



The Lieutenant Don't Know: One Marine's Story of Warfare and Combat Logistics in Afghanistan

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In our wars since 2001, the term "front line" has lost its meaning. Our opponents have not been able to stand against conventional forces in battle, and resort to guerrilla tactics, engaging our forces with IEDs and ambushes. Into this mix of behind-the-lines attacks, combat logistics have played a larger role than ever.

In Afghanistan particularly, the long convoy routes have been vulnerable to the same kind of surprise attacks suffered by the Soviets in past decades, the British 150 years ago, and Alexander the Great 2,000 years ago. In that godforsaken landlocked land, the means to supply a Western army has to be undertaken with blood and sweat, once the quick panacea of airpower is overtaxed.

When he joined the Marines, Jeff Clement was not a high-speed, top-secret recon guy. A logistician instead, he led combat convoys across treacherous terrain in southern Afghanistan through frequent enemy attacks in order to resupply US and British positions. As such he and his vehicles were a constant target of the resistance, and each movement was a travail, often accompanied by thundering blasts as the insurgents paved their way with IEDs. Each movement was fraught with danger, even as each objective had to be met.

The Lieutenant Don't Know provides a refreshing look at the nitty-gritty of what our troops have been dealing with in Afghanistan, from the perspective of a young officer who was willing to learn, and also take responsibility for his Marines in a confusing war where combat was not merely on the "front," but all around.

The Lieutenant Don't Know: One Marine's Story of Warfare and Combat Logistics in Afghanistan Details

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From Reader Review The Lieutenant Don't Know: One Marine's Story of Warfare and Combat Logistics in Afghanistan for online ebook

Marcus Jean-francois says

This was a very good read. I don't hear about this book until my buddy told me about and said he was the gunner for the lieutenant in afghan. Didn't believe him and then he handed me the book. He doesn't talk about his deployment at all and we hang out daily. I don't know Jeff Clement personally but u have worked with several of the Marines he mentions in his book. Great book.

Chad Manske says

Perfect story at the junior (and very important) level of our involvement in Afghanistan. Very readable!

John says

I really enjoyed reading this book. The author strives to provide an easy to read, down-to-earth account of his journey from young Naval cadet to Marine core veteran with plenty of interesting stories along the way. Clement's goal of depicting his story from the perspective of the "average" Marine is quite successful, although contradictory, as the reader discovers that the word average and Marine do not belong in the same sentence. Without accounts like these, the general public would never catch a glimpse of the trials and tribulations that our active and retired veterans have endured, and so I believe that books like these are fundamental if we are to expose the true nature of modern warfare to those who spread dissension from their ivory towers. Additionally, I could relate to the author's use of the title slogan "The Lieutenant Don't Know" repeatedly in order to depict the continual bureaucratic headaches that the common soldiers have to face within their own hierarchal system as they receive orders from higher ups who have never had any field experience. The author also uses this slogan more broadly, as he emphasizes the fact that most soldiers fighting these wars truly do not understand why they are there, except of course to provide "regional stability".

Overall, this book provided just what I was looking for: fascinating stories and details that shed some light on the secret world of the Marines and the war in Afghanistan.

Donna Davis says

Clement is a rough-and-ready type of guy. He comes from a military family, and grows up under the assumption that he will join the US Navy after he graduates. It is something of a shock to the family when he joins the Marines instead.

Most of the books I review are ones I receive free in exchange for a review, and my finger surprised me when it tapped the button requesting a copy of this title from Net Galley. See, I am a Marxist. I never support an imperialist war, which means every war the USA has been involved in since the end of the American

Civil War, and for me, even the horror of 9/11 didn't change that. So why did I want to read a soldier's memoir of Afghanistan?

I hadn't read far, once I received the book, when I realized that part of the hook for me was the journalistic black-out that has been imposed for many years, ever since the flag-draped coffins hit the front pages of local newspapers and everyone rose up for various reasons; some of them were against the war in general, and some were families of the deceased who felt it was disrespectful for their loved ones to be displayed this way. But one way or another, the Pentagon and those who stand behind it decided that this would not be another open-access war; there would be no more photographs of anything that took place in Iraq or Afghanistan in print from even the most mainstream media. It was a giant blow to the First Amendment. And now, though he was required to change a lot of details for security reasons, a Marine lieutenant has come forward to tell us about his experience there. It was as if the wizard had stepped out from behind the curtain; finally, someone was writing about the war.

Many people, especially those of us on the left, get the false notion that the US military wants to round up all of our young men and send them off to fight. It isn't quite like that, at least in this man's experience. From among those who sign up for ROTC, there are those who are culled. Some are tossed for academic reasons; some for physical weakness or unfitness; and others simply aren't team players. And the amount of absolute obedience and conformity that the training requires leaves no room for the free thinker, that's for sure. Either you do it, or you're out!

I had never heard before of someone who genuinely loved every minute of his training experience. I think that part of that mindset has to be a really strong physical constitution; people who get sick easily just can't do this. But a large part of it is also the culture, the stories that are handed down by the family, and the things he isn't supposed to ask about. I have had friends from military families also, and I recognize common traits among them: they are reliable, punctual, and they don't whine. Clements comes across readily as one of them. But he is a natural. He works hard, takes responsibility, and passes with flying colors, though the tale is told with a certain humility in which he owns his mistakes and laughs about some of them, lightening the overall tone.

