



Fives and Twenty-Fives

Michael Pitre

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It's the rule-always watch your fives and twenty-fives. When a convoy halts to investigate a possible roadside bomb, stay in the vehicle and scan five meters in every direction. A bomb inside five meters cuts through the armor, killing everyone in the truck. Once clear, get out and sweep twenty-five meters. A bomb inside twenty-five meters kills the dismounted scouts investigating the road ahead.

Fives and twenty-fives mark the measure of a marine's life in the road repair platoon. Dispatched to fill potholes on the highways of Iraq, the platoon works to assure safe passage for citizens and military personnel. Their mission lacks the glory of the infantry, but in a war where *every* pothole contains a hidden bomb, road repair brings its own danger.

Lieutenant Donovan leads the platoon, painfully aware of his shortcomings and isolated by his rank. Doc Pleasant, the medic, joined for opportunity, but finds his pride undone as he watches friends die. And there's Kateb, known to the Americans as Dodge, an Iraqi interpreter whose love of American culture-from hip-hop to the dog-eared copy of *Huck Finn* he carries-is matched only by his disdain for what Americans are doing to his country.

Returning home, they exchange one set of decisions and repercussions for another, struggling to find a place in a world that no longer knows them. A debut both transcendent and rooted in the flesh, *Fives and Twenty-Fives* is a deeply necessary novel.

Fives and Twenty-Fives Details

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Author : Michael Pitre

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From Reader Review Fives and Twenty-Fives for online ebook

Edwardjd3 says

Disclosure - Served in Marines with Author.

Fives and Twenty-Fives is a conscientious modern war novel that accurately portrays the sacrifices young people give for their country and their struggle to cope. Pitre's writing style is crafty and empathetic. His story-telling keeps you turning pages to learn more about the characters experiences during and after "The Long War."

The characters in the novel express love of country and duty, but there is bitterness over giving everything for a cause that may or may not be justified. Deploying again and again and again wears you down to the bone. The Marines are not blind or bloodthirsty as in "Jarhead." Like those who served with me, they are intelligent and aware, though flawed.

The strength of this war novel is Pitre's depiction of the real fight for veterans, assimilating back into normal life - developing careers and relationships while living with the experiences of war. There's a disconnect between their peers who did not serve, as awkward as a high school "new kid in town movie." As a veteran of OIF/OEF, this novel is a voice for many of us who slowly had to piece our lives back together, back to normal.

You're looking at the future of 21st Century warfare in this novel where all sides are human, all sides have a voice. Most regional and tribal conflicts of the future will be a complex mix of cultures filled with shades of grey. As current events suggest, in many ways, American Marines and Soldiers were just another tribe in a never-ending Middle East tribal war, one that could never be "won or lost" in a traditional sense. Those back home who still think foreign policy is black and white don't understand the complexity of the new world quite like the veteran who has experienced it in sweat and blood and time.

Snotchocheez says

Forgive my comparison of this with the 2014 National Book Award-winner *Redeployment*. Both books are eloquent, visceral, fictional accounts of soldiers' lives during the Iraq War, both on the battlefield and after they come home from their tours of duty. My vote for the most accessible and enthralling of the two works, though, easily goes to Michael Pitre's *Fives and Twenty-Fives*.

I liked *Redeployment* plenty, though I did have a few issues with it, mostly stemming from Klay's decision to present his work in short story format. It did provide indelible snapshots of the war experience, but we're never quite allowed a connection with his characters. Each time we start feeling anything for them (good or bad) *blam* the story ends and another begins. It provides a broad overview, but conversely serves as an arms-distancer from forming emotional ties and intuiting soldier mind-sets. Also, of the thousands of women who served in Iraq, their near-absence in Klay's book is curious, and notably felt.

