



# The Heart and the Fist: The Education of a Humanitarian, the Making of a Navy SEAL

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**The Heart and the Fist: The Education of a Humanitarian, the Making of a Navy SEAL** Eric Greitens THE HEART AND THE FIST shares one man's story of extraordinary leadership and service as both a humanitarian and a warrior. In a life lived at the raw edges of the human experience, Greitens has seen what can be accomplished when compassion and courage come together in meaningful service.

As a Rhodes Scholar and Navy SEAL, Greitens worked alongside volunteers who taught art to street children in Bolivia and led US Marines who hunted terrorists in Iraq. He's learned from nuns who fed the destitute in one of Mother Teresa's homes for the dying in India, from aid workers who healed orphaned children in Rwanda, and from Navy SEALs who fought in Afghanistan. He excelled at the hardest military training in the world, and today he works with severely wounded and disabled veterans who are rebuilding their lives as community leaders at home.

Greitens offers each of us a new way of thinking about living a meaningful life. We learn that to win any war, even those we wage against ourselves; to create and obtain lasting peace; to save a life; and even, simply to live with purpose requires us—every one of us—to be both good and strong.

## The Heart and the Fist: The Education of a Humanitarian, the Making of a Navy SEAL Details

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## **From Reader Review *The Heart and the Fist: The Education of a Humanitarian, the Making of a Navy SEAL* for online ebook**

### **Winnie says**

Eric Greitens' *The Heart and the Fist* is an autobiography of his humanitarian work around the world, life-changing events that shaped him into the man he is today. Beginning with his freshman year at Duke University, the book is set in a number of places in chronological time periods when he discovered his passion for helping people in need. Initially wanting to make a difference in the world through various volunteer works, Greitens traveled to places like Bosnia, Rwanda, and Bolivia, where he heard and witnessed firsthand accounts of the horrors people faced, yet he saw they still had hope. However he soon came to realize that the change he envisioned would never be achieved through simply coming to peoples' aid after a tragedy had struck, and therefore found himself enlisting to become a U.S. Navy SEAL. His book discusses a life of learning through service, which teaches the most powerful yet simplest of life's lessons.

One of the most memorable moments was when Greitens traveled to Rwanda to help as a volunteer during the genocide. In a refugee camp, Greitens took a young boy with a badly infected cut in his ankle, who had already been turned down once by the camp nurses, back to the medical tent. He was appalled by the fact that after enduring so much to get to the camp, the boy could not receive the most basic help and was even turned away. After the nurses cleaned the wound, the boy returned back to his friends, and then they all began to dance around Greitens and sing. A Rwandan aid worker explained to him, "They are singing 'thank you' for what you did." It was a simple act of thanks, yet the raw genuineness of it was incredible in such a cruel situation. If it weren't for Greitens the boy probably would have died from the preventable cause, like many others in the camp.

Through *The Heart and the Fist* I learned a lot about some of the many global problems affecting the world, from the genocide in Rwanda, to the terrorism in Kenya and Afghanistan, and to the effects of Communism in China. It really broadened my view of the world and made me realize just how disconnected I was with the life outside the little bubble I call home. I became educated about the insane, rigorous training to becoming a Navy SEAL, and also the various organizations set to improve the lives of the suffering in third world countries.

This is one of those extraordinary books that leave you feeling that there is hope for a better future. Initially, I was appalled by the brutal reality that was described, thinking that the situation was beyond saving. However during these hardships it was touching to see people offer their hands to help, volunteers, humanitarians, soldiers, and in spite of everything, the victims of these horrors still had hope, signifying the prevalence of humanity through times of dread.

Ultimately, the story of Eric Greitens' life teaches us the importance of caring for others, staying true to yourself, and never losing hope even when the situation seems unsalvageable. It all adds up to a tale of compassion and duty, a powerful story that teaches us the morals of a true warrior. *The Heart and the Fist* tells the story brilliantly, inspiring us to live our lives with a truly meaningful purpose.

