



## Generation Kill: Devil Dogs, Iceman, Captain America, and the New Face of American War

*Evan Wright*

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Another nameless town, another target for First Recon. It's only five in the afternoon, but a sandstorm has plunged everything into a hellish twilight of murky, red dust. On rooftops, in alleyways lurk militiamen with machine guns, AK rifles and the odd rocket-propelled grenade. Artillery bombardment has shattered the town's sewers and rubble is piled up in lagoons of human excrement. It stinks. Welcome to Iraq...

Within hours of 9/11, America's war on terrorism fell to those like the 23 Marines of the First Recon Battalion, the first generation dispatched into open-ed combat since Vietnam. They were a new breed of American warrior unrecognizable to their forebears-soldiers raised on hip hop, Internet porn, Marilyn Manson, video games and The Real World, a band of born-again Christians, dopers, Buddhists, and New Agers who gleaned their precepts from kung fu movies and Oprah Winfrey. Cocky, brave, headstrong, wary, and mostly unprepared for the physical, emotional, and moral horrors ahead, the "First Suicide Battalion" would spearhead the blitzkrieg on Iraq, and fight against the hardest resistance Saddam had to offer. *Generation Kill* is the funny, frightening, and profane firsthand account of these remarkable men, of the personal toll of victory, and of the randomness, brutality, and camaraderie of a new American war.

## Generation Kill: Devil Dogs, Iceman, Captain America, and the New Face of American War Details

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## From Reader Review Generation Kill: Devil Dogs, Iceman, Captain America, and the New Face of American War for online ebook

### Don Mitchell says

Disclaimer: I'm a virulent peacenik who believes the only just US military actions in the past 50 years were Bosnia and the initial Afghanistan liberation, and both for the same reason—stopping totalitarian genocide (Afghani misogynistic tyranny). I believe we use the military career as a means to pacify our permanent underclass—their only hope for the true opportunity we won't give them otherwise. I am so radical that I believe we should reduce our military by 60%.

I listened to this book because I love exposing myself to honest, intellectual, factually expressed contrary opinions—or at least opportunities to challenge my set attitudes. This book did challenge my thinking, but the author did not strike me as virulently in favor of military action; so, it may have been a bit of preaching to the choir. He was, however, far more sympathetic than I.

The author embedded with the very tip of the spear during the invasion of Iraq: a Marines recon division. He sat crammed into unarmored Humvees during purposely triggered ambushes, laid in ranger graves during artillery strikes, and otherwise exposed himself to all the dangers of one of the most risked units in order to get the full, ground truth. He lashes out at command incompetence, technical and equipment failures, failure to train for the mission, and communication failures. It's a very good book, well written, providing tangible experience of fear, anger, testosterone laden "get some", and regret.

It's quite clear that the soldiers are fairly cynical about their purpose. They don't buy the agitprop WMD nor liberation arguments, although they do fear nerve gas. Nevertheless, they want to "get some". They want to "fuck up" buildings, people, and machines sometimes regardless of whether these are military targets or not. They've been taught to be killing machines and that's what they want to do. They've been taught to follow commands without question and, for the most part, that's what they do. The only commands they don't follow are from the incompetent, irrational commander standing right in front of them who's repeatedly and just immediately done another knuckle-headed, fear-based overly hostile act. They do passive-aggressively delay on following another command.

I was fairly depressed hearing this killing machine, cynical, fungible cog attitude which seems so contrary to our privileged middle-class sense of self-determination. There was also a sense of spreading the American way of life as a noble cause with very little self-criticism of the culture.

The book sympathetically relays the soldiers' macho psychological and motivational immature survival strategies of mutual hazing interleaved with true sympathy. It's definitely worth listening to and perhaps reading. It didn't change my attitude but I don't think it would change a hawk's attitude either unless the hawk were totally naive about war.

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### Landry Smith says

Generation Kill by Evan Wright is a firsthand account of a reporter embedded with the Marines of Force Recon Battalion during the invasion of Iraq. Jam-packed with details, this novel portrays the struggles and terrors that the marines face in the war. From weapons malfunctioning to choices that the higher ranking

officers have caused, Evan Wright explains everything that happened during his two months with the marines.

Throughout the story, the marines encounter problems with their enemies. Sometimes the enemy dress up as civilians so that the marines cannot tell whether the person is a civilian or military personal. This interferes with the ROE (Rules Of Engagement) because the Rules of Engagement state that they can only shoot at enemies in uniform. Another rule they can't break is that they can only fire if fired at. This boils down to the marines not being able as aggressive as they are trained to be.

