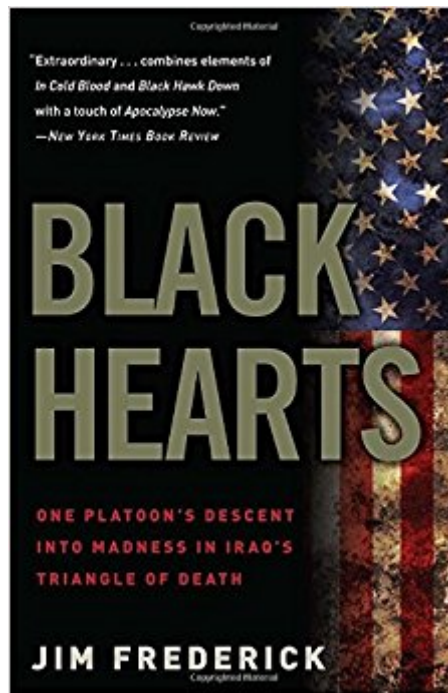




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Black Hearts: One Platoon's Descent Into Madness In Iraq's Triangle Of Death



Synopsis

This is the story of a small group of soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division—its famed 502nd Infantry Regiment—a unit known as “the Black Heart Brigade.” Deployed in late 2005 to Iraq’s so-called Triangle of Death, a veritable meat grinder just south of Baghdad, the Black Hearts found themselves in arguably the country’s most dangerous location at its most dangerous time. Hit by near-daily mortars, gunfire, and roadside bomb attacks, suffering from a particularly heavy death toll, and enduring a chronic breakdown in leadership, members of one Black Heart platoon—1st Platoon, Bravo Company, 1st Battalion—descended, over their year-long tour of duty, into a tailspin of poor discipline, substance abuse, and brutality. Four 1st Platoon soldiers would perpetrate one of the most heinous war crimes U.S. forces have committed during the Iraq War—the rape of a fourteen-year-old Iraqi girl and the cold-blooded execution of her and her family. Three other 1st Platoon soldiers would be overrun at a remote outpost—one killed immediately and two taken from the scene, their mutilated corpses found days later booby-trapped with explosives. *Black Hearts* is an unflinching account of the epic, tragic deployment of 1st Platoon. Drawing on hundreds of hours of in-depth interviews with Black Heart soldiers and first-hand reporting from the Triangle of Death, *Black Hearts* is a timeless story about men in combat and the fragility of character in the savage crucible of warfare. But it is also a timely warning of new dangers emerging in the way American soldiers are led on the battlefields of the twenty-first century. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

This painstaking and balanced book studies the experience of one airborne platoon in Iraq's deadly "Black Triangle," where U.S. forces have racked up a larger number of casualties than in any other area of the country. The stress of combat on the platoon eventually led to what can be described only as a war crime, in which rape and murder overtook an entire Iraqi family. Frederick's thorough research makes this a dense book, one not for the novice in studying the Iraq War or any other, but his compassion for all parties involved has enabled him to get an amount of cooperation from all of them that makes the book an exceptionally rich and valuable document of an aspect of the war the coverage of which is not always free from political bias or just plain sloppiness. Although not for the beginner, this is a valuable addition to any serious study of this war. --Roland Green --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Riveting. . . A narrative that combines elements of 'In Cold Blood' and 'Black Hawk Down' with a touch of 'Apocalypse Now' as it builds toward its terrible climax....Frederick's extraordinary book is a testament to a misconceived war, and to the ease with which ordinary men, under certain conditions, can transform into monsters. . . . Extraordinary." --New York Times Book Review
"Meticulous. . . . Demands to be read." --Washington Post
"Frederick, taking the story through to the surprising effect of the beheadings, the conclusion of the war crime trials and the impact that they had on the Iraqi relatives of the slain and the members of Bravo Company, tells the complex story in raw, compassionate and exact detail. Black Hearts should be taught at West Point, Annapolis, and wherever else the styles and consequences of combat leadership are studied." --HuffingtonPost.com
"Gripping. . . . A model of extended reportage on a multifaceted subject." --Chicago Sun-Times
"Panoramic. . . . Gritty." --Chicago Tribune
"Black Hearts shows how a broken system broke its men. . . . Engrossing and enraging, a chronology of combat and crime reported with compassion." --Army Times
"Every military leader should read Black Hearts. With empathy and clear-eyed understanding, Frederick reveals why some men fail in battle, and how others struggle to redeem themselves. An absorbing, honest and instructive investigation into the nature of leadership under stress." --Bing West, author of The Village and The Strongest Tribe
"Intense. . . . Fast-paced and highly detailed, this volume is difficult to put down." --Publishers Weekly, starred review, "Pick of the Week"
"Frederick's...compassion for all parties involved has enabled him to get an amount of cooperation from all of them that makes

