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Deedee Derksen
**THEE MET
DE TALIBAN**
Oorlogsverslaggeving voor beginners
DE GEUS

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Deedee Derksen

Tea with the Taliban

War Reporting for Beginners

Original title: *Thee met de taliban, Oorlogsverslaggeving voor beginners*

NONFICTION

The personal story of a female war correspondent

A different take on war reporting. Open-minded, outspoken, and with a healthy dose of self-irony

For readers of *People Like Us* by Joris Luyendijk

‘As the evening progresses, I feel less and less like the fantastic war correspondent that my friends met only yesterday when I got on the plane for my first trip to Afghanistan. I increasingly imagine myself as a fledgling celebrity journalist who accidentally finds herself at a table filled with film stars at the Oscars. Who the f*** is Deedee Derksen from *de Volkskrant* in Holland?’

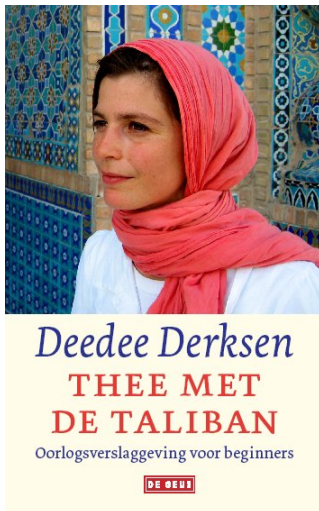
– from *TEA WITH THE TALIBAN*

About the author and the book

Everyone has an opinion on the war in Afghanistan; from the prime minister to the lavatory attendant. The papers publish one important editorial after another. But who knows what is really going on? In search of answers and adventure, Deedee Derksen sets up shop in Kabul as the only Dutch journalist. She has a cup of tea with loose-tongued Taliban fighters, travels embedded with the US Special Forces, and ambles through the most dangerous valley in the world. However, to really get to the bottom of the war she needs to dig deeper. The question is: how far can you go as a western journalist in Afghanistan? Deedee Derksen reports – open-minded, outspoken, and with a healthy dose of self-irony.

The first time Deedee Derksen went to Afghanistan was in August 2006, at the beginning of the Dutch mission in Uruzgan. Straight away, she travelled the country on her own. At the start of 2008, she settled in Kabul, reporting for Dutch national newspaper *de Volkskrant* and current affairs programme *NOVA*. At the time she was the only Dutch permanent correspondent. Since 2009, she has been training local journalists in Afghanistan; she regularly travels back there from her current place of residence, Brussels.

This book is a must-read for people who want to keep abreast of what is happening in Afghanistan, especially those interested in finding out how a female journalist manages to hold her own in this environment.



Deedee Derksen, *Thee met de taliban*
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Excerpt

‘So after Saddam fled, we entered his palace’, the stunningly beautiful US anchor tells the expanding group of men who breathlessly latch on to the umpteenth anecdote emanating from her appetizingly low neckline. ‘We found the Stetson belonging to Uday (Saddam Hussein’s son) among his possessions. I put it on and I’ve worn it all through the journey, even at customs when we left, ha ha ha ha!’

I am talking to a South African cameraman but he rapidly loses all interest in our conversation as he stares towards the other reporter. She has been God-knows-where and masterly uses those locations as a springboard for amusing stories. It is as if she has visited exotic holiday destinations and seen wondrous attractions. At the same time her tales are peppered with historic moments in the ‘War on Terror’.

She was there, and I wasn’t. As the evening progresses I feel less and less like the fantastic war correspondent that my friends met only yesterday when I got on the plane for my first trip to Afghanistan. I increasingly imagine myself as a fledgling celebrity journalist who accidentally finds herself at a table filled with film stars at the Oscars. *Who the f*** is Deedee Derksen from de Volkskrant in Holland?*

Tonight, the TV reporter is the centre of attention in French restaurant l’Atmosphere in Kabul. The in-crowd often refers to it as l’Atmo. You’d almost forget you are in Kabul. You are supposed to. Okay, Kabul has its merits as a backdrop but most expats much prefer to eat and drink among their own sort. Other journalists, aid workers, businessmen.

Admittedly, the US anchor is beautiful, feminine, and successful, so she is one up on many other people in Kabul, but most other patrons are not to be discounted either. This is where famous war correspondents such as Anthony Loyd (*The Times*), John Simpson (BBC), Dexter Filkins and Carlotta Gall (*The New York Times*) have a beer once the action is over. Any time you can meet them here as they prop up the bar with a bottle of Bud in one hand and a mobile in the other, ready for the next scoop. ‘A bomb, really, where? I’m on my way.’

I have never been here before but I already knew all this when, this afternoon, I talked on the phone to the South African cameraman and said, as casually as possible, that I would meet him in l’Atmo. I had just arrived in Kabul, where I had immediately taken refuge in my hotel. Frantically I started to ring the numbers I had collected in Holland before my departure, including his. Help me, help me!

‘Seven o’clock in l’Atmo? Yeah, sure.’ I tried to sound as if I was attempting to suppress a yawn, whereas secretly I found all of this terrifically exciting. I’d heard and read many stories by other correspondents about l’Atmosphere. It seemed a fine example of a restaurant in wartime, with French waiters wearing bulletproof vests with bow ties, floating over polished hardwood floors as they carried plates with frog’s legs and foie gras to champagne-swilling war correspondents.