I thought this book was exciting and at the same time educating, because I learned what a war in modern times is like. It tells you the strategy of the US military and the reason why our marines are always the first in and last out. I couldn't stop reading because the tension carried through to the next page and there was always action on every page. When I finished the book I decided to read it again because I liked it so much.

In conclusion, *Generation Kill* is a narrative from a reporter who was alongside the marines of First Recon Battalion that explains why our marines are elite. He supplies the readers with the day-to-day issues experienced on the battlefields of the Middle East. This is the most honest and accurate view on the Iraq War that exists.

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## **Lighthreads says**

I had no idea this book would be so funny, but for real, it's hilarious. Also exhausting and enraging and painful. And truly excellent, for the record.

For anyone who doesn't remember, this is the account of a reporter embedded in a marine recon unit during the invasion of Iraq. And by "embedded" I mean he rode in the lead car that was repeatedly the northernmost American presence in Iraq, and the very tip of the invading spear. There are a lot of firefights recounted – or more accurately, a lot of incidences of marines driving purposefully into ambushes – but that's not what's good about this book. What's good are the character portraits, the deft touch Wright has in fanning out people like a hand of cards. He is particularly good at laying out the wildly different individual reactions to violence -- celebratory, num, anguished, indifferent, everything in between. It is a focus on the individual, and I found it rich and thoughtful.

I have a friend who spends a lot of time getting paid to think about how we can prosecute war better. On a technical level, I mean – what can our guys eat, read, learn, what drugs can they take to make them more effective in the field? Judging by this book, almost anything would do, because almost anything would be better than the starvation and disease they work through now.

I do think there is something . . . dishonest is the wrong word, but close. Obfuscating? Maybe. Wright spends most of this book eliding himself flawlessly out of the narrative, to the point where it is jarring when he records some action he took or something he said. He writes most events as if they occurred without him. Which is deeply ethical in a way – this isn't his story. If this were an autobiographical book by a reporter about how hard it is to decide to go off to Iraq for a few months as a civilian and then go home again, I would have rolled my eyes a lot. But at the same time . . . you throw a stone in the river, the course of the water changes. The observed behave differently. And Wright did his best to tell us a story about the river without the rock in it. Wright lived in these guys's pockets for months; he slept in holes dug in the sand with them and drove into bomb blasts with them, and then wrote coolly, almost formally about them. Until the acknowledgements where he calls them by given name for the first time and pulls the curtain back, very briefly, on the depth of the relationships he formed.

He's not obligated to write a personal memoir. And like I said, there is something ethical in his choices. Just . . . a rock in a river changes things.

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## Visha says

Disclaimer: This reviewer is a gentle and peaceful person. Truly.

Interestingly, although I posted this review almost a year ago, I haven't heard from a goodreads person ("community manager") until now about it. Possibly because Evan Wright has become a "goodreads author"? Maybe that has nothing to do with it, but possibly goodreads wants to become "Lifetime Books" or literally, "Good Reads" - they don't want critical reviews or anything negative written about their "goodreads authors". In the spirit of placating folks, I am cheerfully revising my review. However, I won't be promoting their website to authors, readers and writers as I have in the past.

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[I was able to get this book from the library, so I didn't feel as though I wasted money on it. The edition I read was a hardcover, and one of the first things that grabbed my attention was the mistake Wright made by noting Camp Lejeune was in South Carolina. For those who are without maps, the Internet, or other fact-checkers, Camp Lejeune is in Jacksonville, North Carolina.:]

I would have had far more respect for this book if it were fiction. The characters that appear are well-described (Doc Bryan is my favorite), the situations are wonderfully tense, the complexities of a bureaucratic system (the military) are woven fairly well. Having lavished such praise, I must now confess that I found certain aspects of the book disappointing. Overall, I doubt Wright could come up with such material; thankfully, the people, places, and times he writes about are fascinating enough on their own: this story could write itself.

Wright gets his feet wet but disappears just before the dawn of this large-scale war. His book was written as a series of articles for *Rolling Stone*, then packed together with cardboard on either end to make a book. However, Wright seems to think he's as badass as the "cowboy" Marines (those reservists who screw up over and over again and drive the Recon Marines crazy) just because he spent a couple of weeks in a sand-grave, baby-sat by real trained killers who had to risk their lives just a little bit more because this candy-ass was with them.

