

BRIAN WILLIAMS APOLOGIZES FOR TELLING DAVID LETTERMAN A FAKE STORY ABOUT BEING SHOT DOWN IN A HELICOPTER (February 2015)

I want to say first of all that this has been the hardest week of my life. I've never been through anything so rough since way back in March of 2003, when I was reporting from Iraq and riding with the troops in a Chinook helicopter that was all of a sudden struck by –

OK let's start again. This story is not about me. Just because the program is named for me, just because I face the camera every night of the week looking every inch a celebrity in the signature slant of my eyebrows, my impeccably trimmed hair, my hand-tailored jacket, and my professionally-knotted designer necktie, I'm not important. I'm not the news. I'm just the guy who reports the news. But in spite of myself, tonight I find that the news is about me, so I want to set you all straight about exactly what happened when my helicopter was ---

What I can tell you for sure is that on that day in March, 2003, I was in Iraq covering our invasion, covering the heroic advance of our troops from Kuwait all the way up to Baghdad. I was sitting in one of four Chinook helicopters that got out north of the invasion. We were flying very low—maybe only a hundred feet or so above the ground, and flying slow because we were carrying huge segments of bridge that were going to be laid out across the Euphrates so that my camera team and I could cross the river and—

OK, we never got to the river because we were shot down in the middle of the desert north of the invasion, out ahead of our troops. I mean we weren't exactly shot *down*, but we took ground fire—RPG and AK-47-- and then had to land hard, really hard, so hard that I can remember to this very day the impact on my backside. I can feel it right now. These are things you don't forget. Now let's see: where was I in all this?

Right. Ground fire. Well actually, when I said that *we* were hit, I mean that we were part of a group that was hit, that one of the choppers ahead of us was hit, at least that's what I found out when the chopper I was in caught up with that one—about half an hour after it was hit. So we sat in the middle of the desert, four birds in the desert, one of them winged, running low on water as we waited for rescue and I spent several hours each day looking for the oasis that was supposed to be somewhere out there but that----

Let me start again. My job is not to be the news but to report it as best I can, to bring back the truth from around the world or at least read it clearly and with just a touch of stentorian gravitas from the teleprompter in front of me, though few people know how nerve-racking that can sometimes be. I mean I've often wondered what would happen if the teleprompter jammed, which fortunately it never has, but still and all you have to wonder----

Tonight it pains me to realize that even though my job is to report the news, I have somehow become the news because in the fog of war almost a dozen years ago, I mistook the helicopter that I was riding in for another helicopter way out ahead of ours. If you wonder how this could happen, how a seasoned reporter could make such an egregious mistake, I can assure you that you've got company. In fact I would never have made such an egregious mistake if I had not been traumatized the night before by an IED that had been detonated right outside our hotel in Basra just as I was stepping through the-----