership -- whether it was Defense Secretary William Cohen, or the White House or the Justice Department or anyone else -- know about Able Danger being set up?

**SHAFFER:**
At the time, it was highly compartmented. The whole idea of going after Al Qaeda was controversial. A lot of folks at DoD that we approached really didn’t know if they wanted to participate fully or not. So the answer is, I don’t believe a lot of those [civilian leadership] folks knew about Able Danger because it was considered a compartmented -- not special access -- but a compartmented planning effort, where we tracked everybody who was knowledgeable. Because we wanted to protect the operational security of the fact that we were going to look at these [Al Qaeda] guys offensively.

**GSN:**
Even when a program is compartmented, wouldn’t the senior leadership on the civilian side know about it?

**SHAFFER:**
I cannot speak to that because I have no direct knowledge. I only know from my
to use the same Able Danger methodology to protect U.S. person issues.

I briefed [General Shelton] on that other operation in the spring 2001 timeframe, before 9/11. So, from my knowledge, I believe he remembered Able Danger at that point in time because of the reference to this other operation.

However, I don't know how far above him or laterally, he shared information regarding Able Danger. I don't know about the civilian leadership.

The highest level on the civilian side that I'm directly knowledgeable of was that the assistant secretary of defense for special operations and low intensity conflict was aware because I briefed him on this. [Editor’s Note: Brian E. Sheridan held that assistant secretary position at the time.]

He received a briefing from me [in 2000] on Stratus Ivy, my unit, and I gave him information on what we were doing for Able Danger. His comment to me was, "You need to get on those guys and push them harder." That was the way he told me to get on SOCOM to get them to push harder to get this going.

**GSN:**
This was before Able Danger had any success or had identified any results.

**SHAFFER:**
Absolutely, yes.

**GSN:**
Tell me about the nuts and bolts of the program.

**SHAFFER:**
Essentially, at the beginning of the program we didn’t know where to start. It had never been done before. To define a global target of this magnitude, which changes and adapts, was daunting. Therefore, the first stop was the Joint Warfare Analysis Center at Dahlgren [VA]. There was a conference there in the November / December timeframe of 1999, which went nowhere. Those guys did not understand the scope of trying to do neural-netting, human factor relationships and looking at linkages. They just didn’t have the capability at the time. Therefore, it was kind of a bust.
data mining analytical capability which I had used for other operations. So, I recommended to Captain [Scott] Philpott, "You need to go see [a person that has chosen to remain anonymous] down at LIWA and talk about what [that person] is doing." [Capt. Philpott] goes down and gets his brief and says, "This is it. This is exactly what we’re looking for," because they were not only using advanced data mining technology, they were also looking at data that no one else was looking at. [James] J.D Smith [a former contractor on Able Danger] talked about some of this in The New York Times [on August 22, 2005].

He talked about the fact that they were going to information brokers on the Internet who were getting information about the mosque system from overseas locations. Nobody else found that to be reliable. That’s why nobody was looking at it. The problem was that nobody was looking at it regarding the right type of vetting. J.D. Smith and company were using these advanced [software] tools to ferret out patterns within that information.

**GSN:**
You’re talking about lists of where mosques were located geographically.

**SHAFFER:**
No, individuals who were going between mosques. Who were they? Who were the contacts? Looking down to the individual level.

**GSN:**
Did they say, for example, "Here’s Abdul and he’s showing up at a mosque in Pakistan and, lo and behold, he’s showing up at another mosque in the Sudan a week later"?

**SHAFFER:**
Yes.

**GSN:**
How did they get down to the level of who’s walking in and out of a mosque?

**SHAFFER:**
Because apparently there are records of who goes where regarding visits to mosques. That was the data that LIWA was buying off the Internet from
forward publicly, but he has not publicly admitted that he was the guy using this type of information that made the link between [Mohammed] Atta and [Sheik Omar Abdel] Rahman, the first World Trade Center bomber. That’s how the link was established, through [Smith’s] research on the Internet.

**GSN:**

Hypothetically, what would you imagine Smith came up with that would have led him to that conclusion? Might he have said, for example, "Hey look at this. Based on this information we’re buying off the Internet, I’m seeing that for a three-week period, every time that Atta -- whoever he is -- shows up at a mosque, Rahman shows up at the same mosque, six times in a row." Is that what you’re driving at?

**SHAFFER:**

It was a six-month data run. Six months of looking at the data. Whatever he saw in the way of linkages. [Smith] explains it by saying there were eight data points that they pulled out of the identity of each of the bombers that conducted the first World Trade Center attack in ‘93. Those eight data points were used to look at relationships with these other [suspected terrorists] they were finding through these information runs. It was that data set which was bounced off constantly for six months through these patterns. Some of this was already ongoing, by the way, before SOCOM showed up to ask for LIWA’s support because LIWA had other classified projects that they were already working on. Some of those are still classified. But, that’s why this all came up so quickly after SOCOM showed up to ask LIWA the question. They were already in the middle of looking at some of these issues.

**GSN:**

I presume this was some of the work that was taking place using the Spire software?

**SHAFFER:**

Yes, Spire, Parentage, Starlight...

**GSN:**

I understand it is pretty interesting visualization software that basically takes these data points and runs them against hundreds of thousands of files, finds correlations and then depicts them visually.
that linkage to verify it or refute it, depending on other available information.

**GSN:**
Was there a moment when somebody said, “C’mon over and look at this,” and actually showed some sort of graph or chart or linkage, and said, “This makes me think that these two guys are connected.” Was there that kind of “Ah ha!” moment?