This is the MTV-news of Iraq-War writing. Wright is clearly beside himself to be near the "men's men" of the military - Marine Recon units, who are the last all-male combat frontier. Wright salivates over his assignment, positing himself as one of the guys, despite the fact that he's as much of a Marine as I am. He reveals the motley crew as surprisingly sensitive, intelligent, and mostly level-headed, not so much through his own writing, but by comparison - in his own mind, he encompasses the bravado, machismo that a Rolling Stone reporter can only do. I couldn't help but think what this series - and book - would have been if written by a better reporter, even one from *Rolling Stone* - PJ O'Rourke, perhaps?

Wright does make an interesting choice: while thoroughly identifying the enlisted Marines, he chooses to give code-names to certain officers who "show their asses" as the operation unfolds - Encino Man, Casey Kasem, and Captain America (an offensively inept individual who should have been identified so the public could scream for his dischargement). Of course, Wright couldn't come up with such clever names - he borrows the ones designed by the Marines. But his choice to use the code-names rather than the real names of these

officers smacks of cowardice. Was he afraid of legal action against himself? Was *Rolling Stone*?

Perhaps because Wright was one of the early writers of the war, this book got a ton of press, won magazine awards (I have to insert this joke here: "Awards are like hemorrhoids; sooner or later, every asshole gets some."), and HBO bought the rights to make "the movie" - somewhat like "The Hills" in Iraq. Thankfully, better books have since been written, and if you want to spend your time and money wisely, invest in Dexter Filkins' *The Forever War*, a far superior book in every way.

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### **Mike says**

Decent **3 Stars** account of the US Marine Recon "tip of the spear" on the eastern flank of the invasion of Iraq. Good companion to *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer*

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### **Kathleen says**

Ten things I learned from *Generation Kill* that I really should have known already:

- 10.) A shamal is a wind blowing over Iraq and the Persian Gulf that can cause horrible dust storms. The resulting weather can make things like driving, sleeping in the open, and not getting putrid, red eye infections difficult.
- 9.) Sabka is a geological phenomenon particular to the Middle East which appears to be plain desert, with a crust of sand about an inch thick, but beneath that crust is quicksand made of tar. This can make things like driving Humvees and not getting ambushed harder to accomplish.
- 8.) Recon Marines are the hard core--like Special Forces in the Army, or SEALs for the Navy. A Recon Marine can hold his breath for four minutes. He can run ten miles in 150lbs of gear. A Recon Marine doesn't do push ups, he pushes the earth down. He is swift, silent and deadly. Usually he operates in small autonomous groups away from senior officers. He is not, however, generally trained to drive a Humvee around playing cowboy with up to seventy other vehicles. He probably doesn't even have a military operators license for a Humvee.
- 7.) Light Armored Reconnaissance battalions are trained for just that type of mission. There were LAR battalions available at the time of the Iraqi invasion.
- 6.) Guess who was tasked with driving a caravan of Humvees into ambush after ambush as a distraction from the main invasion force. Hint: Mattis' radio call sign is "Chaos" because he's wily and unpredictable.
- 5.) Any number of the tragic civilian deaths that occurred during the invasion were probably in line with the ever shifting, rarely clear Rules of Engagement.
- 4.) Rumsfeld's idea of Maneuver Warfare--using speed and agility instead of overwhelming force--was completely contrary to the established military wisdom.
- 3.) Maneuver Warfare is a brilliant way to destroy a country as long as you don't care what happens next.

2.) The lack of supplies for troops wasn't just a matter of not having batteries for NVGs, no body armor, or the cammo for a MOPP suit being forest instead of desert. A company of reservists were actually forced to work for food--taking escort duty for other convoys in exchange for MREs and other basic supplies--in the middle of the invasion.

1.) All war is a crime, but that doesn't make every warrior a criminal.

And that's just the stuff I learned that I really, *really* should have known already. Even if you did pay more attention than I do to the war abroad and the invasion of Iraq, you should still read this book. It is a well told story, well detailed, human, and interesting.

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### **Daniel says**

There is something that Evan Wright was able to do in writing this book that the other authors, even the award winners like Dexter Filkins and Steve Fainaru, were not able to do and that is extricate himself from the story and allow it to be solely about the men. Wright is so invisible in the mix that you forget he is riding along in the humvee with the rest of the recon marines. He is able to so skillfully express who these men were and what they are all about, that the entire work reads like fiction. Their complaints and problems sound completely human and honest and Wright makes sure that their imperfections and humanity are what we see. It helps to put the proper face on what happened over there in the most incredible and unendurable of circumstances and maintain sympathy and a sense of honor for our servicemen fighting in Iraq.

This is a great book and a very cool read if you want to know what it was like getting your feet on the ground in the early days of the war. It's right up there with the very excellent war correspondence that has come out of the region over the past years.

