

'The Tightening Dark'

Author of the thrilling memoir sits with VFW Magazine

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The “American Dream” comes without instructions, symmetry or a scientific formula to abide by in living it out to the fullest. Formless in nature, it lives in the hearts and minds of its dreamers.

From sacrifices waged and torture endured to protect his country, Haisam “Sam” Farran’s latest memoir, *The Tightening Dark*, poignantly captures a man’s commitment to country, a reminder that the gatekeepers of the “American Dream” are its dreamers.

“When we started writing this book in 2018, we chose to tell my whole story and not just what I endured as an American hostage in Yemen,” said Farran, a retired Marine Corps officer, interpreter and security specialist with more than 30 years in the Marine Corps and its Reserves. “People needed to know about all the sacrifices I’ve made for this country, and that Muslim immigrants like myself exist. We wanted to show that others like myself come to fight for the American Dream every day.”

Farran, 60, was born in Lebanon, the son of a hardworking father who traveled across the Middle East as a laborer, opened a restaurant and eventually accumulated enough money to immigrate with his large family to the U.S.

The Tightening Dark begins with Farran’s upbringing, which transitions to his family’s decision to leave Lebanon amidst turmoil via Libya’s U.S. Embassy when he is just 10 years old.

“Looking back now, that’s when I first knew I wanted to become a Marine,” said Farran, a member of VFW Post 9283 in Southgate, Michigan. “It was my first sight of a Marine, this guard at the Embassy in Tripoli. For a Lebanese boy in line, the whole experience of seeing him in his regal bearing, his professionalism and stoic demeanor was something aspirational. I was fixated on him, on what I thought he represented.”

Through countless amusing details that paint a vivid picture of his expected culture shock,

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

Farran navigates his adopted home of Dearborn, Michigan, where he eventually sees his father thrive as a restaurant owner and the rest of the family follow suit.

Following his graduation from the Fordson High School in Dearborn, Farran, 17, convinced his parents to sign his waiver for the Marine Corps in 1978.

During Farran's time in the Marine Corps, he served as a translator/interrogator during the Persian Gulf War in 1991. He also served as a translator for the Defense Intelligence Agency, where his Arab-speaking capabilities earned him a promotion as chief of attaché operations at the U.S. Embassy in Yemen following the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.

Leaving active-duty in 2004 and retiring from the service altogether in 2008, Farran became a security manager for several private companies, returning to Yemen in 2009 as a security consultant.

In *The Tightening Dark*, Farran provides a portrait of Yemen, a nation made up of a collection of rival tribes governed by a long-standing autocrat supported by the U.S., whom Farran himself trained on behalf of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

"I had built a really good relationship with the Yemen leadership before the Houthi rebels took over, helping train the Yemen military since I spoke the language fluently," Farran added. "We trained them in interrogation tactics, which ironically were eventually used on me."

As Yemen descended further into governmental chaos and instability by 2014, Farran was tasked with overseeing the evacuation of his security company members in what had become a war-ravaged country.

As air strikes carpeted Yemen's capital on March 27, 2015, however, the Shiite Houthi rebels managed to infiltrate the house Farran and fellow American Scott Darden occupied while conducting their final security assessments before fleeing.

"They told me I was all alone here," Farran said. "They told me all of my friends in high places ran out of the country like dogs. So I was given two options: I either cooperate and get out, or not and stay here for a long period of time, possibly dying."

Farran would spend the next six months suffering through an array of interrogation tactics by the Houthi rebels in a decrepit jail cell hidden away in the Yemeni capitol of Sana'a.

The Tightening Dark paints a harrowing picture of the conditions and inhumane treatment Farran suffered under the hands of the Houthi, who routinely interrogated and beat him for refusing to confess to lies. But it also exemplifies the sheer mental toughness and profound sense of being that kept Farran alive.

“Once a Marine, always a Marine,” Farran said. “In the worst of times, I always held myself up to what a Marine with extensive training was supposed to do. I was prepared to die over my commitment to country.”

Hatchette Books, publisher of *The Tightening Dark*, will host a virtual author visit with Sam Farran on Nov. 10, allowing readers to ask questions about the memoir. This is the first in an occasional series of author visits through Checkpoint’s Veterans Book Club. If you’d like to receive the link for the virtual visit, please email JDyhouse@vfw.org.

“I have not done any virtual tours yet,” Farran said. “But November 10 is a very special day for me because it’s the Marine Corps birthday. So I’m excited to do this on such a special day.”

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