When he is asked why he prefers to be a military engineer (in charge of logistics, so that he is out in the field with the men rather than driving a desk), he says that his skill set points toward engineering or teaching, and he does not want to teach. As a retired teacher, I could only grimly nod, and think, "So this is what it's come to. Men would rather go out in the desert and get shot at than deal with the current climate in teaching."

Long after bin Laden has been found and is dead, US forces continue to serve in the most maddening of conditions. Everything there seems to be in short supply. Nobody has a truck, and if they do, it runs badly; after all, trucks were designed for roads, not sand. Nobody can drive anywhere other than behind a minesweeper, because incendiary devices are planted anywhere and everywhere, or nearly so. Open desert is scary to cross because an attack could come from anywhere anytime, and just what will the convoy hide behind? But hills are worse, because gunners may hide behind them, and they too can conceal horizontal exploding devices. And while traveling in a large convoy, often speeds are limited to 3-5 miles per hour. Twilight is the Taliban's favorite time to attack, but it is almost impossible to get anywhere at these speeds without having to travel during that time. If someone shoots at you, you aren't allowed to shoot back unless you can see them; nothing creates an international incident faster than deaths due to friendly fire among allies. All you can do, when shots come out of nowhere, is run, and sometimes, that is at the speed of a walk.

But it has to be done. The village must be secured.

Clement has a gift for story, and the wisdom to let his experience gel to where he could write about what he did and saw with a measure of professional distance. He engages, but does not rant. It's a good book, well paced and organized, with some (approved) photographs to further enlighten the reader.

What is it that "The Lieutenant Don't Know"? The phrase is mentioned early in the text, but not fully explained till the end of the book, and it is done with the care and precision of an accomplished writer. You'd better order a copy right now, because not just anyone can explain it the way Clement can.

Kelsey Moore says

I had a unique perspective on this book because I know the author. It was a great insight to convoy operations in Afghanistan, a place I know well but I had no idea what it was like for the Marines on the road.

Melissa says

This is a highly readable, well-told story. So many current war memoirs are from infantry Marines or Navy SEALs or Army Special Forces, but Lieutenant Clement's experience in combat logistics was no less dangerous, arduous or important to the overall war effort than theirs. It was both refreshing and interesting to read about a completely different aspect of the fight. He is passionate about his men and paints a detailed picture of the day-to-day operations of commanding a miles long convoy driving 3-5 miles per hour.

Wally Beddoe says

In "The Lieutenant Don't Know", Marine Lt. Jeff Clement of Combat Logistics Battalion 6, provides a gripping and descriptive view into navigating the hostile and challenging terrain of North Helmand Province in Afghanistan where the supply routes between the main base Camp Leatherneck, and the various remote outposts were described as either 'bad' or 'worse'.

A Combat Logistics Battalion is responsible for keeping forward operating bases within a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) supplied with fuel, water, and other critical supplies as well as recovering destroyed or blown-up trucks from the field, among other things.

Whump! IED. IED. IED!

Lt. Clement tells of the daily challenges faced by the Logistics Marines where IEDs were commonplace and Rules of Engagement restricted their role 'outside the wire' to a defensive one. Often averaging five miles per hour, their large truck convoys were constant targets of bombs and snipers. However, the lieutenant goes on to explain that "Freedom was outside the wire", contrasting their ability to be decisive and get things done while on the road and under fire was far easier than dealing with the politics and personnel who had no idea of reality outside Camp Leatherneck.

"The Lieutenant Don't Know" is a great read for its insight and straightforwardness. After you read this book, you'll have a renewed appreciation for the Marines serving in logistics capacities. Marines from any era or MOS discipline will appreciate the familiar and timeless hard-charging attitudes and logistical frustrations we all know and love.

Clement writes "Our sense of normal is distorted. I think this is essential to getting our jobs done, but sometimes Marine leaders take this distorted sense of reality for granted. Like when somebody forgets to provide food to Marines in training. "You haven't eaten in 48 hours?" Suck it up! You're Marines! You'll get food when you get there!" or when somebody doesn't plan for some kind of shelter in case there is a huge storm during a parade or ceremony; "You're getting wet, oh well, you're Marines... your amphibious! Suck it up!"

"Why do Marines do whatever they're asked? The lieutenant don't know. The thing is, the Marines will do whatever they're asked. Conditions that would cause a mutiny in the Army or Navy will be accepted by the Marines. Sure, we'll complain... griping is part of who we are. It's when the Marines stop complaining that we have problems."

Know your Marines, know yourself, and know your shit!

Bravo Zulu Lt. Clement! "The Lieutenant Don't Know" now has a permanent spot in my military must-read bookshelf.

Yut! Drive On!

Kellog Mcpussy says

I never thought reading about Combat Logistics could be so interesting. Guess the reader don't know.

T.W. Dittmer says

Great read. Tells the story of our Marines doing the job.

Warren says

Good book about getting the bullets and beans to the 'front lines'

Deb Alwi says

This was an amazing book!!

Lane says

An excellent account of the current action in Afghanistan and the daily life of logistic troops. An easy read with enough details to see the large picture and smaller activities of the lower level troops.