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### **Tara says**

3.5 stars. This is an account of Marines of First Recon Battalion in the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. A representative excerpt:

*"Their wild fire continues. Then the voice of Captain America comes over the radio, quavering and cracking. 'Enemy, enemy! They've got us on both sides!'*

*'Oh, my God!' Person says. 'Is he crying?'*

*'No, he's not,' Colbert replies, cutting off what will likely be a bitter tirade about Captain America. In recent days, Person has pretty much forgotten his old hatreds for pop stars such as Justin Timberlake—a former favorite subject of long, tedious rants about everything that's wrong with the United States—and now he complains almost exclusively about Captain America.*

*'He's just nervous,' Colbert says. 'Everyone's nervous. Everyone's just trying to do their job.'*

*'We're going to die if we don't get out of here!' Captain America screams over the radio.  
'They've sent us to die here!'*

*'Okay,' Colbert says. 'Fuck it. He is crying.'"* (? 293-294)

Side note: these were  
Marines, not soldiers.  
You do not refer to  
Marines as soldiers.  
I've noticed quite a  
few other reviews  
getting this wrong.  
Cut it out!

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### **Nicole says**

Wow. This was an incredible book. It was funny and yet heart-wrenching, and it was extremely difficult to put down when I needed to be doing other things like studying for exams. Evan Wright actually has a lot in common with Bill Bryson when it comes to his writing style. Instead of Katz providing essential humor in *Walk in the Woods*, Wright has every American soldier in the group to add those jaw-dropping "wait, did that actually happen?!" moments.

Loved it, highly recommend.

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### **Xon says**

A couple of Marines who were in Iraq told me to read this book because it accurately described a bunch of young kids invading Iraq. So I guess the fact that I thought the book was just OK would be more of how I feel about Iraq than how well the book is written. These marines go into Iraq and meet very little resistance. There are no major battles, no overcoming of impossible odds, and no stories of heroism. I have become accustomed to being overwhelmed with bravery and heroic acts when I read war books and they just aren't in this. These marines live in terrible conditions in the desert and have to come face to face with atrocities that often times they caused. I also couldn't believe how so many of the characters in the book were basically really excited to kill people. When I've read other war books I almost wish I was there helping out the good ol' U S of A and wondering how I would perform under similar conditions. There is not one part of me that would want to be with these Marines in Iraq. Apparently accurate but not inspiring.

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### **Hayley says**

I knew virtually nothing about the Iraq invasion--especially the conditions on the ground. This book made much of the military strategy (and some of the most shocking, sad, and funny moments) quite real to me. It did so without losing me in military terminology, or seeming patronizing by dumbing it down *\*too\** much. The author's tone was appropriately masculine and efficient.

My greatest commendation goes to the author's contrast between the inexperienced young men going in and their more jaded selves coming out. Some left majorly altered, but their instinct and appetite for killing often

remained chillingly unchanged. Most, however, understood the ineffectiveness of their invasion for liberating Iraq.

One of the most morbidly enjoyable aspects of the book is its focus on the incompetence of powerful Marine leaders. Some of these commanders were surprisingly inefficient. Many of the plans the marines had to follow seemed surprisingly foolish. This book could be re-titled "The Many F\*\*\*-ups of the Iraq Invasion."

Speaking of F\*\*\*-ups and such, the author presented the men's dirty humor and language in a way that was more endearing than bothersome. Their crudeness was often the book's well of humor, and I was surprised to find myself wishing I knew this bunch of rude guys that I would probably never seek out in life.

The author clearly has favorite men--characters he wants you to like (and others he villifies). I was ok with this--the author did an excellent job of presenting even his favorite people without much sugarcoating. Part of their appeal is the author's conveyance of their flaws, and simply his heavy coverage of their actions and thoughts.

The author also conveyed the marine's primitive living conditions on the road very well. He played to all the senses when describing the terrain in Iraq and the conditions the men tolerated each day (Even those having nothing to do with battle).

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Very little keeps the book from getting five stars. It's more like 4-and-a-half. Because of its title and its early emphasis on this new kind of American war--and this new, untested generation--I wanted some straightforward comparisons to the men in previous wars.

The author could have explained, in very basic terms, how these marines began with far more innocent (or less innocent, or equally innocent) minds than young men in previous wars. Because, really--what can prepare ANYONE for war? Young men will always enter the marines and have new, shocking experiences. Was that really any different for other generations? Did these men deal with things other young marines have not? Were their minds that different, when it came down to killing? I'd like just a little more contrast between marines then and now.