Pitre remedies that by zeroing in on one unit of the Marines: an Engineering cadre focused on filling potholes. (Totally unglamorous-sounding, yet as essential as any elite infantry unit: each pothole they encounter invariably contains a bomb or other IED that needs to be extracted and defused, and the pothole filled with concrete *all whilst wearing body armor in 110 degree desert heat, with constant threat of ambush*,

all so that each convoy of tanks and humvees and personnel carriers can advance to their next engagement.) The novel's narrative rotates among three first-person POVs: Pete Donovan, Alabama boy, Tulane MBA candidate, and lieutenant-leader of the unit in question, with very serious doubts as to the efficacy of his role in Iraq; Lester 'Doc' Pleasant, a 19 year-old medic from the bayous of Louisiana, who seems *very* overwhelmed by his role as trauma-tender (God, who wouldn't be?); and (in a stroke of genius) "Dodge", or Kateb, Iraqi university student with a penchant for bad American hair bands and *Huckleberry Finn*, who is essentially swept off the street and conscripted to terp (interpreter) duty for the unit. Their stories, along with some strong supporting characters (particularly a pivotal Sergeant Michelle Gomez, a Tejana badass) provide ample opportunity to make a personal connection and get a more vivid inside look at what life was like as a soldier there.

Uncompromisingly brutal, but hardly one-note (thanks to the post-war stories of the three main characters), *Fives and Twenty-Fives* provides an unflinching look at life during wartime in "the cradle of civilization". **Highly recommended** (if not even essential) read.

Kate Dunn says

Disclosure - Knows author, read advance copy

Don't shy away from this book if you're put off by war stories. The writing is open wide yet tender, and unflinching in the up close and visceral. It makes the day to day happenings of being a modern soldier necessarily tangible, especially for those of us who have no idea just how specific that is. But it then transcends so far beyond the experience that you're left gaping at how good intent, failed leadership, undue guilt, integrity and inertia can possibly exist at such war within a person without utterly destroying them. It's everything you always wanted to ask a soldier but knew you never could.

Each character goes to Iraq bolstered on an ideal and a need for acting on it that in turn undoes them. It's all basically the answer to Frodo's question at the end of *The Return of the King* "How do you pick up the threads of an old life? How do you go on, when in your heart, you begin to understand, there is no going back? There are some things that time cannot mend. Some hurts that go too deep...that have taken hold." Some hope does take hold. But so does damage. This novel is wise, heartbreaking, full of unexpected chuckles, and there's a sweet nudge of romance that reminds us of the glimmering threads that are worth fighting to pick up again. To wit, I love the character of Dodge so much, and everything that made him who and what he is. He is the link between east and west, past and future, wartime and civilian return. And he's charming as hell.

Read it for him to start, and then think about everyone else we're sending into these impossible lives.

Booknblues says

Fives and Twenty-Fives

By Michael Pitre

5 stars

401pp

Publication date: 2014

Having just finished **Fives and Twenty-Fives** by Michael Pitre, I want to continue reading about Dodge,

Doc and Donovan. I don't want to let them go. I want to know that they will be alright. That things will get better. That Dodge will be happy with a pretty girl in Tunisia and that they will all find a purpose and reason for what they did and a way to live with it. I think also of Zahn and how he tried to make everything right and the brave, tough and beautiful Sergeant Gomez.

We often hear about the disconnect that returning veterans feel and their sense of isolation, and certainly Michael Pitre highlights this feeling in **Fives and Twenty-Fives**, but each of his characters has been drawn with care. Each member of the road repair platoon lives with a feeling of isolation, Donovan as a lieutenant will never be quite a full-fledged member of the platoon and as Dodge tells him his rank is translated as unnecessary in Arabic, Doc the medic, has always been treated as hick until he excelled and medical training and technique and now he feels an overwhelming obligation to the platoon and Dodge, a good and sturdy vehicle has lost his name and turned his back on his Iraqi family while finding solace in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Pitre shifts his novel between each of these characters with each section beginning with a document from the characters past. The novel shifts between the present and stories from Iraq. The platoon is a road repair one requiring them to repair potholes. The access the perimeter 5 meters out to be sure that it is safe before exiting vehicle and then twenty-five meters out to be sure they will be safe. An armored member is sent to look at the pothole which each and every time contains an IED and than the robots are sent to disarm them.