the book an exceptionally rich and valuable document of an aspect of the war the coverage of which is not always free from political bias or just plain sloppiness." —Booklist

"Harrowing account of the atmospherics, commission and aftermath of a war crime. In March 2006, deployed in the south of Baghdad, the 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division faced a countryside in uproar. Arguably the most dangerous spot in an extremely dangerous country, the Triangle of Death featured IEDs that made every Humvee ride "an exercise in terror" and a civilian population indistinguishable from the death-dealing armed militias. With too few men to mount proper patrols and suicide car bombings and videotaped beheadings circulating to instill an extra bit of horror, every soldier had to endure constant stress and resist hating the very people they were charged with protecting. Relying on scores of interviews with soldiers and Iraqis, journals, letters, classified reports and investigations, Frederick carefully reconstructs the events that led to the breakdown of 1st Platoon, Bravo Company, when four soldiers raped and killed an Iraqi girl and murdered her family. War atrocities, of course, are as old as Achilles' rage, and why particular soldiers succumb to madness and surrender their honor, while others who have undergone the same hardships don't, remains a mystery. Still, the author answers the questions he can, plumbing 1st Platoon's psychological isolation, a consequence of having three of their leaders killed in a two-week period, the resulting disarray compounded by a leadership vacuum and by constant, invidious comparisons by senior officers with Bravo's other platoons. Their heightened sense of self-pity, the belief that they faced unevenly distributed risks and the perceived disrespect or indifference of high command—all these factors created the conditions that led to an unspeakable crime. While never absolving the four perpetrators of their individual responsibility, Frederick makes clear that the atrocity had identifiable antecedents and spreads blame much wider than four out-of-control GIs. A riveting picture of life outside the wire in Iraq, where 'you tell a guy to go across a bridge, and within five minutes he's dead.'" —Kirkus Reviews, starred review

— From the Hardcover edition.

Well, I don't think I can really say that I love a book that paints such a bleak picture, but I do greatly appreciate and admire this work. As we now go back into Iraq for a third time, this time covering much of the same ground as before, it is important to realize why US national leadership is so keen to avoid putting US troops directly into combat. Fighting a counterinsurgency type war is exhausting, tedious, and terrifying. The boredom, the combat, and the fear reveals some men as cowards, some as heroes, and some as monsters. In *Black Hearts*, Jim Frederick has written a thoughtful and moving study of how a battalion, a company, and a platoon can all disintegrate in a matter of

months. While hindsight is 20/20, and leadership is always tough, it's clear that there were failures of leadership, and many of them were avoidable. The content here is powerful and well developed. For the technical aspects of the writing, I do typically enjoy books written by journalists. This book is no exception - it is well sourced and often preemptively answered the questions I had about events. As a military officer, I think this book is particularly important to read for members of the military. As a study in leadership, I think this is a fantastic reference to dissect. As a glimpse into what can happen in war, I think this is an important primer.