The book was still wonderfully fascinating to me because on-the-ground conditions were often surprises. But if someone has read a great deal of first-person war accounts, might they want some outright analysis of how the close-up picture in this war is different? (The author gave one difference--that First Recon was used as a decoy and shock-battalion, instead of their intended job...but there's room for more).

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### Speedtribes says

I saw the HBO miniseries first, and then rushed out to find the book as soon as I could. The book gives a broader view of events than the series, as the writer goes out for extra interviews/research/reporting to get

more information. He explains a lot of the 'whys?' I ended up with while watching the story play out on tv. The book turns out as readable as the series is watchable, coming across as a not-so family friendly road trip set in the backdrop of a war.

I loved this book. So. Much. The soldiers are so crude, unhesitating and all too willing to fling the foulest, rudest, nastiest insults at each other - and yet it's still clear that, even if they were all the sorts of people who'd hate each other if they were civilians, as marines they loved and would die for each other at the drop of a hat. It felt strangely inspiring, reading their experiences, even as the socially polite part of my brain winced.

It helped, also, that because the reporter was placed in the first car, we were able to get a focal point to constantly return to in a sea of unfamiliar names and places.

The book is peppered with explanations for all the unfamiliar technical terms and lingo, but they're presented in such a manner that they didn't feel dumbed down. I didn't notice much of a leftist or conservative slant. I felt like the writer was doing his best to simply write what he saw and felt as it happened - the good, the bad, the hilarious. He could have left it at that - with the myopic, claustrophobic filter of being trapped in a humvee with no space and no information and terrible communication - but he did go back for additional information to clarify why certain maneuvers had been ordered, even as he makes the point that at the time, no one at their level had been told any of this. The additional information was much appreciated and really put everything into perspective.

I liked that he was not above mocking his own weakness in comparison to these other, far more fit and capable men, and included several humiliating episodes where he clearly showed his weak civilian ways.

I am told that an earlier addition of Gen Kill doesn't have the afterwards where he talks about where the soldiers are now? If that's the case, I'd recommend making sure you're buying a newer edition.

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### **HFK says**

**Everyone walks around in skivvies, scratching their balls. Vigorous public ball scratching is common in the combat-arms side of the Marine Corps, even among high-level officers in the midst of briefings.**

Beautiful. I am very touched by the above, and I am not even being sarcastic while writing it down. It is a sign that I have just spent ten hours reading about belonging and brotherhood that can only be seen inside war zones, inside shared life-and-death situations. The dynamic and the hierarchy, which always forms inside the male dominant environment, is such a beautiful pleasure to experience as an distant spectator.

**We had a saying about the military in Afghanistan: 'The incompetent leading the unwilling to do the unnecessary.'**

Rolling Stone journalist Evan Wright spent two months with 1st Reconnaissance Battalion of the United States Marine Corps during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. His three-part series was originally published in the magazine, providing one of the most realistic look at a combat situations in the beginning of an Iraq invasion, albeit only through the eyes of 23 soldiers and his own.

*Generation Kill* (also adapted as a mini-series) is an excellent example of why I am such a huge fan of military/war oriented nonfiction. I am not a soldier, I am not there to see what happens inside war zones, I can only get an idea of it through short media coverage and books that provide first hand accounts of various different individuals and experiences.

Evan Wright delivers step by step account of the first days of combat that quickly turned into an guerrilla warfare. 1st Reconnaissance Battalion was trained to do anything and everything expect the thing they were signed to do = be the first battalions that storm through the borders inside Humvees that were stripped bare. This even when U.S Army had special battalions designed exactly for this job.

Combat?

Defective and broken gears, failing technology, uncertainty, misinformation, communication problems, media (these soldiers often got their information of the war they were fighting by listening BBC), a lot of waiting, boredom, professionalism as much as incompetence, friendly fire, situations where your guidance and orders aren't up to date, wounded soldiers, enemies and civilians. Dead soldiers, enemies and civilians, brotherhood and humor, excitement, frustration, fear and manly dynamics inside military hierarchy, but most importantly, situations where it is almost impossible to recognize who is your enemy and who is an innocent civilian. Situations where you will end up killing a woman, maybe a child, or a wild dog. Human shields, guerrilla warfare middle of civilians, not the rules you play with if you are part of U.S military.

Describing these situations is why *Generation Kill* is almost mandatory read to any American who desires to understand the conditions these wars are fought in, who has the heart to understand their soldiers who fight the fight of someone else's.

