

Selected Transcript of "DUSTWUN" (Season 2, Episode 1) from the Serial Podcast

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About a year and a half ago, clips from this video appeared on every major news broadcast.

It showed the rescue of a guy named Bowe Bergdahl. He was the US soldier who was captured by the Taliban and held captive for just shy of five years. The Taliban made the video. The first thing you see is a couple of guys in traditional Afghan clothes. They've got scarves on their heads or covering their faces, and they're holding machine guns.

They're standing next to a silver pickup truck. The front hood is up. In the backseat of the truck, the door is open. A bare-headed figure is sitting with his knees up against the seat in front of him. The camera closes in, and you see this pale, young man. And that's Bergdahl. His head is shaved. He looks sort of like a cult leader from a '70s movie. He can't keep his eyes open properly. They're bothering him. He keeps blinking and rubbing them.

A wider shot shows that the scrubby, rocky hills all around the truck are dotted with other guys—Taliban—holding rifles or rocket-propelled grenades.

[Chanting]

One or two of the guys lean in to where Bergdahl is sitting, and they're talking to him. He's looking at their faces. One guy says something in Pashto, which is translated on screen as "Don't come back to Afghanistan." What I've heard since is that the guy said, "Do not come back to Afghanistan. You will not get out alive."

Black spots appear in the cloudy sky, and you see that they're planes or helicopters. One gets closer and closer. It's a Black Hawk. And then you see Bergdahl again. He's out of the truck now, looking up at the sky. His clothes are too big, billowy.

[Sound of helicopter]

Then, at about six minutes in, right after some cows wander onto the scene, the helicopter lands, dust flies. Bergdahl walks forward, flanked by two men, while three men from the helicopter—the US Special Operations team—jog toward him. The two sides meet in the middle of the clearing, shake hands—like team captains right before the starting whistle.

Bergdahl steps forward. The Americans put their hands on him, pull him towards the Black Hawk while they're walking backwards. They don't want to turn their backs on the Taliban just yet. Bergdahl is walking stiffly, lumbering almost. At the helicopter, they pat him down one more time, and then he's on board. They're up and away. Takes less than two minutes... And it's done. The video cuts off.

[End at 3:05 mark]