Frederick's work is really first rate reporting. One of the best accounts of infantrymen in day to day operations to come out of the Iraq war. Frederick's well-researched and well-developed reporting of first platoon, B Company 1/502 is deeply troubling. The first platoon was unfit to go into combat by all accounts, but went anyway. The chain of command failed this platoon, although I suspect some of the soldiers (an unknown number) were simply unfit to serve in the U.S. Army in the first place and should never have been allowed to enlist, much less complete basic and AIT and subsequently deploy as infantrymen into combat. No amount of hands-on leadership and direct supervision can change a psychopath into a decent soldier. The 1/502 battalion commander was clearly a 'nut job' of the first order; the company commander weak and woefully inadequate as a unit leader. The expected NCO leadership within the platoon was noticeably absent. There was a systemic failure of leadership from battalion down to squad level. It is easy to criticize the platoon, but the real responsibility rests at the top - the President and SecDef Rumsfeld - for giving the division an unstated mission, with no clear guidance, and inadequate resources. I was there in Iraq at the same time (Dec. 2004-May 2006), to include the time of the "abduction" of the three soldiers from first platoon. It is not easy to explain to the reader the complex, uncertain political-military situation that existed at the time, or the oppressive heat, dust, and general stench of Iraq, or the deepening distrust and dislike that developed between U.S. forces and the Iraqis. IEDs were the main source of frustration - and it was widely believed that Iraqi army and police forces were active participants in the planning and execution of the insurgent IED campaign. The longer one stayed in Iraq, the less trust and goodwill was extended to the Iraqis. Frederick does an excellent job in tying together the "big picture" with the day to day activities of the first platoon, that will eventually result in the rape and murder of an Iraqi family. Frederick lays out this sordid crime in detail. It was this rape/murder, coupled with the significant breach in security and lack of supervision that shortly thereafter resulted in the "abduction" of the three soldiers from the first platoon. There was a very well written short article by former lieutenant Frederick Downs called "Death and the Dark Side of Command" that

was published in Parameters some twenty years ago. Frederick's work Black Hearts just reinforces in greater detail Downs' earlier observation that some soldiers in the U.S. Army are deceitful, untrustworthy, malcontents, criminal in conduct, and even psychopathic in personality. It is the responsibility of the chain of command to identify and separate these persons at the earliest opportunity. Clearly, the battalion and company chain of command failed to provide the proper leadership needed during the deployment. First platoon B-1/502 was in many respects a disaster just waiting to happen. It finally happened one day in March 2006 when this dysfunctional unit went badly off-course. I found Black Hearts to be military writing of the highest order. One of the best books to come out of the Iraq war to date. Anyone interested in small unit leadership will want to read this book.

This is a good book to tell the story of First Strike and the events surrounding the rape of the 14 yr old Iraqi girl, Abeer. It is also a story of mismanagement that goes all the way to the top and Rumsfeld's saying you go to war with the army you have when it was obvious we were not using all of our army. Instead the troops were told to do more with less. This does not excuse misconduct and rape/murder. As usual these were crimes of opportunity. When this story first came out, Green was portrayed as the leader and instigator of the crime. He participated for sure especially in the murders but the initial rape idea was not his. Also, the initial stories portrayed the Army as trying to cover this up. That is not true. And these impressions sold by the media are corrected in this book.

Clear a violent region near Baghdad in a country whose linkages have been destroyed by our invasion. ethnic tribal hatreds abound, and the soldiers quickly descend into hatred of all locals leading to abuse and ultimately a vile atrocity which lies at the heart of the story. But the ultimate madness is the decision to invade in the first place setting in motion a chain of events that leaves 20 something's with terrors that will understandably haunt them as long as they breathe. Their experiences were in the words of one soldier like going to the mailbox daily having to do this when there is a 1 in 4 chance it, the mailbox will blow up. --And never knowing when. George W Bush and his minions who foisted the Iraq debacle upon us should be forced to read this powerful book of what their folly has caused

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