### **One thing about war I've learned: It produces amazingly colorful night skies.**

*Generation Kill* is able to bring these soldiers to life in ways I haven't experienced for awhile. I laughed out loud because these guys are so funny, all from different backgrounds and with different history. They can be controversial and always randy in many ways. They have filthy mouths and sometimes hunger for blood. But, they will steal your heart.

I felt anger, frustration, sadness - range of emotions you should when being wrapped inside a military operation you have no idea how it will eventually end for the soldiers you already care about.

That is effing fabulous.

*Generation Kill* is a book for the ones who came after, and for the ones still coming in an never ending war. Kudos to Evan Wright for bringing war to us, to the ones who sit in the audience forming the never ending moral judgement and opinionated reasoning as to why something should or should not be. We know very little, but at least we can have a better clue due to works like this.

Sergeant Brad Colbert, Lance Corporal Harold James Trombley, First Lieutenant Nathaniel Fick and Corporal Josh Ray Person, you have a special place inside my bookish military heart. <3

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### **Kathy says**

I am still digesting this book and will for awhile, I suspect. The author was an embedded reporter in First Recon Marine battalion in the early days of the Iraq war. First Recon Marines do just that---go in first, before anybody else, and open up the way. The descriptions are brutal, graphic and sometimes unbearable. As a woman and a mother, I was devastated at the sights and sounds and experiences of these young men. Iraq is hell for everyone--soldiers and Iraqi citizens alike. For the American soldiers, aside from the obvious danger of being killed by enemy soldiers, there is the added problem of civilians inextricably mixed with Iraqi Army soldiers in villages and cities. Imagine what kind of permanent psychological scars occur in a 19-year-old American soldier when he follows orders and discovers that he just called in a bombing run on a building bristling with Iraqi soldiers--and later in the carnage he discovers that they deliberately chose to hide in an orphanage. For me, this book was disturbing, depressing and frightening--and all too real, particularly when I reflect that when the US eventually leaves, the overwhelming corruption in Iraq may quickly erase any signs that we were ever there.

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### **Lee Sherred says**

Very good book, I really enjoyed it. An intriguing insight into modern warfare through the eyes of an attached journalist with no previous military experience at all...and, bizarrely, from Rolling Stone magazine of all things? It was interesting to read about the authors STEEP learning curve when it came to basic things that a soldier takes for granted. Initially, he was clearly seen as a burden and someone not to be trusted but, as the book progresses, it's nice to see how he developed a bond with the unit.

As a side note, if you don't have time to read the book, the TV series of the same name follows it very closely.

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### **Christopher says**

This is an incredible book of combat and the "fog of war." The book reads like such great fiction that if he didn't mention it you wouldn't realize that the author was there for the whole thing. The narratives of combat are enthralling, sobering, and thought-provoking. Two of the most fascinating things about this book are: (1) the "fog of war" aspect, where even though these soldiers are incredibly eager to get into combat, when they do they seem disillusioned by the fact that, sometimes, the people that they kill are civilians and they aren't always sure if they killed good guys or bad guys. Wright, without ever trying to do some ham-handed psychoanalysis, shows how all the soldiers deal with the horrors of war. (2) Wright's afterword in the 2008 reprint and, specifically, Corporal Person's criticism of the comments that the actors of the HBO miniseries of the same title that no one, not even actors who are suppose to portray the rigors of battle to American audiences, can never truly understand what it is like to fight unless they've been there. Truly, this is one of the best accounts of war I've read since Black Hawk Down.

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## Nicola says

Wright, a *Rolling Stone* journalist joins the Marine Corps First Recon (special-ops-trained warriors programmed to kill) as they become the first men on the ground during the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

I've tried to read *Dispatches* and *A Rumor Of War* before and never made it past the first few chapters – they were too disheartening, too leaden for a wine-sipping liberal like me to get much out of. By contrast, I found myself utterly immersed in *Generation Kill* and always eager to pick it up again when I had a chance to read.

It's hard to unpick the reasons why I enjoyed the book so much. Partly, it was because it felt relevant to me (because aren't we all [American and British:]), regardless of whether we volunteered for service or even supported the Iraq War, consigned, in some small way, to being a part of this 'Generation Kill'?). I think the book also benefits greatly from being a contained story. It hints at the events before and after, but this is the story of one mission. Though it obviously lacks a Hollywood structure, it does have a beginning and an end – and it's infinitely more readable for that fact.

