

## The 15:17 to Paris

### *The True Story of a Terrorist, a Train, and Three American Heroes*

Anthony Sadler; Alek Skarlatos; Spencer Stone; Jeffrey E. Stern. *The 15:17 to Paris: The True Story of a Terrorist, a Train, and Three American Heroes*. 2018. 256 pp. ISBN: 978-1-61039-734-6 (EB)

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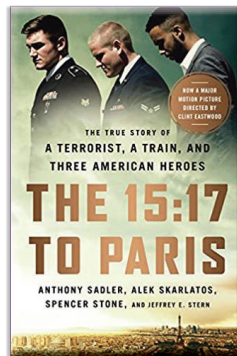
On Friday, August 21, 2015, Ayoub El-Khazzani boarded a train from Brussels to Paris with enough weapons and ammunition to exterminate the 500 living souls on board the train. Radicalized in his youth, he possessed the will and intent to do so. He didn't count on the heroic efforts of three Americans traveling on the train—Anthony Sadler; Oregon Army National Guard Specialist Alek Skarlatos; and US Air Force Airman First Class Spencer Stone. The trio was on the last leg of their “European Blowout” vacation to celebrate Skarlatos' return from a deployment to Afghanistan and Stone's successful completion of an overseas tour in the Azores. Sadler, a California State University-Sacramento student, joined his friends in Rome to celebrate the end of his sophomore year.

The book is a fascinating and inspiring read that offers an intimate look into the lives of the three men and their remarkable heroism. The book opens with a brief introduction to the three main characters, followed by a description of their childhoods, their families, and the improbable events that made their friendship and the European trip possible. We learn that Stone aspired to be a Special Forces Operator. He applied to be an Air Force Pararescueman (PJ), but the Air Force disqualified him for medical reasons. Still, Stone continued his military training, first as a Survival Evasion Resistance and Escape (SERE) trainer and later as an Aerospace Medical Services Technician. Stone is also a martial arts enthusiast; Skarlatos is a weapons expert for the National Guard. These skills were essential to their ability to disarm and subdue El-Khazzani, maintain control of the passengers, and render lifesaving aid to a critically wounded passenger until the train arrived at the nearest station and French officials arrived.

The narrative then shifts to the day of the attack. The authors describe the moments leading up to the attack, the chaos and confusion that ensued, the courage and quick thinking that ultimately saved many lives, and the improbable sequence of events that needed to take place for the

counterattack to succeed. The account of the actual attack is gripping and terrifying, and the authors convey a sense of urgency and immediacy that makes it feel as though the reader is right there on the train with them.

What sets this book apart from other accounts of terrorism or heroism is the personal touch. The authors are not just writing about a news story or a historical event, but about their own experiences. They offer thoughts and emotions before, during, and after the attack, providing a deeper understanding of the event and the people involved. The three friends are portrayed as relatable and human, not just as heroes, which makes their bravery all the more remarkable.



President François Hollande awarded the trio France's highest decoration, the Knights of the Legion of Honor (Chevaliers de la Légion d'Honneur). President Obama invited the trio to the White House for a ceremony where he awarded Stone the US Air Force Airman's Medal and a Purple Heart and Sadler the Secretary of Defense Medal for Valor. The Air Force immediately promoted Stone to Senior Airman and later to Staff Sergeant in recognition of his heroic actions.

The book touches on broader themes of friendship, resilience, and faith. The three friends had a strong bond forged over many years. It is clear that this friendship played a significant role in their ability to react quickly and effectively during the attack. The authors also describe the event's aftermath, including the media attention and the emotional toll it took on them. They each credit their faith for giving them the strength to persevere through difficult times.

15:17 to Paris is a remarkable true story of heroism that is well worth reading. The authors provide a unique and personal perspective on a terrifying event that could have had much more tragic consequences. The book is a tribute to the three friends and their incredible bravery, and offers valuable insights into the nature of heroism, friendship, and faith.