**SHAFFER:**
No. This was simply a chart showing up with potentialities or clusters of information. That’s what it showed. I took a copy of those clusters of information, a copy of a chart produced by Smith and company which showed, early on in the process, the Atta guy and other terrorists. It was this sheet that I hand-carried personally from LIWA down to Tampa and gave to Captain Philpott.

Now, did I know it was important? No. I’m an operator. I’m not an analyst. So, when I took it down from LIWA and gave it to Captain Philpott, he opened it up and said, “Oh my God, this is what we need. This is exactly what we need to do.”

So, even when [Capt. Philpott] saw it, he didn’t realize the importance of those names. It was just like, “This is the path. We are now on a path to be able to define the target.” The first step in any good operation is finding the target.

**GSN:**
That essentially means that he saw that the methodology could be used, and here was an example of the methodology showing some specific people that had a high probability of being related, or being connected, to each other...

**SHAFFER:**
...through Al Qaeda.

**GSN:**
Was he saying in effect “This is a great methodology,” or was he saying, “We got our bad guys”?

**SHAFFER:**
He was saying a little bit of both. Primarily, this is a great methodology. By the
This way, this chart was used to brief General Shelton and General Schoomaker. Again, nobody was focusing on the exact data points. They were recognizing it as a great methodology that we needed to pursue and use. So that was the primary focus.

**GSN:**
Tell me about the Able Danger intelligence unit itself. Are we talking about six guys sitting in a room crunching data?

**SHAFFER:**
We’re talking about the winter 2000 timeframe. At this time, it is only a partnership between LIWA (which isn’t even formalized yet), DIA (my unit, Stratus Ivy) and SOCOM (the Able Danger cell). What we were doing was working together and -- this is key -- we were doing this as an entrepreneurial, just out-of-the-box-thinking type of thing.

This is like GM, Ford and Isuzu getting together to do a project, and that was the whole idea. We weren't trying to go through the bureaucracy. We were keeping the bureaucracy kind of at bay, and focusing only on Al Qaeda and how we could define the target.

Now, I personally went up and briefed Colonel [James] Gibbons, the commander of LIWA on Able Danger and asked him to enter the partnership with us, based on General Schoomaker. So, Army, LIWA / Information Dominance Center (the IDC), became a partner. Stratus Ivy became a partner because I briefed my leadership. My immediate leadership was Colonel Jerry York, grandson of Sergeant York, and Major General Paul Barton, then the director of operations for DIA regarding human collection. So, I got their approval. Now you’ve got Colonel Gibbons with Army, and General Newman above him. You’ve got Colonel York over me and General [Bob] Harding above him. So, you’ve got pretty much all Army leadership there.

That’s key to the story. You’ve got SOCOM doing its thing down there [in Florida] and yet you had a room about this size, the room we’re in today, full of guys who are trying to crunch everything together. Captain Philpott and his team were trying to crunch us together. You had guys on loan from the intelligence side, you had guys on loan from the operations side. The bottomline was it was being done as a J3 operation; not an intelligence operation but a planning operation.

**GSN:**
J3 was operations; so it was not intelligence. It was intel guys supporting operations. And that was a big distinction -- either benefit or hazard -- as we developed this capability.

**GSN:**
At what stage does Able Danger begin to reach conclusions that are looking interesting?

**SHAFFER:**
When the information from LIWA arrived at Tampa, Scott Philpott and his team started looking at it critically, trying to figure out what this really meant; based on other classified databases and lawyer review. The lawyers started looking at the data as well for any legal issues regarding the fact that this information came from "open sources".

**GSN:**
Even before anyone at Able Danger made the decision to try to share its findings with other agencies or departments?

**SHAFFER:**
Absolutely.

**GSN:**
Even while the data is still being gathered and analyzed?

**SHAFFER:**
Absolutely, because there were so many critical issues regarding this, simply because it dealt with open sources. When an intelligence officer, like me, looks at the data, does that somehow magically turn it into "intelligence"? That was the critical issue. Somehow, there is this interpretation that even open source information could be construed as intelligence information because of its use. If Tony Shaffer, intelligence officer, takes data off the Internet and I use it for a project does that make it "intelligence" and subject it to all of the rules that govern the oversight of intelligence information?

**GSN:**
Which legal organization within SOCOM is raising
We’re talking about the lawyers. All lawyers in DoD report back to the DoD General Counsel. There’s no exception to that. Therefore, it doesn’t matter if the lawyer sits in SOCOM or Defense Intelligence, they all report back to the General Counsel.

**GSN:**
How big is the group of lawyers sitting in SOCOM?

**SHAFFER:**
I don’t know the exact size of the shop. I suspect it is probably between eight to a dozen folks, for the headquarters itself.

**GSN:**
Do you remember how the battle over this issue began?

**SHAFFER:**
Oh, I do, because from Day One, they were worried about, “Where are you getting this data from? What’s the source of the data? This is open source. How can it be this detailed?”

There were a lot of interrogatives the lawyers were asking regarding the sourcing of the information. I had no problem ever with oversight and answering the hard questions. The concern was, again, this was open source, but are we somehow violating some U.S. person’s rights by the fact we’re bringing in [the information] and using it for intelligence purposes?

**GSN:**
Was it one of the staff lawyers or was it the head of SOCOM’s legal department that was the principal mover and shaker of this?

**SHAFFER:**
I don’t know that answer, but the lawyer assigned to Able Danger was the person who explained this to us.

**GSN:**
Was the resistance that you were getting to the methodology -- we haven’t even
SHAFER:
By the organization. I'm confident because I started getting problems with this issue back in my headquarters in D.C., through the DIA lawyers. I know they were talking to each other and it became a big issue that all the lawyers in DoD were talking about. One of the investigators currently looking into this, when I talked to him this last week, confirmed to having the same problems even now. What open source collection really means, and what level of oversight is appropriate to protect U.S. persons’ rights, even when intelligence officers look at stuff off the open Internet. The debate remains now.