Wright, though not the most technically-skilled writer (commas, please! they exist for a reason!), has a magpie eye for human interaction. That's what elevates the book for me. He describes moments among the men that might, to someone else, have seemed banal and unworthy of observation – he renders them instead beautiful, comic or immeasurably poignant. For example, during a lull in fighting, Colbert, who always conforms to Marine regulations that he not take off his uniform and helmet, suddenly decides to strip down and run around a field with his arms outstretched like a plane. It's a momentary lapse and he redresses quickly, saying, "Better now." It's a kooky, telling moment and Wright captures dozens more like it. It's these little moments that bring the text alive, allowing the reader to identify with even problematic figures like "Baby Killer" Trombley.

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## Silvana says

US Marines. Jarheads. Devil Dogs. Many names to call them but none could really embody the essence and the spirit. Compared with the other military branches in the US Armed Forces, I think this one is the most unique, and thus most intriguing. This memoir told a story about the marines based on direct view from a reporter (from Rolling Stones magazine) who was embedded in the First Recon Battalion, one of the first units deployed in and entering Iraq in 2003. Cynics or critics may say this is a typical pop-ish war stories from an outsider who wanted to produce an easy-to-read yet empty, explosive account on the things happening *over there*. They are wrong, obviously.

Different with my previous reviews (not that I made a lot), I'll try to be as disciplined as possible (military mode = ON) by dividing my comments into several parts with quotes from the book as titles.

### "Get some!"

The unofficial Marine Corps cheer used by the enlisted men to keep up their (and their fellows') spirit. 'Get some' means kill the enemies, that simple. Do they really take this by heart? Well, yes and no. Some marines in this book loved using their mighty guns and blew things up to oblivion because it is exhilarating and

makes them feel more 'alive'. Others, the more cynical ones, said that they found no real pleasure in shooting people and they feel that it's just to protect their comrades and do their jobs. However, there is always an oddball, in this case Pvt. Trombley, who said he's more excited playing Grand Theft Auto (videogame) than shooting people with his SAW machine gun. The "get some" mentality doesn't always prevail. Cruelties and damages caused by war did make the Marines feel something different. Remorse, frustration, anger and finally indifference are not uncommon. Which brings us to the next subject.

**"We're going to be fighting a war for oil."**

Aha! I had a question earlier before reading this book. Do the soldiers deployed in Iraq know that this war isn't just to fight terror? That there's more basic (and practical) reason behind it? Apparently, some realized this from the very start, before the media reported that the search for WMD had failed. Did it stop them from fighting? Nope. Why? Idealism, romance, and camaraderie. Quoting from the super hawt Sgt. Reyes (who played himself in the HBO miniseries because it's too hard to cast someone like him), the romance comes in because the Marines are a small band of hard motherfuckers, trained to go behind enemy lines against forces twenty or forty times bigger." Another quote from the Sgt. Brad 'Iceman' Colbert, "We are going to the great unknown. Scary, isn't it? I can't wait." So apparently he didn't care that the US wanted to topple Saddam and more inclined to think of the war as a grand personal challenge. Another marine said that he preferred to die among his friends (brave warriors) than die old in bed with only a few people by his side.

**"Every time he steps out of the vehicle, I pray he gets shot."**

The incompetent leading the unwilling to do the unnecessary. That pretty well sums up all the gigantic mess caused by the officers leading their units in this book. Sometimes mentioned only by nicknames bestowed by the enlisted men, such as Godfather (the Marlon Brando-voice battalion commander who was always ready to send his troops into harm's way to lick his bosses' arse) Encino Man (a company commander who was so astoundingly dim-witted hence the name), Captain America (a platoon leader whose combination of reckless gungho-ness and paranoid antics made his soldiers constantly fantasizing about killing him) etc. I could only admire the strong will of the soldiers not to seriously injure those boozos who fucked up many times, endangering the Marines and civilians. Encino Man for example, ordered an artillery fire (when there's absolutely nothing to worry about) way too close to his marines just because he did not know the safe distance required. Lucky that he couldn't give the correct degrees thus his men were saved by his incompetence. Godfather, aside from his arsekissing, also paid (wayyyy too) much concern on his battalion's "Grooming Standard". He basically waged a holy war against the evil, evil moustaches. Anyway, Wright wrote about them quite objectively. He did not only interview the soldiers but also the despised officers so as to acquire their views. The reasons given were silly at best but I am glad that the writer did that.