Pitre's gift of storytelling and characterization engages the reader in caring for Donovan, Doc and Dodge. He certainly builds a sense of the bleakness of Iraq during the war and the shifting forces within it. Early in the novel one of the characters says:

Those spots where blood soaks in? Right into the dirt? Plants always grow there. I never knew that before. We'd convoy by the same places all the time, and all those places where I knew there'd been a lot of blood? Sure enough: green, healthy plants.

I was deeply moved by this book. I found it to be very human and very engaging.

thewanderingjew says

This book is destined to become the quintessential novel about the Iraq war, in much the same way as Tim O'Brien's "The Things They Carried" has become the go-to book about the Viet Nam war experience. Each character is unique and brings with him stories which create real time experiences for the reader. The tale travels between the past and the present and tells the story of who they were when they entered the service and who they became when they departed. The reader will experience an array of emotions with the characters, they will do what they do, feel their reactions to their assignments, sometimes lacking reason or responsibility, touch their fear, their horror, their anger, their frustrations, their courage, their confusion, their successes and failures. The anecdotal tales and the conversations between characters will bring them to life and bring home the story of the Iraq war, and even other wars, where friends and family become enemies of each other, dedicated to opposite sides and causes, no longer able to communicate with each other as they once did, no longer sharing the same common goals. This war, however, is different, in its own way, and these are not infantrymen, but each and every one of them is damaged in some way by their service.

Michael Pitre, served two terms in Iraq and his book seems to be written from the experience of his conscience. It is told from the point of view of three characters: Lieutenant Pete Donovan, a graduate of Officer Candidate School, Kateb al-Hariri, an interpreter from a well-to-do family in league with Saddam Hussein, and Hospitalman Lester Pleasant, a natural born medic, looking for opportunity outside the small town life of his childhood.

Pete Donovan is the Lieutenant in charge of a platoon charged with the responsibility of filling potholes,

following the rule of fives and twenty-fives when checking them for IED's, securing the surrounding area to protect his soldiers and soldiers advancing toward them while they fill in the potholes to prevent them from being used again. The most important part of the job is to do it quickly because sitting in one place too long makes them all sitting ducks. Missing one will make the oncoming soldiers unwitting victims of the explosions. It was difficult to know exactly who was the enemy. They lurked quietly on roadsides, looked innocent, pretended ignorance, and yet they sneaked in at night and planted bombs under curbstones, in potholes, in cracks in the road, under trash, anyplace a bomb-like weapon could hide. Sometimes the explosion was the precursor of an ambush so they had to be very careful and attentive at all times. Although it does not sound like they were involved in ongoing battles, they were indeed involved in action and a form of combat. It is in the area of fives and twenty-fives that their lives were often lost. It was a harrowing endeavor to clear the area. Donovan is deeply effected by the hypocrisy and irresponsibility of those in charge, by their haphazard decisions which do not take safety into consideration at all, but simply are moved by the politics of war.

Lester Pleasant is the medic in charge of taking care of the injured. He was born to the job, does it well and enjoys helping the soldiers to survive. When he witnesses the horrific, nightmarish injuries to men he could do nothing for, his life is forever changed. His job enables him to abuse drugs and he uses them to escape from the nightmares that often visit his sleep.

Kateb al-Hariri, the Arab spokesperson, the terp known as Dodge, was a student working on his thesis on Huckleberry Finn and poignant quotes from the book introduce each chapter. His family worked for Saddam Hussein. He enjoys American music and literature. He wants to help the Americans, but this means he also betrays his own family and friends. In turn, the Americans reward his bravery by betraying him and his service and failing to help him leave a country that only has enemies against him now. He finds himself an exile in Tunisia, at the end of the book, and he is somewhat of a freedom fighter, once again, only this time he is the English spokesperson for self-styled, young, freedom fighters there. They believe they are also fighting what they see as an unfair despotic government.

