



The Good Lieutenant

Whitney Terrell

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An acclaimed American novelist with a keen eye for our biggest issues and themes turns his gaze to Iraq, with astonishing results

The Good Lieutenant literally starts with a bang as an operation led by Lieutenant Emma Fowler of the Twenty-seventh Infantry Battalion goes spectacularly wrong. Men are dead--one, a young Iraqi, by her hand. Others were soldiers in her platoon. And the signals officer, Dixon Pulowski. Pulowski is another story entirely--Fowler and Pulowski had been lovers since they met at Fort Riley in Kansas.

From this conflagration, *The Good Lieutenant* unspools backward in time as Fowler and her platoon are guided into disaster by suspicious informants and questionable intelligence, their very mission the result of a previous snafu in which a soldier had been kidnapped by insurgents. And then even further back, before things began to go so wrong, we see the backstory unfold from points of view that usually are not shown in war coverage--a female frontline officer, for one, but also jaded career soldiers and Iraqis both innocent and not so innocent. Ultimately, as all these stories unravel, what is revealed is what happens when good intentions destroy, experience distorts, and survival becomes everything.

Brilliantly told and expertly captured by a terrific writer at the top of his form, Whitney Terrell's *The Good Lieutenant* is a gripping, insightful, necessary novel about a war that is proving to be the defining tragedy of our time.

The Good Lieutenant Details

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Author : Whitney Terrell

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From Reader Review The Good Lieutenant for online ebook

Andy Plonka says

The story and information about the war in Iraq was first class, but I did not like the reverse chronological order and the changing points of view (initially it was difficult to figure out who was speaking). In addition the dialogue was riddled with acronyms that are probably familiar if you have a military background (which I do not). A simple glossary at the end of the book would be a tremendous help in this area.

Heidi says

Maybe if I had more familiarity with military service, this book would be interesting reading. In addition to the way it's constructed (backwards chronology, which works, but wouldn't have made sense if I didn't know that in advance), it has military jargon throughout. I enjoyed the last few chapters.

David Eisler says

A really fascinating novel about war and how it touches people's lives in many different ways. The reversed chronology demands the reader's attention, but I found the effort worthwhile. It's probably best to read it in as few sittings as possible, otherwise it might be easy to lose track of things. Beyond the structure, I found the main characters interesting and compelling in an honest way. Overall I think this book was a sleeper hit of contemporary war literature in a way I hadn't expected.

Brian Grover says

This book unspools backwards in reverse chronological order, and that sort of literary trickery is always a bit of a red flag to me; I think it has mixed results here.

The book starts us in Iraq, where a "recovery" platoon looking for a missing US soldier's body rolls into a buried maze of explosives and one of their Humvee's is blown apart. Terrell then walks us backwards to explain what they were doing there, and how the soldier went missing. That's the interesting part of the book, and yes the mystery of who these people are makes this section more compelling. Unfortunately, we then keep moving back in time, and we end up shadowing many of the same characters through parts of basic training back in the States, when nothing of much interest happens - so the penultimate pages feel a bit like filler, which is disappointing.

Of course we get a coda in the final pages paying off what happens after the Humvee gets blown up, but by that point the book has lost a lot of steam. Terrell is a good writer, and I did enjoy this book. I think the lieutenant who leads the platoon is an interesting enough character (she's flawed, has more than a little self-doubt, but demonstrates tremendous competence whenever she's tested) that I might have enjoyed the story more if it had been told front to back instead.

Alan Fitzgerald says

I felt the style of telling the story in reverse was a bit of gimmick which detracted from the novel. It may warrant a second read to fully get the book, but I'm not willing to do this. It may have been better to have told the story in a more linear manner.

Jeremy Hunter says

I took me awhile to get into this one, but once I did I thought it was fantastic. The novel is about a young lieutenant deployed in Iraq. During the beginning of the novel, Lt. Fowler gets a couple of her soldiers killed on a mission. What follows, is a series of flashbacks of Lt. Fowler before getting deployed. Throughout the novel, Terrell portrays Fowler as a young officer that is clearly over her head. Per usual, Terrell creates memorable chapters within an interesting plot. The novel is worth a look.

Pierre says

This is an important book that should be mandatory reading for those interested in a textured view of modern warfare.