GSN:
Did this issue get to the DoD general counsel?

SHAFER:
Yes it did. I know for a fact that it did because I talked to the general counsel lawyer who was the oversight for this issue. I know for a fact that is was being looked at by the DoD general counsel.

GSN:
Did the General Counsel’s organization know about this matter?

SHAFER:
Based on direct knowledge, I know they were looking at -- and dealing with -- all these issues because a subsequent operation, the nickname of the operation was Dorhawk Galley, which happened in the spring of 2001, before 9/11, I had to talk to the general counsel about the same set of issues, because this had to do with the Internet and U.S. persons and open source information. I personally briefed George Tenet on this and I briefed the National Security Council twice.

GSN:
On the issue of open sourcing?

SHAFER:
On the legal set of issues regarding Dorhawk Galley, which were compatible to the issues we were facing for Able Danger.

GSN:
SHAFFER:
There are two concerns. First, the government has to be careful about what information it puts on the open Internet because, obviously, if they put something out there, U.S. people can see it. Therefore, it has to be above board.

Second issue, comparing that information to anything else out there regarding open source information. If you put information out [on the Internet], you have the reasonable belief, that it’s not going to be protected. That’s my judgment. If you put something on the Internet, such as a blog statement, it isn’t protected, it’s open. Does the government have the right to look at that and the use it against you if they so choose? That is one of the fundamental issues. Because although it’s not protected, and it’s out there, does the government have the right to do something with it?

What can you look at and not look at regarding U.S. citizens? That was one of the issues we were dealing with regarding these open Internet searches, which the lawyers were concerned about.

GSN:
What kind of records would be referred to as on the open Internet?

SHAFFER:
For example, corporate records. Say a company talks about its business activities overseas and lists them. If I take that information, as an intelligence officer, and say “Gee, I may want to look at this for some intelligence operation down the road.” I take it, print it off and put it in a file. Any file I keep as an intelligence officer is subject to oversight.

GSN:
Say, for example, hoovers.com, which presents all kinds of corporate financial information, lists every overseas office of every U.S. publicly-traded company. Now, you look at this and say “Hey, there are 37 companies that have an office in Lagos, Nigeria.”

SHAFFER:
Right. You’re spot on.
You're saying that someone on the legal side of the intelligence community might have said, “We don’t even have the right to do that. You can’t gather that information off the Internet, which is publicly out there, and use it in an intelligence manner.”

**SHAFER:**
You hit the nub of it, absolutely. That’s what they were concerned about.

**GSN:**
What was the Able Danger program’s response to that legal argument?

**SHAFER:**
Well, we aren’t doing intelligence collection operations, we’re doing operational planning. Therefore, whatever we’re doing should not fall under intelligence guidelines.

**GSN:**
That was sort of a stretch, wasn’t it? Here you have this ultra-secret and important intelligence mission which you claim is happening under operational planning, but wasn’t that somewhat bogus?

**SHAFER:**
No, it wasn’t bogus. It was the operational focus. The idea was that we were trying to use this information for purposes not of intelligence collection. Obviously, we wanted to do it to confirm or vet information, but I wasn’t using this to plan to go after some U.S. citizen. That was not the purpose.

The purpose was to look at linkages. That’s what we were doing. So, any given byte of information probably wouldn’t even have been looked at [individually] because it didn’t fit the criteria of our search. There was [vast amounts] of information. Out of all that, we’re only going to look for things that are relevant to the target, Al Qaeda.

If I take information off the Internet and put it into a file, I’m doing that electronically, with the database. That was the issue. You’re doing it electronically. The argument was, “When you take all this information off the Internet, how do you then protect U.S. citizen rights?” The lawyers were looking at all the information that was coming in. They had to vet everything. They were personally looking at it and had a validation process.
What would they have pointed to and said, "This is a violation. We can't allow you to do this"?

**SHAFFER:**
That's where the whole issue comes in of lawyers saying, "You can't look at these guys, who are suspected as being terrorists." All this information is coming in. They had this vetting process. And then, all this information comes to us regarding these [suspected terrorists] who were here legally, as part of these data runs. But, the lawyers are now saying, "You can't look at that. We're going to put that in the 'U.S person' category that you can't look at."

There is a vetting process. They're trying to protect U.S citizens' rights. I briefed the general counsel on this. I briefed George Tenet on this. The problem was, where do you draw that line regarding protection of U.S. persons -- between U.S. citizens, such as yourself, and these other folks who are here legally, but not technically deserving of the same protections? That's the kernel of the issue.

**GSN:**
Was there a group of suspected terrorists who had been identified in some other way and now Able Danger was trying to find additional information about them? Or were these guys emerging out of Able Danger's own data crunching?

**SHAFFER:**
Once these guys had emerged out of the data crunching, there was an interest to try to confirm or refute their linkage to Al Qaeda, and then to do operations to further exploit them. The reason I can't go into much more detail is because for the [suspected terrorists based] overseas, the train continued on them. I don't want to say anything that would violate security, based on the fact that there were other things that came out of this.

Our focus of the Able Danger oversight fiasco is the fact that this data also identified a cell here in the states. That became the critical issue -- the fact that the SOCOM lawyers recommended to the chain of command of SOCOM that we could not share that information with the FBI.

**GSN:**
Let's get to the crunch. Now you've identified five cells, one of which is in the United States.
GSN:
At what stage does the Able Danger team say, "We’ve got some pretty hot information here, and we should share this with somebody"?

