



The War I Always Wanted: The Illusion of Glory and the Reality of War: A Screaming Eagle in Afghanistan and Iraq

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Growing up in the shadows of the giant B-52 Stratofortresses that thundered away from the nearby Barksdale Air Force Base, Brandon Friedman dreamed of becoming a warrior and defending his country. But dreams of heroism and the realities of war can look very different, and when Brandon joined the army as a second lieutenant in peacetime, he had no way of knowing how his world was about to change.

This is Brandon Friedmans story of coming of age in a world awakening to the horrors made plain on 9/11. With the U. S. Army moving into full-fledged combat operations half a world away against Al Qaeda and their Taliban hosts, Brandon found himself facing an elusive enemy on unfamiliar ground. He tells how, as an infantry platoon leader in the elite 101st Airborne Division, the famed "Screaming Eagles," he and his unit struggled to find their footing in the high valleys of the Hindu Kush while battling radical Islam in operation Anaconda.

A brief respite at their home base in Kentucky, and Friedman and the Screaming Eagles were off to war again, this time in Iraq. In this gripping memoir of a young soldier learning the hardest lessons of combat, we see the terrors and disillusion of war as the insurgency in Iraq spirals out of control. And we see the true valor of character emerging under fire.

The War I Always Wanted: The Illusion of Glory and the Reality of War: A Screaming Eagle in Afghanistan and Iraq Details

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Zack says

Loved this book. I read this before deployment because of the title. I had pretty much the same opinion the author had.. I wanted to go to war to fight and kill the enemy. I thought Brandon did a good job telling a story that included deep personal emotions about the things he saw and things he did. One of my top picks.

Eddie McDonough says

Brandon Friedman's The War I Always Wanted is the best post-9/11 war memoir I've read so far. This is probably because, unlike the other memoirs I've read, it reads like a novel. Starting with an intriguing set up, the book bounces back and forth between Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq a year later. In both battles, he sets up scenes that made me feel like I was there. He ends his book well, with a tragic bookend you can't help but see coming, but is still so random that it works. This book enticed me the whole time I read it and is a great book to help understand the feelings and emotions of soldiers.

Sandra McRae says

I've wanted to read this since I read a review of it when it first came out, so over Christmas (a.k.a. "reading season" for this college instructor) I ordered it. It's the kind of book I'll pass around to others...my husband, my retired Col. brother-in-law, my veteran friends. I'd love to discuss it with my vet friends. I may assign it for a class in the future.

I read it to see what Friedman had to say about the debacle of the Iraq war (the last few chapters did not disappoint) and to try to understand his experience which seems similar to many of my veteran students. The emotional tone is kept very low, and I wanted more raw reaction. It's not there. But that's part of the story. I will say the limbo he goes through as he is discharged and prepares to go home is a fascinating window into a rare situation and I felt restless and vulnerable with the narrator. He keeps it together admirably...can't imagine being in that situation--or any of the others he describes in detail. I loved the recurring image of the horse.

From the narrator (Friedman, but actually Friedman's writer self), I wanted more emotional depth and intensity...which sounds weird when you're reading a combat narrative. But like he says, his experience never matched the Hollywood intensity, and that's part of the story. But as a writer, he has room to grow and I hope he keeps writing. It's a tough challenge as a writer to convey numbness and not have the reader numb out as well. I guess I wanted more intense emotion to seep through, so it's maybe a bit underwritten--writing workshops teach underwriting as a default, which is part of the problem with writing workshops. I look forward to more work from Friedman, to see how his style evolves as he breaks the rules he has learned so far.

Jake says

I really liked the book. Stylistically, it reminded me a lot of Catch 22 and Slaughterhouse-Five. Lt. Friedman is a good writer and just goofy enough that an effete New Yorker like myself can relate. Handles big themes about chance, life, and the tolls of war very well. Great movie references.

Terri says

For its clever simplicity and candid honesty, I class *The War I Always Wanted* as one of the best books set in the Middle East theatres that I have ever read.