Terrell, based on his time as an embedded reporter in Iraq has woven a gripping tale told in a surprisingly effective format - moving backward in time.

The writing is concise and the characters compelling. In particular his choice of a female protagonist in a war novel feels genuine and a welcomed twist.

Terrell captures the mundane nothingness of war with its horror equally skillfully.

This is a major work and one that will remain relevant for the foreseeable future.

Danny Cerullo says

This is a good book, though I can't say it's a great one. It feels at times more like a writing exercise than a fully realized novel. The novel moves back in time, starting at the climax and moving backwards until we see the characters young and untouched by war. I'll stop short of calling the format gimmicky, because it's certainly effective at times, but overall doesn't quite add up to the visceral gut punch I think it's going for. It's a worthy entry into the growing canon of Iraq war novels, but not anything that transcends the genre.

Rachel says

I was really optimistic about this book because the premise seemed strong and I had heard good things about it. In the end, though, the reverse chronology didn't really work for me. I had a hard time keeping track of all the details and had to do a lot of flipping back to review what had happened at what time. I was left with some unanswered questions and felt like some aspects could have been fleshed out a bit more. Still, it was an interesting perspective on the Iraq war and shed some light on the inner lives of soldiers.

Kira Geiger says

I really wanted to like this book, but the backwards-in-time narrative format combined with audiobook listening in distraction-heavy NYC kept me from fully submerging in the story. I liked the characters in general, and I appreciate the style and choices made by the author, but I just don't think it's a book I'll pick up again - either in print or digitally. I really loved that the author showed rare viewpoints of this war were in— and showed a flawed female soldier. Lt. Fowler is not portrayed hero simply because she's a woman in charge of a platoon of men; she has doubts aplenty and an actual personality, she's certainly female but it's not the whole point of the book. Gives me greater perspective on what it likes to be a woman in the US Army.

Cortney says

I thought I would love this book based on its synopsis, but I just couldn't get into it. I felt like the first part was rather confusing, yes it starts with a bang, an IED goes off amongst a group of soldiers. Then the plot goes in reverse chronological order to reveal how people ended up in the position they were in. However, the beginning was so confusing that I wasn't sure what exactly happened to certain characters so then I lost the emotional connection that was supposed to be built up by the end of the book. Maybe I needed to pay more attention or go back and reread the beginning but I just got lost instead.

Dan Downing says

Describing the mechanism used to tell this story without giving away important plot elements may not be possible. I had not read any of the blurbs or jacket notes which forced me to figure a few things out as I read. If I can do that, so can you!

Suffice it to say that this is a war novel, a book about Iraq and American soldiers working there. Salted with humor and insights into the specific conflict the story also reaches into the very heart of war and warriors. Everything is wrapped in a love story.

Recommended.

Lauren says

I really wanted to like this book. It sounded really interesting and was highly reviewed. However, I found myself getting lost almost immediately. Terrell's timeline and layout chronologically is jumpy at best, impossible to follow at the worst. Reorienting myself as to what time frame the story was in was frustrating.

The novel is broken up into chapters, which are further broken into paragraphs told from a different character's perspective each time. I found this difficult to navigate, as it was hard to determine who was narrating in each section right away.

Another rough point for me was the terms and references being made. I have no connection to the military, no one in my family who's a member, so a lot of the terminology and language was difficult to translate as far as military word usage were concerned.

Jonathan Bacon says

What do you say about a book filled with military slang, tracing the events in reverse chronological order from an IED explosion to earlier better days, which reverse chronicles the path from the harsh realities and necessities of war back to an earlier innocence and integrity? I admire Whitney Terrell's research, writing and the uniqueness of "The Good Lieutenant," but also find the story troubling and yet (in my limited second hand experience) probably a very accurate view of the effects of war on men and women. It's not a book to read for enjoyment, but maybe to grasp a fuller understanding.

Cardyn Brooks says

The sliding timeline and shifting points of view in The Good Lieutenant made me think of Catch-22 and A Few Good Men. The title's irony also made me think of The Good Samaritan biblical tale. This story of Fowler and company is rich and deep in its portrayal of the tedium, the horrors and sometimes ridiculousness of war, where someone loses something as a result of every decision made regardless of being military or civilian; battle winner or loser.