This book was hands-down amazing, from his witty, humorous remarks to his honorable decisions, I would definitely recommend this book to anyone. Greitens' story teaches you incredible life lessons to live by and truly inspires you to strive to do positive things. He had seen and experienced so much at such a young age, and it's interesting to follow the evolution of his view on the world as he matures throughout the book. With each story filled with adventure and sentimentality, he keeping you wanting to know more about his travels and his work, both as a volunteer as well as a Navy SEAL, demonstrating the delicate balance between the heart, and the fist.

## **Camille says**

{July 2016 book club selection} I was really impressed with Eric Greitens and his attitude and accomplishments. It was interesting to read about his varied experiences in humanitarian work, in Navy SEAL training (I can't believe people voluntarily put themselves through that!), and in his active-duty deployments. He obviously has a really good heart and seems to have great leadership capabilities. I was especially touched by his focus on service and action--the way he always sought to get to know those around him and help them focus on their strengths and being the best they could be.

I see great value in this observation offered towards the end of the book: "I knew from my experience working with Bosnian refugees and Rwandan survivors that those who found a way to serve others were able to rebuild their own sense of purpose, despite all they had lost. I knew from my time in refugee camps and my time working with children of the street that to build a new life in the face of great challenge, what mattered was not what we gave them, but what they did." Of course, this doesn't mean that we can't or shouldn't help people, just that we should keep in mind that what helps them the most is finding their own strength and sense of purpose. That kind of aid (helping people find strength and purpose) sometimes takes more time and effort on our part than giving food or money, but it's what seems to be the most effective in the long run. Greitens applied this principle in starting his foundation for wounded veterans, looking for ways to help them find new purpose so they didn't focus solely on what they had lost.

In the preface, Greitens talks about what he learned from both humanitarians and military co-workers around the world. He says, "They've shown me that it is within our power, and that the world requires of us - of every one of us - that we be both good AND strong. I hope that the stories recounted here will inspire you, as these people have inspired me. They have given me hope, and shown me the incredible possibilities that exist for each of us to live our one life well. For each of us, there is a place on the frontlines." I think Eric Greitens is a great example of how one person can make a difference. He has inspired me to try to be better.

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## **Tony Taylor says**

What a great book! I love it when I can go from one great book to another, and so it happens again as I read Eric Greitens' "The Heart and the Fist: The Education of a Humanitarian, the making of a Navy SEAL." This guy is the best of the best in many ways... he knows how to live a great life and he does it... he has been doing it since he was a kid.

Here is a guy who pretty much knew what he wanted to do since college. As a young man he was already traveling the world ready to give something of himself and of his time while working with refugees in trouble-spots in Africa and in Croatia, and later as a volunteer in Mother Teresa's home in Calcutta, India. He worked with lost children in Bolivia and gave them hope, and, along the way, he became a Rhodes Scholar where he had the time to study and read within a unique academic environment while he considered his options as to "what's next?". In the end he had the option to stay on at Oxford to teach, or to make a bundle of money working for a Fortune 500 company.

But instead he took a totally unexpected turn: he joined the Navy and became an officer with one purpose in mind: to become a Navy SEAL. He describes in well-written detail his six months of basic SEAL (BUD/S) training and how he became one of only 21 men out of the initial 220 men to complete the course and to go on to become a Navy SEAL. He served in Afghanistan, in the South Pacific, in Africa, and in Iraq, and when

his time as a SEAL was over he was ready to accept even greater challenges. He wanted to help fellow wounded and disabled warriors serve their country again; this time using their military leadership skills as civilian leaders in their own communities. Eric went on to establish his own humanitarian agency for these warriors: *The Mission Continues*.

So as I said above, what a great story! How can you help but to admire a man such as this who not only keeps himself in top physical condition (he was also a boxer before he was a SEAL), but who also excelled in academics and in life... a man of great inner strength who still continues to be focused on everything he does whether to better himself or to help others?