**"Sir, not to get homoerotic about this, but I could kiss you."**

Marines worship their competent officers and leaders. Such respect does not come easily but when one earns it, it will stay. One of the most beloved officers in First Recon is Lt. Fick (the Dick Winters in Bravo Company) who is smart, brave and reliable. Soldiers will follow their leaders to hell with no question if they trust them. Fick paid attention to his men, took initiatives and dismissed his superiors' asinine demands. I can't wait to receive my copy of his memoir soon. Eric Kocher (who also starred in the HBO miniseries – but not as himself) is another example. He repeatedly countermand the colossally retarded orders from Captain America even if that could (and finally did) cause him huge trouble.

**"The Americans have let Ali Baba into Baghdad."**

So said an Iraqi, lamenting the flourishing looting and bandits roaming the streets of Baghdad during the night while the American promised to restore order. A promise is a promise is a promise. The US didn't have any clear idea on what to do after they beat the main Iraqi army. The Iraqis did not put up too much confrontation when the US forces came, but they did not really surrender either. Pockets of resistance are

everywhere. Clueless is the best word to describe the US policy on this. A war that's suppose to last for like 3 months, have been going on for 8 years and killing thousands of its youth. A translator opined: "You have taken this country apart and you are not putting it together." Speaking about translator, how could a battalion, an elite one that was among the first ones entering Iraq, only had and relied on one translator and none in the command structure fluently spoke Arabic? I am indeed scratching my head because of this. That is so downright unprofessional. If every battalion that used to be and currently deployed there suffers from the same problem, then no wonder miscommunication (and lack of cooperation) with the locals occur.

### **"Goddamn kid playing peekaboo."**

Rules of engagement is without doubt one of (if not the most) the most complicated part in a war. Civilians casualties and all those shits, they never look good in front of the cameras, or even in front the soldiers fighting to save their lives. How to differentiate a combatant and a noncombatant if they all look the same? The enemies do not wear their clothes (if they're soldiers) to be distinct. The enemies do not hesitate to live and move among civilians and shoot their mortars from settlements. The enemies have different rules and Geneva Convention is not one of them.

### **"This war will need its own theme music."**

If you've seen the HBO miniseries, there are lots of scenes when the Marines are singing. Here's some examples: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9UpK\\_...](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9UpK_...)

Apparently, they did sing a lot. To spend time, mostly. The lead driver in Bravo company, Corp. Person, a very talkative and hilarious persona during the war, often engaged the others to sing with him (Well, not country music since his team leader, Colbert, banned it, referring to one song as "Special Olympics-gay"). He's not the only one with musical prowess in the company. All kinds of genres, 80s, hip-hops, you name it.

The soldiers in the Bravo Company, as in the other units in the Armed Forces, come from a generation that are raised in pop culture, hardly remember Vietnam and uses internet. This new breed of men are spearheading a country's languished efforts to reach its national goal (Terror? Oil? It all comes down to self-survival). Aside from the undeniable and incomparable sense of brotherhood (remember the quote from Henry V about Band of Brothers?), war brings only suffering. Policymakers should pay more attention to the troopers and do not treat them like toilet tissues.

All in all, I am satisfied with this book. Its deficiencies are covered by its stellar close-range reporting. Funny, smart, engaging, and somewhat enlightening. In conclusion, allow me to let loose a stream of Marine Corps-grade epithet: THIS \*expletive\* BOOK IS THE \*expletive\* BEST \*expletive\* COMBAT \*expletive\* MEMOIR I'VE EVER \*expletive\* READ!

PS: fill in the expletive blank by yourself. And don't forget to watch the miniseries. It is superb.

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### **Terri says**

This book is not for everyone. It is a confronting and blunt tale, but I got a lot out of it. Hence, the five stars I gave it.

Evan Wright does not censor himself and nor should he. It is real, very real, to censor it would just be wrong. I came to this book after watching the mini series. I wanted to see how different they were. I found out that

they are not different at all. What happens, and what is said, in the mini series, happens in the book. Well done Evan Wright.

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### **Kayla says**

I have friends in the U.S. Marines. At least five of them have been to Iraq, one is currently there, and at least five more are waiting for their deployment. I have been searching for a book that would help me see things from their perspective, because sometimes it's hard for me to understand what exactly goes on in their heads. When I first discovered Generation Kill, it was the HBO mini-series. After watching the first episode and wanting more, I found out it was based on a book. Success! Although it's not written by a Marine, the book is written by an awesome journalist named Evan Wright who embedded with 1st Recon in March 2003. He's from a magazine with a liberal reputation (Rolling Stone) but he keeps politics generally out of his writing. Everything stays honest and true. By the end of the book you feel like you really know these men of 1st Recon. You have a better understanding of what is going on in Iraq and no matter your opinion of the war, you build a respect for those who are really just doing their job.

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