The heroes and the villains often view themselves in warped mirrors. The hero views a villain in his glass, unable to accept the praise, and the villain views himself as a savior, eagerly accepting undeserved honor. I believe that Pitre has brought home the war experience for the reader so they can view the soldiers and their interactions, the brave and the damaged, the injured and the dead and understand the failures that have often resulted from inept handling of strategy and deployment of soldiers to specific areas in a war zone, understand and perhaps bring about positive change to correct and prevent additional, unnecessary, perspective catastrophes.

Besides the main characters, there are several minor ones who play important roles. One is the female Sergeant Michelle Gomez, a little larger than life. Another is Major Leighton who thoughtlessly, perhaps, sends the men on missions that are not well thought out but is charged with doing it and then with rewarding or punishing them according to a book or rules that should probably be abandoned. Another is Corporal Zahn who sustains a head injury and is basically treated without proper medical care or assessment. Then there is the beloved Gunny Stout, a man whose bravery and casual disregard for regulations placed him in even greater danger. Each of the characters had a different approach and perspective on the war that affected their behavior. They were all young and, perhaps, a little naïve and idealistic, at first. This soon changed as they learned to master their job, their environment and their lives., but to a man and woman, after Iraq, there was no real returning to the life they once had, they had been forever altered, forever changed and could not go back.

The horrors of war, the emotions of the fellow soldiers, the enemies coldness, the mistrust and the fear are so palpable that the reader will be upset more often than not, and yet, this story must be told. Each side believes they are fighting for the just cause. Who decides who is right? Who decides the winner? Does might make right?

The soldiers are not machines, they breathe, feel, move about and are effected in many ways by what they experience, and we who sit in our ivory towers ignoring them are making a mistake and not learning from history. We allow them to be sent out on missions that are not well planned, with equipment that is inferior to what they require and without regard to their safety while in service or their healthy return to life outside the military. They return with so much baggage, it is hard for them to let go and live a normal life without

some help and guidance. Their scars need time to heal and not all are visible. If nothing else, this novel points out the absolute futility of war. It is never ending in one form or another but it takes on a life of its own. There are always different sides, different opinions, and different despots willing to take over and rule. So long as human beings fail at diplomacy, fail to live with, come to terms with, understand and tolerate different cultures, religions, and races, conflict will continue to exist and lives will continue to be lost in the fog of war.

Loleh says

PTSD & War are invariably complex and cannot be separated from the individuals who have experienced both. Pitre offers us a novel with a rare glimpse into war perspectives without giving one perspective more importance over another. Doc Pleasant, Leutenant Donovan, Sergeant Gomez... many names, many stories, many outcomes. There is a high degree of authenticity involved. Pitre has a genuine writing style and serves us well-developed characters which can stand as characters on their own. The present narrative is thorough, interrupted by flashbacks from the past which linger around us, waiting to ruin our momentary sense of security. All characters in this novel are haunted by their memories from the war. This is in many instances evident when they attempt to enjoy everyday pleasures of life, suddenly find themselves delivering explanations and observations that confirm that their mind is still stuck in a war zone, a state of mind which stays with them long after they have left the war zone. As the reader you learn significant detail about life through the eyes of a soldier as well as gather knowledge about strategical moves. Above all, this novel confirms the senseless loss of war. In this novel, the soldiers fight in Iraq but wherever a war is fought, regardless who the soldier and who the civilian is, the fight is pointless. It is loss on both sides, not simply physical loss but psychological damage too. War is damaging people. All that can be expected is loss and no amount of self-talk can change that. This is the message of the novel for me.