SHAFFER:
Capt. Philpott came to me and said, “Based on our internal discussions within Able Danger, we are concerned by the fact that this appears to be a group of terrorists here within the United States.” It was at that point in time that he asked me to broker a relationship or a meeting with the FBI.

Keep in mind, I had been asked to develop a parallel, but different, capability for the FBI on one of their terrorist targets overseas. So, at that point in time, I was negotiating with the FBI about parameters and scope of support. The same basic team that was doing the SOCOM stuff was going to be assembled to support the FBI mission as well. That includes some of the same data miners, the same technicians, the same analysts.

GSN:
And you’re fronting for them?

SHAFFER:
I’m fronting for them too, yes.

GSN:
So, at the same time you’re being asked to set up a meeting with the FBI regarding Able Danger, you’re already talking to the FBI about using almost the same data mining resources on another FBI program.

SHAFFER:
Absolutely correct. That was why it was so logical for Scott to come to us and ask for that support. So, I called my FBI point of contact and said, “Hey, I’d like to link the special operations guys up. They’re doing a mission -- I can’t tell you about it -- but I’d like to make a meeting for FBI and your ‘Bubbas’ to meet with them and discuss the information they have.”
My best recollection is between summer of 2000 and fall of 2000, somewhere in that like. Now, I did not personally set up all the meetings. The one I do recall personally setting up was the last one. That I recall was where the O6 colonel in charge of Able Danger, was supposed to meet with officers of the FBI at the FBI's Washington Field Office to discuss this issue. I personally got the phone number from my FBI point of contact, called the WFO folks and said “This colonel from SOCOM is going to come talk to you. Please receive him.”

**GSN:**
Okay. What happened?

**SHAFFER:**
The colonel never showed up. Later, I found out from Captain Philpott that the reason the colonel didn’t show up was because he was told not to.

**GSN:**
Why not?

**SHAFFER:**
I learned from Capt. Philpot during my next trip down to Tampa that the lawyers had gotten involved and recommended to the chain of command that they not pass the information. According to Captain Philpot -- and again you’ll have to ask him directly -- it went up to the J3, the operations officer, a two-star general at Special Operations Command, where lawyers and Captain Philpot both briefed and the general came down on the side of the lawyers.

The thinking at the time this was going on was that there was an investigation of Special Operations Command regarding its support to the siege of the Branch Davidians [which had taken place in Waco, TX, in 1993].

The concern, as I understand it from talking to Captain Philpott, was that if SOCOM shares this sensitive [terrorist] information with the FBI, and the FBI takes action with it, and something goes wrong, we at SOCOM will get blamed for the bad outcome.

**GSN:**
Typically, in a military organization, the legal department acts as an advisor to
Absolutely.

**GSN:**
The legal department doesn’t make the decision; the legal department whispers into the ear of the commander who makes the decision to either overrule them or overrule you.

**SHAFER:**
Right.

**GSN:**
Who was the commander at the time? General Pete Schoomaker?

**SHAFER:**
This never got to the commander. This got to the operations officer level and, as I recall, it was General [Geoffrey] Lambert, the J3 special operations command. I believe it was at that level where this decision was stopped.

**GSN:**
This is below the level of General Schoomaker.

**SHAFER:**
I’m confident that General Schoomaker was never told of this.

**GSN:**
So the information gets blocked, basically because of these legal objections. What’s the reaction from you and your Able Danger colleagues? Here you are working hard to get the information together, which you consider very important, and you’re being prevented from sharing it with the FBI by the SOCOM lawyers.

**SHAFER:**
You have to understand two factors were in play at that time. First off, we did not know Al Qaeda to be the threat it is now. There was no drum beat for us to do something immediately.

My second point is that this [objection by the lawyers] is only one of about a
GSN:
So, you’re saying the Able Danger guys didn’t go ballistic.

SHAFFER:
No. We were concerned by the fact that this kept getting turned off, but again we had no fire under our butts to do something. This was but one other bureaucratic roadblock that we’ll have to fight. We’ll get to it. But, I’ve got other things right now that I’ve got to do.

GSN:
I can accept that there was no urgency, no great hysteria about Al Qaeda at the time. I understand how, in your position, you might have said, “Alright, I’ve got bigger fish to fry.”

SHAFFER:
Absolutely.

GSN:
But it’s harder for me to understand how the actual Able Danger people doing the data mining analysis and coming up with their important conclusions could tolerate seeing that the fruits of their labor aren’t going anywhere.

SHAFFER:
Not true. Some of the “fruits” were going places. Again, the foreign targets were [being worked.] Keep in mind, the pieces of Able Danger you’ve heard about are only about one quarter of what was actually going on. There are still classified programs which have not been announced, which we’ll not talk about, and other things which are going on internally. There were other things that were going on which were being looked at successfully.

It’s just that this aspect of Able Danger was, in my judgment and the judgment of others, the most critical for the events of 9/11.

GSN:
Are you suggesting that some or all of the information related to the four terrorist cells outside the U.S. was put into some sort of operational hands overseas --
SHAFFER:

I have to use this phrase, “I can neither confirm nor deny what happened to the other elements or aspects of the information.”

GSN:

Are you telling me that there was some good to come out of Able Danger?

SHAFFER:

Yes, the part that the lawyers did approve and tell us that we could do was the overseas part.

GSN:

Let’s talk about the Pentagon’s recent effort to verify the existence of Able Danger. It’s beyond my comprehension that the Defense Department, if it genuinely wanted to find some records of Able Danger, couldn’t work its way back to the very office you sat in, to the computers that you used, to the e-mails that you generated, to the reports that you wrote, to the recommendations that you sent forward. I’m sure they can find that information. In your opinion, what is the Defense Department doing right or wrong in trying to determine whether Able Danger reached these important conclusions about Al Qaeda or not?

