Hunting down Osama bin Laden

The raid that killed al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden took shape after detainees identified a bin Laden courier.

First information

- After 9/11, CIA chases leads about bin Laden’s inner circle
- Detainees repeatedly mention one courier’s pseudonym, identifying him as one of the few trusted by bin Laden; true name, location unknown
- Courier’s true identity learned in 2007
- Two years later, locations where courier and his brother operate in Pakistan are learned

Narrowing in

- August 2010 Courier’s residence found: high-security compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan
- September 2010 U.S. thinks bin Laden may be hiding in compound
- February 2011 U.S. thinks intelligence is strong enough to begin developing plan for going after bin Laden
- March 2011 First of five National Security Council meetings on capturing or killing bin Laden; other meetings: March 29, April 12, April 19, April 28

The operation

- April 29, 2011, 8:20 a.m. EDT Obama authorizes operation
- May 1, 1 p.m. Top advisers gather at White House
- Around 3 p.m. (midnight in Pakistan) Helicopters heard over Abbottabad
- Two dozen Navy SEALs drop into high-walled compound; inside for 40 minutes
- Bin Laden killed in last five or 10 minutes of siege; shot twice in the head on third floor of main building

Inside the compound in Abbottabad

- Built in 2005; about 3,000 sq. ft. (279 sq. m) of space; but no telephone or Internet service to avoid detection
- Two men lived on first floor
- Exterior walls topped with barbed wire

Outcome and aftermath

- One U.S. helicopter lost because of mechanical failure; destroyed for security purposes
- Along with bin Laden, three adult males killed: bin Laden’s son and two al-Qaida facilitators
- Woman identified as bin Laden’s wife used as human shield, killed; two others injured
- 3:32 p.m. Obama returns for update
- 3:50 p.m. Obama tells bin Laden appears to be one of those killed during raid
- 11:35 p.m. After confirmation, Obama announces in televised address that U.S. forces killed bin Laden and are in custody of his body
- Bin Laden’s body put aboard the USS Carl Vinson, then placed in the North Arabian Sea


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