Toni says

I ordered this book for one of the libraries I work at because of the editorial reviews. After it was processed, I noticed it was on the shelf. Looking for a new read, I'm often disappointed when searching for that one book that is going to be my new, great find. I looked at the cover, did a quick scan of the flap and put it back. I wasn't in the mood for something that was going to tear my heart apart. But, then my curiosity drew me back again. We as a nation are interested and have empathy for our returning soldiers even if we have mistrust with the policies of our nation that put them "over there" in the first place. I started the book ready to put it down again, but this time by starting the 1st chapter - it was strong enough to pull me into the story. Within a few pages I was so happy that I finally had found my next book to recommend to our patrons. I ordered another copy for my other library, and then downloaded another copy for my kindle so I could read it at night. This is how much faith I had in the writing skills of the author and I was never disappointed in his ability to tell this very important story. As other reviewers have remarked, the story of the Iraqi interpreter is the highlight of the book. Through the character of this educated, young man who is fascinated with American culture enough to write his university thesis on Huck Finn, we see the fragile infrastructure of the war-torn nation and the complications that can barely be understood. The things I'll "warn" my patrons about is that it does change characters every chapter. It works in this case because really there are only 3 main characters that this story is told through, each in their own lives now and then memories of their time in Iraq where they are all connected through their Marine Corps platoon. It is never confusing as you always know who is telling the story right from the front of each new chapter. This book will stay with me for a long time as will the characters long after the book makes it back to the shelves. It will remain on our recommended reads list at

the libraries for the foreseeable future.

Burninglemur says

I read an early copy of this.

Thomas Barnett seemed to relish saying, in his “two armies” talks, that he likes his fighting force “young, male, unmarried, and slightly pissed off.” This is a book about what happens to the young and pissed off when they are at war, and how they return.

Each of the characters’ frustrations erupt from their struggle to understand the world and how it works, and each, in their own way, decides to do something. That’s what the young and pissed off do - they see things that they don’t like, and they do something. And they get rolled. Hard.

There are two main timelines in play, roughly anchored to when each of the characters first gets the slap in the face that comes with “doing something,” and when they each return to “normal” and do some serious reckoning about the other cheek.

Despite their push and talent, each character learns that they are ultimately powerless to shape the world around them to their expectations. One learns how little his officer’s rank has to do with his capabilities. One learns that no matter how fast and talented he is at fixing people, his work happens after the fact. One learns that the world doesn’t run on intellect and empathy. Slap. Slap. Slap. And then, each is left in something different than the world they left - something perhaps further from their ideal - and they have to decide what to do with their impotence, if not their lives.

Read this. Read it and laugh, and cry, and throw it across the room. Read parts of it aloud to curious people in the bar. Read it and wonder what happened to who you used to be.

Read it and think about sending the young and pissed off to war.

Naeem says

Because my concerns are more with the people and the culture of the occupied country than with the US soldiers themselves, I have a problem with reading war novels by USians. That is why, last summer, I read 7 or 8 novels by Iraqi authors. Having banked those, I allowed myself to read this novel. I was wary and ready to put it down with the first offense.

But Pitre surprised me for two reasons. I will get to those. First, let me get my negative out of the way. He ends the book in the right and the wrong way. Right because the ending is told from the point of view of an Iraqi. Wrong because it feels like an ode to freedom or democracy or some such silly fantasy.

Now let me turn to why I think Pitre's is a surprising novel. The problem for a USian is how to tell the story of war without the people, culture, and topography of the occupied country serving as mere props. Pitre solves this problem in two ways. He makes an Iraqi translator, named "Dodge", a central figure. Perhaps the most important figure; and certainly the smartest character. This move has two very good effects: it forces the reader into an Iraqi point of view; and, it places the reader in two minds about Iraqi translators. One the one hand, they provide the "insider" eyes that the novel so badly needs. On the other hand, this insider is a

traitor to the resistance against the US occupation. Pitre never makes this tension explicit but uses it to bend the reader's sensibilities.