It is not a brutal honesty or an emotional rollercoaster like many of the intense books written on these wars, but it is as honest and memorable.

Brandon Friedman, who served as an LT in the 101st Airborne and did tours in Afghanistan and Iraq during the early years, tells a clever story. He is not afraid to tell it how it is. He is not afraid to be politically incorrect and admit that he wanted the wars, wanted to fight in them. As the book progresses he is not too proud or buttoned up to admit he was wrong to think that way in the first place. Seeing what he saw in Iraq, he lost complete and utter faith in his government.

He felt that in Afghanistan they might be fighting the good fight, however in Iraq, the waste of human life overcame him and he began to realise that it was not worth it. What threat had Iraq posed that warranted so much pointless death and destruction?

The authors own sentiments;

"Four words: *Weapons of Mass Destruction*. Five more words: *What a bunch of shit*"

And that is why I loved this book and it will go down in history as one of my favourites, for the humour and for the honesty. As an Australian I put much worth in both of those things and I could not help but genuinely like this guy.

Boozy says

Although I don't agree with his overall views on the war, he did bring the dualities of trying to both want to escape from the terribleness of war yet still finding himself drawn to it and the associated feelings of coming back and finding that he no longer fits in society. An excellent introduction into the mindset of today's soldier.

E.D. Martin says

I am a reader. A thinker. I need to get inside someone's head to understand what they went through, need them to tell me the details. And that is what Friedman was able to do. I've watched countless movies - both fiction and documentaries - about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, yet this was more real to me than anything I've seen.

I think that everyone should be required to read this book, to know what our soldiers are going through over there. Whether you agree with our reasons for the war or not (and I don't), our soldiers are psychologically fucked up from their experiences, and the least that we owe them is the attempt to understand as best we can what they went through.

Alejandro Pelaez says

We South Americans tend to distrust our governments easily. For us it is difficult to understand how Americans took so long to realize what a BS Irak war was despite the evidence (or perhaps lack of it). Politics aside, I think this book is great for understanding the psicological toll a guerilla warfare takes for soldiers in a populated environment. This is how post cold war era combat looks like with no clear enemy. I think the lessons learned (and clearly taught in this book) had a big impact on foreign US policy which apparently came to understand that no matter how good willed boots on the ground are, they will always be an occupation force, break things, and generate rersistence sooner than later. It was a wake up call to the naivete of "unlimited power". All of this told with the simple unassuming stance of a 20 something, which make it a light reading, despite of the density of the subject.

Tasha says

A fantastic read. Friedman writes honestly and with no bullshit about his experiences during Anaconda and the early invasion/insurgency in Iraq. What grabbed me most were his writings about his personal and emotional experiences during the wars he fought, not the bravado and the maneuvers. While there is not a lot of detailed physical action in the story, there is a lot of internal, emotional action well worth the read. He writes with humor at times and his writing is wonderfully easy to get into, it grabs you right from the start. This is an open, personal account of one soldier's experiences and his evolution from an innocent soldier into a war veteran and all it's trappings. While as a civilian, I'll never fully understand what it's like to be a soldier/veteran, Friedman gives me a glimpse into what it is like and makes me appreciate these brave men and women even more.

Mike says

Don't read this one for battle scenes, famous tactical engagements or overall conduct of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. You won't find that here. You will find a fine story of a young lieutenant who finally gets to go to the "big game" and comes to realize war is hell. He is only involved directly in one gunfight in the two wars he goes to. He is involved in Op Anaconda in Afghanistan and the initial invasion and early occupation in Iraq. His description of fear before and intense focus during deployment to the battle is excellent. Well worth reading for his description of the insertion by helicopter into the Anaconda area. Also for the frank discussion of general confusion and ignorance at the platoon level of what is going on and what the objectives are. He brings a highly critical view of the Iraq war into the story and that is fine, he was there. What brought the book down to 3 Stars from 5 Stars is his complaint that the US forces became savages as the Iraq occupation continues...yet he sees soldiers of his unit posing by a dead insurgent from his firefight and he does nothing to stop it. And I did not agree with his assessment of the US as "Amrika", i.e., he comes to view the US the way the Iraqis do.