SHAFFER:

First, I think it’s premature at best when we’re talking about a project that had [vast amounts] of information. I don’t think they’ve gone through all the data in two weeks.

Second, there’s going to be an e-mail trail, which if people actually look at it, they will realize what we attempted to do. It will prove the veracity of our attempts to move information from point A to point B. This was not done in a vacuum. It was done where we corresponded on these issues.

Third, I don’t think they’ve found all the databases. Some of these databases are commercially held. We had contractors. There are contractors out there which had this data. I’m not convinced [DoD officials] have gone to all of the contractors and found it yet.

GSN:
I have to be very careful now as to how I start answering because I’ve been told that there are going to be [congressional] hearings on this. I have to be careful regarding where the data may be.

Orion Scientific, [now part of SRA International, Inc., of Fairfax, VA] was helping LIWA [the Army’s Land Warfare Information Activity], but they also had a contract with Defense Intelligence. [James] Smith said in a statement I heard yesterday that Orion got cold feet when it appeared that LIWA was getting ahead of DIA in some of the analysis. Because the contract that Orion had with DIA was much more lucrative than the contract it had with Army, and the fact that the smaller contract was doing more and better things with its advanced technology, was embarrassing the DIA guys. So, I understand from Mr. Smith’s account, DIA put pressure on Orion Scientific to back out of the Army relationship, which then in turn reduced the capability of the Army support to Able Danger.

That may have been a contributing factor to why there were problems with Army and Special Operations Command beginning in the spring of 2000. At that point in time, LIWA backed out of the relationship.

**GSN:**
Which other contractors were involved with Able Danger?

**SHAFFER:**
I know that some of the technology you’re talking about were done by Battelle. There were Battelle scientists involved in this. Battelle, Orion and then Raytheon. Raytheon became the lead contractor when Army backed out of it.

What happened was the Special Operations Command -- General Schoomaker, in particular -- grew tired of trying to get the Army to do something like this. When Army started backing off for any number of reasons, Special Operations Command made the decision to relocate Able Danger to Texas. It began the effort from that location to do two things: first, recreate the LIWA suite of technology; and second, energize it using some of the same folks. The one common denominator was the senior scientist that moved from Army down to Texas to do that very function.

**GSN:**
Were many of the people working on Able Danger in Tampa relocated to Texas?

**SHAFFER:**
Yes, that is accurate.

**GSN:**
You remained in Washington as the liaison guy.

**SHAFFER:**
But, I did take my time down there in Texas. I deployed several of my officers to go down and augmented the effort on a recurring or rotational basis to include my going down as a reserve major. I took my hat off as the leader of Stratus Ivy and put my hat on as a reserve Army major, going down and helping as a planner at that cell in Texas.

**GSN:**
What role did Raytheon play in support of the eight or 10 or 12 guys that were working for Able Danger in Garland, Texas?

**SHAFFER:**
They played a significant role in establishing the suite of technology, managing the databases and essentially creating the mechanisms for managing the information to display it for leadership to look at and make operational decisions. That’s where I came into it. I was one of the guys looking at the information. Raytheon helped put it together in packages, so that it was usable.

**GSN:**
If the Army wanted to find what was the data and what were the conclusions that Able Danger had reached, would one possible place to look be those databases maintained by Raytheon?

**SHAFFER:**
That would be an assumption I think you could make based on the information I’m aware of. I don’t know what’s resident at Raytheon at this point in time. I have no direct knowledge of that.

[Editor’s Note: When contacted by GSN, Raytheon Company said through a spokesperson that it could neither confirm nor deny any involvement with Able Danger.]
Okay, after the 2000 presidential elections, the Bush administration comes into power in January of 2001. How, if at all, does that change anything that Able Danger is doing? Do you get new guidance? Do you have a new hope that someone will listen to you? Is there a new round of proposals to get the information out to the FBI? What happens when President Bush takes over?

**SHAFFER:**

I’ve got to say there was a cascade effect after General Schoomaker retired. He was the overall supporter and advocate of Able Danger and [after he left] everything kind of went downhill. He was the intellectual godfather of this effort. He understood what he was trying to achieve, this entrepreneurial, out-of-the-box thinking.

In one of my update briefings to him, I brought with me four Power Point slides. Each had about five bullets on it. I figured the update would probably take about 10 minutes, max. I talked to the DIA rep and he said, “You’ve got an hour with General Schoomaker tomorrow,” and I said, “I don’t need an hour, I need 10 minutes.” He said, “No, you don’t understand. Trust me on this.” So I trusted him.

I came back the next day and I figured he would have changed the schedule. No, I still had an hour with the CinC. So, I walk in there with four slides and I start my briefing and General Schoomaker gives my briefing. Every bullet that I put up there and talked to, he talks for 10 minutes to his staff. He explains to them what we’re doing as part of Able Danger is essentially trying to recreate the old OSS [Office of Strategic Services, the World War II-era intelligence unit that was the forerunner to the CIA] capability. The idea of having operationalized information that can actually enable us to do things more rapidly, in a more agile fashion. So General Schoomaker understood what he was trying to achieve. Once that intellect of General Schoomaker left, it went away.

[Editor’s Note: General Schoomaker retired in 2000. He was brought back to active duty by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld who named him Army chief of staff in 2003]

**SHAFFER:**

Once the four star [General Schoomaker] went away, it was pretty much like the world closing around us. There was no political will to continue this at that point in time. Plus, my direct leadership: Colonel York and General [Bob] Harding had moved on as well.
high risk / high gain, some of which are still ongoing -- seemed to not be appreciated by the incoming leadership.