The second excellent element is that the novel is about the mundane and not about the dramatic or heroic. All the characters are part of a US team whose function is to fix Iraqi roads after they have either been carved up to set bombs or after those bombs have exploded. The precise details required to fix roads -- the necessary coordination, the speed at which everything must be done, the anticipation required to defuse traps set by the Iraqis -- this is the medium through which Pitre tells his story.

What makes this novel palatable is Pitre's sympathy with people and the culture his nation's soldiers occupy. What makes the novel worthwhile is what we learn about the everyday conditions that make up contemporary Iraq.

Another bonus: Pitre shows no love to the Blackwater types.

Ryan Dejonghe says

This book nails it: both the feeling of conflict and the conclusion of duty back home. I'm impressed at the realistic inclusion of both officer and enlisted, especially both sexes, male and female. The repeated exposure to war, though not completely understandable or always justified, has both physical and psychological consequences to everyone involved. Though each service member has bonding similarities, everyone is affected uniquely. Author Michael Pitre expresses this perfectly. For that, I want to thank my military brother.

I am a former Marine and currently work helping my fellow Veterans. FIVES AND TWENTY-FIVES captures what many civilians want to know, but so few returning military members wish to express. Thankfully Pitre, was trained in writing before he signed up for training in combat. He took that writing expertise to war—twice—returning with the capturing of unequivocal knowledge. As a writer and a Marine, Pitre relays experiences unparalleled to many of this written genre.

I'd like to pause and highlight a fantastic review from someone who served in the Marines with Pitre:
<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

In particular, this book focuses on several different people involved in the conflict of Iraq: officer, enlisted, Navy Corpsman, and Iraqi interpreter. Initially, it felt like separate stories, which I would have appreciated as well, but then the stories began weaving more and more together. Pitre's method brought about the intricate relationship every member has with one another, whether in peace-time uniform, in shoulder-to-shoulder combat, or discharged back home.

If you were never in the military and want to know more about our men and women coming home and still serving overseas, this is the book to read. If you were in the military and want to understand more about modern-day effects of multiple combat tours: read this book.

I want to thank Bloomsbury for providing this book electronically for me to review. And for the author, Semper Fi, brother.

David Carr says

One of the bookmarks I place in my Little Free Library bears these words of Ernest Hemingway: "All good books are alike in that they are truer than if they had really happened and after you are finished reading one you will feel that all that happened to you and afterwards it all belongs to you; the good and the bad, the ecstasy, the remorse and sorrow, the people and the places and how the weather was."

How the weather is in this book: it redefines the landscape because it is military weather, and it redefines trust and engagement among human beings because it is Anbar Province weather in 2006. At every moment in these linked narratives, the weather is arid and defeating, a constant flow of heat and futility. But in this miasma, people find their lives through the charges they are given and the losses they endure, because they have nothing else. No victories make enough difference to clear the air or spread the conviction of good or useful purposes.

It is a brilliant novel, the best about Iraq I have read. As in **Redeployment** by Phil Klay, a less accomplished but no less moving story collection with events based Anbar Province, the weather does not change. There is no clarity; nothing like reflection, only procedure; sacrifice that is not service, even for those fortunate ones who come home.

Diane S ? says

An honest and significant work highlighting those who served in the Iraqi war, their motivations for joining, their fears and their struggles trying to assimilate back into a normal life. It is narrated by three different men, the most interesting to me was Dodge, the Iraqi interpreter.

During the war these three men were part of a crew that filled in Iraqi potholes, where every pothole had a bomb that needed to be detonated. All the characters were complex and the description were very detailed. Also love the introduction of Huck Finn and the meanings found within the text.

The author was a Marine captain and this added authenticity to the storyline and peaked my interest in this accounting of a war I only knew from the television and newspaper accounts. Wonderfully written, honest and raw.

ARC from NetGalley.