James says

Great. Like some other recent memoirs from Americans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, this book captures both the youthful energy, idealism, enthusiasm, and naivete with which the author went to war and the grief, weariness, and mixture of validation and disillusionment with which he came back, as well as the difficulties of readjusting and trying to cope with the emotional burdens he carried home. The author is highly insightful, wise beyond his years, and also both courageous and articulate in sharing his thoughts and feelings, even when he isn't sure how they'll be received. Based on this book, this is a man I respect and admire and would like to know.

Michael Flanagan says

This book had me engaged from the first page. The author also uses flashback so well in this book not what I call an action packed book but a great read all the same. At the end of the book I was still wanting more.

Michael Kelley says

Could have been better

Nicole says

I've read many books about the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, but this is the first I've read where the author/soldier seemed so mentally unprepared for war. That is not a criticism of Brandon Friedman. It's a statement regarding how movies and television can create this skewed perception of reality. I found the honesty of the book refreshing. Friedman did not hold back when talking about his fear and how so much of what he did felt pointless and wasteful and how, after his service was over, he knew he would never be the person he'd been prior to combat. It's a very interesting book about service and the war. And I really hope that poor horse made it...

Luis says

Wow what can I say about this book. As you may see by my profile picture, I can easily relate to this book, but even more so, I was in his battalion for the whole Iraq invasion and occupation...So reading this book was like reliving perhaps the most memorable year of my life. I was a combat engineer in 326 en bat c co of the 101st airborne and STB after the army readjusted into units of actions, and our company permanently became part of 3rd brigade. So basically when the Rakkasans deployed or went to the field for training, we always went with the infantry battalion. I personally arrived to late for Operation anaconda and Afghanistan, but I got to my unit just in time for the invasion of Iraq. I was just 2 days with them and fresh out of basic training and AIT, and I heard countless stories about Operation anaconda and Afghanistan on the way there.

Friedman did an excellent job re-accounting his experience. I really feel his writing style was quite complying, and it was hard to put the book down. My only complaint was I would have preferred his

experiences in Afghanistan and operation anaconda had been completed in the first part of the book instead of him re-accounting it through flashbacks later on in the book. His re-accounting of Iraq and the major events that 1-187 experienced while there were very accurate as I can attest to that. His point of view of the war was also expressed quite brilliantly IMO , and I have to admit as a fellow vet, I agree with most of his point of view. Most of his opinion of the war hit home very hard. I found myself feeling the same way as he did many times. Not just his opinion of war, but his view of it before being a combat vet. His description of his illusion of going to war and being a hero or seeing a bunch of action was quite identical to my view of it before I went to Iraq, and then realizing it is quite a different thing than you first envisioned. He also provided an excellent account on all the anti-climatic missions which turned to great disappointment. Can not overstate how accurate this was for many operations, but at least, I was a combat engineer...So while he was going on anti-climatic raids in Baghdad, I was rolling through Baghdad blowup UXOs which was quite fun lol, but he was right on point with this part of the book. Also, his account of basically "taking it easy" in Tal-fare until the death of two soldiers from mortar platoon was excellent. The mortar platoon were our neighbors in the fort we stayed at, and I watched those guys unload their dead buddies. It was tough to watch, and I knew our deployment from that day on was not going to be the same...and it wasn't. His explanation of these event, and the emotions the battalion felt was excellent. Overall, I felt how he expressed his experience was well written. It has caused me to reflect and re-evaluate on my time there deeply since I have finished reading the book(as to why I gave it 4 stars), and I have found he was able to express in words the very similar emotions or no emotions (desensitized soldiers;indifferent, non-emotionally state) I felt when there. To put it very simply...If someone were to ask me for a detailed story of my experience in Iraq, I will lead them to this book.