At one point in time, the then Director of Operations [for the DIA] had me come in and brief him on a series of operations. This was February /March 2001. This general said, “I want you to explain to me every one of your operations in detail.” So, I started going through the laundry list of each operation and describing it to him.

From moment one, it was a bad conversation. It was like, “Well, I don’t agree. Well, I don’t agree. Well, I don’t agree.” So, he basically was saying all the operational focus that I had been required to focus on by the previous leadership, by Colonel Harding, was not something he wanted to pursue. No matter how much common sense, no matter how much reason I tried to use with him, it seemed to be an emotional issue with him.

**GSN:**
Did you take that as his personal philosophy or was that somehow reflective of a larger administration view?

**SHAFFER:**
I can’t answer that question because some of these operations were driven by the Office of Secretary of Defense. They were telling him that we needed to do them. It was tasking from that level, plus in this case, from General Schoomaker.

**GSN:**
How do you explain his objections to your various activities?

**SHAFFER:**
I can only speak to the facts. His opinion was, “That’s not part of your job.” As he walked through things, he kept saying, “I don’t see this as your job. This should be done by someone else.”

I tried to explain to him how that’s not their job. We’re human intelligence. This is just an aspect of human intelligence. He disagreed with me. It came to the point where we brought up Able Danger, where I was explaining the operation to him -- as you know it now, plus more -- and he looked at me and he said “Well, Tony,
that’s not your job.”

“Well, sir, this is basically using human methodology, combined with data mining to…”

“Tony, you’re not listening to me. This is not your job.”

“Sir, this is important, I think…”

“Tony, I’m the two star here. I’m the two star. I’m telling you I don’t want you doing anything with Able Danger.”

“Sir, if not us then who?”

“I don’t know, but it’s not your job.”

And that effectively ended my direct support and my unit’s support to Able Danger.

**GSN:**
Did it end Able Danger altogether?

**SHAFFER:**
I think it contributed to the failure of it because by that point, Army had already pulled out and Special Operations Command, because of the political change there, had also changed their focus. I remember the last conversation I had with Captain Scott Philpott on this was a desperate call from him asking me to try to help use one of my operational facilities to at least try to exploit the information [Able Danger had collected] before it got lost.

**GSN:**
What was the name of the general who said “No, this is not your job.”

**SHAFFER:**
General Rod Isler.
SHAFFER:
There are good guys and bad guys in the story.

[Editor’s Note: When contacted by GSN, General Rod Isler (USA-Ret.) said he recalls Lt. Col. Shaffer as someone who worked under his command at DIA, but had no recollection of any discussion with Shaffer in which Shaffer briefed him on Able Danger or an intelligence mission to find Al Qaeda cells. Isler emphasized that in his role as deputy director for operations at the Defense Intelligence Agency he had no authority over any programs run out of the J-3 unit of the Joint Staff, and no authority over any program run by the Special Operations Command.]

GSN:
How soon after the 9/11 attack did you realize that Able Danger had actually identified about a year earlier the Brooklyn cell and several of the actual 9/11 terrorists, including Mohammed Atta?

SHAFFER:
It was within two weeks of 9/11, when one of my colleagues, who had kept one of the charts, called me and said, “You’re not going to believe this. He’s on one of our charts -- Atta.” I just felt this sinking in the pit of my stomach like, “You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“Nope, you want to come see?”

This [colleague] and I get together for coffee.

“Here it is,” [said the colleague.]

I’m just sitting there shocked, like I can’t believe we have this, and I asked, “What are we going to do about this?” and [the colleague] said, “I don’t know yet.”

I was told later that the information [on Able Danger’s findings] was passed by Congressman [Curt] Weldon over to Stephen Hadley [then the deputy national security advisor in the Bush White House]. At that point in time, I was convinced, “Okay, we got the word out. We’re good to go. At least someone will know now
Was your motivation at this point to be able to say, "I told you so," or to have it recognized that there had been some good intelligence work carried out and that maybe someone would want to keep that effort going?

**SHAFFER:**

The problem was everything was in total chaos at that time. I accepted recalled active duty and took command of a special mission unit which did another counter terrorism mission. So, we moved on our merry way, to do other things. I can’t speak for Capt. Scott Philpott and my other colleagues, but I do believe that everybody felt that the information got to where it needs to be and we’re just going to let it go now.

**GSN:**

Did you ever hear anything to suggest that anybody either in the White House or in higher military or civilian DoD leadership positions actually said, "Look at what Able Danger found. We should keep this going."

**SHAFFER:**

I thought that maybe some of the good work we had done was continuing to do good things. But, I heard Richard Ben-Veniste [one of the 9/11 Commission members] confirm that no such capability exists today to try to replicate what we did. So, that’s a 9/11 commissioner confirming that no such [data mining] capabilities exist today.

**GSN:**

How did the thought dawn on you -- or another Able Danger colleague -- that you should talk to the 9/11 Commission?

**SHAFFER:**

It’s interesting how that came up. Going into October of 2003, I was deployed to Afghanistan as the operations officer overseeing all of DIA’s collection activities in that country. The 9/11 Commission shows up and announces, through the chain of command -- I did this above-board, through the chain of command, General [Lloyd] Austin, being the two-star commander of Task Force 180 and Brigadier General [Byron] Bagby, being his deputy. Word came down through them, saying, "Is there anyone here assigned to this command who has information that is relevant to the pre-9/11 intelligence or operations environment? Please tell us so
SHAFFER:
These are my talking points. [Shaffer showed GSN a typed, one-page memo, with a series of bulleted points, but would not allow GSN to publish the memo.]

I went through this whole thing with [Zelikow and other staff members.] I talked about the background, what Stratus Ivy was. I went through the integrated human collection planning effort. I talked about how we planned to do that, the application of U.S. technology. You notice how much time we’re taking now to talk about it.