Dave Hoover says

I was lucky enough to get my hands on an advance copy of this book. I recently separated from the Marines and was in Iraq during the time the book is set. In fact, I was on the same base - Al Taqaddum. I have to admit, reading a work of fiction about that was quite strange. I was a helicopter pilot on the base and was actually just down the road from the road repair crew. As far as authenticity goes - he nails it. The descriptions of the landscapes, the smells, the bureaucracy, and the varied personalities you meet in the Marines brought back quite a few memories (good and bad). The realism of the characters and settings make it very easy to see these characters as real people living out their lives, and not just characters in a story. At some points it's almost like reading a non-fiction account. No matter who you are, the story is accessible and well written.

As for the story itself, I really like the way it was framed. The book takes place present day with each chapter following a different character - a former platoon commander, his medic, and his translator. In each chapter, the characters flash back to their shared time in Iraq. As the story goes on, you start to see the mysteries of what happened to these characters unravel. It's addictive. Every chapter presents you with questions that get slowly answered through the book. I burned through the book in two days - and that's only because I had to go to sleep on day one. The story starts with Pete Donovan - a former officer, Lester Pleasant - a former corpsman, and 'Dodge' - a former translator in their present day lives. Pete and Lester are both living in Louisiana, one in school and the other living at home, while Dodge is in Tunisia during the beginning stages of their revolution. Through the story, their shared past gets slowly revealed as they make their way through their present day lives. You begin to see how what they did makes them who they are and that element of the story is what made the book so exciting for me.

Since I actually am a former officer, I instantly related to the main character. Well, I say he's the main character, the story is actually the 'main character' with each of the individuals acting as supporting characters - but I digress. The post-service funk that overtakes many veterans is described incredibly. I saw myself in several of those vignettes which was sometimes hard to admit. His struggle with wanting to fade into the background and forget what he did struck a chord. For those not familiar with a post-war life, it gives a great view into the mindset many veterans find themselves in. The stories of Lester and Dodge are similarly remarkable and their characters are incredibly well-written. I felt like they could be real people I could actually meet. I found myself getting excited at the end of each chapter to get back to each character's life.

In short, you will not be disappointed in this book. No matter your own personal history, you will find the characters relatable and real. Their actions will frustrate and surprise you throughout. If you're unsure about the book, crack the front page at the bookstore and you'll be hooked. Highly recommended - a must read.

Jenny (Mama Bear Reads) says

I listened to the audio book, and it was so well done. When the characters got choked up so did I. When they were excited, I was excited.

The writing was so authentic. The honesty of the story really came across. From the heartbreaking and grueling conditions of war to the unfair and cruel reality coming home, these character's stories really pulled at my heart.

I loved reading both the perspectives of the Marines and of Kateb. I think I looked forward to Kateb's chapters most of all.

I did not want this book to end.

I definitely highly recommend this book.

Y. C. says

**** I received this from NetGalley in exchange for a honest review.****

War books fascinate me. Sometimes it's the history, sometimes it's the weapons and warfare and tactics, but mostly, it's the people. I enjoy reading about the trauma, the aftermath of a country, the losers (because no one really wins, do they?), their personal reasons for fighting, and whether they think the cause it's worthy. It's especially evident in a well-written fictional novel such as this.

Everyone should read at least one of these in his or her lifetime. It provides a vast amount of insight into the human psyche.

I've never been in a war myself, but I think this is a vivid and heartfelt account of a conflict that has multiple sides. It is raw and honest, and the reader clearly sees the soldiers inner struggles as they go about their duties.

Brilliantly done is the subtlety in the gestures and the reasoning of the soldiers and the underlying mood this creates. Throughout the novel, I feel as if the characters and society itself is wondering in a daze like a well-ordered ant colony until something shakes them up. Maybe it's just me, but suddenly there's an awkwardness that makes things pause and think "geeze, was it really a good idea to send these kids to war?"

What I would have liked is more interaction between the soldiers and the civilians they meet.

Overall, great book.