GSN:
Right.

SHAFFER:
Same thing [in Afghanistan.] It took time to go through these points. The bottomline was, and the way I phrased it was, “We found two of the three cells which conducted 9/11, to include Atta.”

That’s the way I phrased it to them. I don’t know if they didn’t recognize the Atta part, but I did specifically mention two of the three cells which conducted 9/11, and at the end of that I threw in Atta.

Because my focus, honestly, was that we found two of the three cells. That was to me the most important factor, rather than focusing on Atta, as an individual. And that was what I told them.

I basically gave them background on each one of these three agencies and how it worked. The fact was several DoD seniors saw what I was doing [as similar to] the movie “Kelly’s Heroes” with Clint Eastwood? In “Kelly’s Heroes,” Clint Eastwood takes a bunch of guys and goes off for gold behind enemy lines during World War II. [Some DoD officials] compared us to being some renegade element totally out of control, doing something which made
GSN:
So, as far as you’re concerned, you not only gave a thorough briefing on everything that had happened, but also identified -- maybe as a throwaway line -- that you found these cells and Mohammed Atta?

SHAFFER:
Correct.

GSN:
That would seem to be the "money" line. How does somebody [working for the 9/11 Commission] not have his eyes pop open when you say, “Oh, by the way sir, we also identified Mohammed Atta a year before the attacks.”

SHAFFER:
As I recall, at the end of the meeting, there was silence. People were just silent at what I’d said.

Now, I don’t know how to interpret that, but I do know that two things came out of that meeting, some of which are admitted by the 9/11 Commission now.

First, Zelikow approached me at the end of the meeting and said, “This is important. We need to continue this dialogue when we get back to the states. Here’s my card.”

Now a senior executive handing an [Army] major his card, I would consider that a fairly big indication that “Hey, there’s something to this.”

Second thing, by the 9/11 Commission’s own statement of 12 August, it talks about Dr. Zelikow calling back [to the U.S.] immediately. My understanding from talking to another member of the press is that [Zelikow’s] call came into America at four o clock in the morning. He got people out of bed over this.

So, I don’t know what they heard. I can only tell you that I was told by Zelikow to re-contact him and we have their own statement here. So, it seems to me that what they’re saying about [Able Danger] not being important is contradicted by the fact that he did tell me to contact him.
Their statement, more or less, says, “We thought Able Danger was important, we looked into it but then reached the conclusion that either you weren’t entirely credible or the information wasn’t historically significant.”

They might have cooled down a little bit. They might have been very hot when they first heard it, but then reached the conclusion, perhaps reasonably, perhaps unreasonably, that, “This isn’t that significant after all.”

**SHAFFER:**
I agree they may have reached that conclusion, but I believe the investigative rigor that would be required to reach that conclusion actually was not done. I’m a trained investigator myself, and you always ask Who, What, When, Where, Why, How. Can you do that in 30 days or 60 days after something like this is given to you?

Plus, I offered them access to my full copy of Able Danger documents. I let him know that because I was operating as Able Danger’s forward headquarters -- because they were in Tampa or Texas -- to preclude having to bring all this classified information back and forth. I became their repository of both briefing charts, summations and authority documents, so they didn’t have to worry about bringing all this classified material on aircraft.

Therefore, I had a full copy of this. I just kept it because I was worried about something like this happening one day. My former deputy was a finance officer. She kept immaculate records of all the legal documents. We had all this. I informed Dr. Zelikow that I had a copy of all this stuff and I offered it to him. I think that was one of the reasons he wanted me to re-contact him; so he could look at it.

**GSN:**
And what happened?

**SHAFFER:**
I returned in December [2003], took 30 days of leave, came back off of leave, and I called Dr. Zelikow’s number on his card the first week of January [2004] Someone answers the phone and says, “Yes, we remember you. I will talk to Dr. Zelikow and find out when he wants you to come in.”
“Yeah, we know who you are. ummmmm. Dr. Zelikow tells me that he does not see the need for you to come in. We have all the information on Able Danger.”

This is the second week of January. To my knowledge, the Able Danger documentation, which they claimed that they did get, which was about two briefcase-sized containers, didn’t show up until February or March. So, I don’t know what they were looking at or what they’d been told about, but I can tell you, from my understanding, they did not have a full set of information at that point in time.

GSN:
What is your explanation for Zelikow’s actions.

SHAFFER:
Based on my lawyer’s recommendation, I want to remain tied to the facts that I’m aware of. There are some troubling timelines here. I told them about the set of documents in January. Then, in March of 2004, there are some allegations drummed up against me regarding $67 in phone charges, which were accumulated 25 cents at a time over 18 months. Even though when they told me about this issue, I offered to pay it back, they chose instead to spend in our estimation $400,000 to investigate all these issues simply to drum up this information. By the way, these allegations were refuted by the Army by the fact that in the same year, 2004, I was promoted on schedule to lieutenant colonel.

GSN:
So you’re suggesting that based in part or entirely on your coming forward to the 9/11 Commission and raising these issues that that might have ruffled somebody’s feathers?

SHAFFER:
There are some troubling facts that remain. The last time I saw the data I’m referring to is also the February 2004 timeframe. Since then, the data regarding the Able Danger set of documents has not been located.

GSN:
Since GSN broke this Able Danger story in early August, how has the civilian DoD leadership and the uniformed military leadership reacted to your revelations?
have provided [information about] any issues of concern to DoD leadership.

As I understand it, the Army, acting as an honest broker in this entire process, is truly trying to investigate to get all the facts out.

However, there is an appearance that all the facts are not in yet and that the investigation continues. You are aware that other folks besides me have come forward and said this actually happened. You have Captain Philpott, you’ve got J.D. Smith, who said, “Hey, not only is what they’re saying true; I’m the guy who did the data mining which resulted in the Atta link.” So, you’ve got this now.

The question then becomes, “What has DoD really been able to find and are they going to share it with everybody?” It is my opinion, based on what I’ve heard, that DoD has a lot more information that confirms our story than they’ve released to the public.

**GSN:**
Is it your view that DoD, and perhaps other parties, are doing their best to avoid taking the blame for what is, of course, a tragic event?

**SHAFFER:**
I wouldn’t ask you or anyone else to be naïve about that. I’m sure that’s a factor in how they’re planning things. However, I know that the former members of Able Danger have been cooperating fully. Anytime DoD has had a question for us, we’ve come forward and answered it.

The only concern we have now is the fact that we’ve not been active participants in that investigation, for two reasons.

First, how do you confirm, as DoD, that you have all the Able Danger documents unless you bring in someone who was part of the original Able Danger team? To date, that has not happened. We’d like to believe that it will happen at some point in time.

Second, we’re concerned about the fact that there are other folks who we know that have this knowledge -- and we believe that DOD knows also -- yet the statement was issued [by a DoD spokesman] yesterday [August 23, 2005],
Suppose you get to the point, where everybody says, "Yes, Able Danger existed; yes, they did this great data mining; yes, they identified the cells and Atta; yes, they tried to submit it to the FBI; yes, the lawyers, maybe with good intentions, blocked them; and, yes, that was a royal screw up." Everyone agrees to all that. What then? What is your goal? What, beyond everybody agreeing that your story is 100 percent accurate, are you looking for?

**SHAFFER:**

The ultimate goal is what created this whole event to begin with. The intent of Congressman Weldon, and the Army and maybe the leadership was to re-create this [data mining] capability. That’s why this all came up. In the January / February timeframe, we started down the path with Captain Philpott in the lead, saying, "We need to look at how we can recreate the suite of Able Danger capabilities."

That’s when I came into it, because of my knowledge of, and having managed part of the process last time. Army and Navy went to Weldon and said, "Wouldn’t it be great if we had some funding for this?" That’s the key. [Rep.Weldon] asked the hard question, "What happened to the previous iteration of this?" And that’s when the story came out.

I can tell you that both Army and Navy had told us to tell the truth to Congress about what happened. That is a fact. Every time we’ve talked to Army and Navy leadership, they’ve said, "Tell the truth." And that is what we’ve tried to do here. The only reason that this is now in front of the public is because [Congressman Weldon] had the courage to take that information and to do something with it.

I believe it was his intent to put it into the record on 27 June 2005, just to justify the expense of putting this into the upcoming FY2006 appropriations bill. But that was the ultimate objective here -- to build something called Able Providence. Able Providence being the follow up to [Able Danger.] In the simplest terms, to create a global, 21st century armored cavalry capability. Again, the idea here, going back to Gettysburg, when General Buford went after and seized the high ground of Gettysburg. That was a decisive point of that battle.

**GSN:**

What is the specific recommendation that you may have carried to Congressman
SHAFFER:
Two parts. First is something called Kimberlite Magic which is the database / technology piece, which was essentially the LIWA technology piece – the data mining, the Spire, the Parentage, all those different software packages doing what LIWA did. That very smart data mining / intelligence neural-netting and processing capability.

Kimblerlite is the tunnel from which diamonds are pushed through the earth towards the surface. A great deal of pressure presses the diamonds.

GSN:
That’s the first of two parts.

SHAFFER:
Right and Able Providence is going to be the larger piece of that which basically uses complex data display tools to allow operational planners, such as myself, who are technology novices, to look at and make sense of the data.

GSN:
How much were you looking for in terms of funding? What’s the dollar value?

SHAFFER:
You’ll laugh. We’re talking about less than $50 million dollars for the entire thing and that’s small bucks compared to other programs. Just for the technology, we’re talking about $13 million for the Navy, probably about another $12 or $13 million for the Army. With some other upgrades and personnel issues, we’re talking about under $50 million dollars.

GSN:
Is that money in the 2006 bill? Where does it stand?

SHAFFER:
The last time I discussed this, and this is actually my real job right now, we’re working with a senior staffer. He’s already notified both the Army and the Navy that the intent is for the Hill to fund this capability. So, that’s where the negotiation is right now.
SHAFFER:
That will be success. That's all I want.

GSN:
It's a hell of a lot of effort to go through to get a measly $50 million. Usually, a senior congressman, like Curt Weldon, can get a $50 million program done over lunch; over a bowl of soup.

SHAFFER:
That's what we're going for. All this public stuff was not our intent. Our intent was simply and quietly to get this capability up-and-running, and focused on the fact that warfare has changed. Fundamentally, we want to find a way to change the culture to match the new war fighting thinking. To be entrepreneurial, to use this technology to establish partnerships of the willing, people who are willing to partner with us.

Just like we did in the original Able Danger concept, you took three separate organizations, Army, SOCOM and DIA, small components of each, focused them on one problem. It was like, if you don't mind me saying, a big apprentice task: go after Al Qaeda. That's what we're talking about here. Just being able to think out of the box, to get out of the normal government channels and think like a businessman.

GSN:
Just out of curiosity, why was Congressman Weldon willing to talk first with GSN about Able Danger?

SHAFFER:
You're an insider magazine. There was a belief that if we're going to talk about this with anyone, you'd be the best to get this word out to government insiders because they would take notice of it. And the idea here is to show people, "Hey, this happened before. We want to do it again," and in some ways maybe even elicit some support from the government to move this forward.