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## **Sue says**

I have little understanding of the glories of war, and I admit to not understanding those who choose to join the military. Furthermore, warriors are rarely among the people I admire most. So when I heard about this book, I hoped I'd get some insight into what draws people to those choices. Eric Greitens had a first-rate education and several high-powered career options, and he chose to become a Navy Seal.

The first half of this memoir showed us a youth devoted to learning and serving, and it was underwritten by his conviction that we, the United States, were often late with our aid to refugees, when force and intervention early on would have done more good. He was an idealistic young man who spent summer vacations working with refugees and victims of violence. His exposure to some of the saddest victim stories of our time – Rwanda and Bosnia – offered a powerful argument for his growing feeling that fighting for good was an honorable choice.

But, but, but... I kept thinking. How does a government even with the greatest concern for human rights always know when to intervene? Never mind that usually we are far more concerned with our national interest (meaning — often — oil). His youthful conclusion seemed naïve if well intentioned.

But he leaves his youth behind. Cut to his decision to join the Seals after an idyllic period as a Rhodes Scholar. He undergoes brutal training, and he goes to hot spots across the globe. This is no ordinary man. He's smart, he's strong, and he's brave. And the naivete gives way to a more nuanced approach to foreign intervention. He comes to believe that we could not succeed in a place like Iraq, for example, without better understanding of how to relate to the people of the country. He's the kind of person I want our military to have in troubled places, and today he's working with war wounded to give their lives new meaning.

So do I have a better understanding of those who choose the military? Truthfully, Eric Greitens was always a warrior. Even in college, he wanted to test himself, so he trained as a boxer – not your basic intercollegiate sport. So it wasn't just a philosophical decision; there was something inside him, driving him to meet physical and competitive challenges. I'm still not sure I get it, but I've read a truthful account of a man who cares for humanity and is more willing than most to fight for it.

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## **Michael Cogdill says**

Eric Greitens, I pray the narrative of your life shadows and inspires mine until my final day.

Readers, harvest the wisdom of this book. Feast on it. Eric Greitens transcends the jingoism and railing identity politics that tend to invade our national discourse. Instead, he proves that an unimpeachable heart for humanity and the stoutest mettle of a serviceman are not merely compatible, they are essential to one another.

This is the writing of a Rhodes Scholar and a great American warrior and a humble soul at once. To a world of those who preen themselves with tiny accomplishment, vaunting the self rather than serving another, Greitens sounds out a reminder that our legacies are made of great sacrifice, endurance, radical kinds of love, all cloaked in a humility that continues to call that legacy downward, as long as we're drawing breath, to find still more struggling human lives we can better with our own.

Read this expecting to be changed, elevated at the spirit (and in the gym by the time you get halfway through his recollection of Hell Week). Greitens is a transformative American truth teller who has seen some of the hardest parts of the world. His experience of humanity's ability to drill into poverty and despair and find greatness is on the clearest display.

Gift this book. To the men and women who wear the uniform of the United States, give it as a gift from a man who chose to endure the toughest training in the U.S. military to make himself an even more extraordinary American servant to the world. To college students, grant this book as an inspiration to the heart and mind. To the despairing, the cynic, the railing pessimist, give this book as an antidote. I believe it holds power to treat the affliction of believing and assuming that defeat is inevitable, that nature of the self is our calling, and that service is for someone else.

And then there's the gratitude narrative, quietly woven into the prose. To read this book is to bow in thanksgiving for the American ideal and the full potential of the American experience in lives around the world. The book is a calling, a chiming to our souls, leading us beyond our comfort to the full and ironic happiness that breaks out in serving the world, with intelligence, the sharpest insight and a warrior's love that wins hearts and minds. It reveals how truly well a life can go, and that each of us carries a greatness within, a greatness in waiting, eager to make itself the writing instrument that marks our legacies on hearts and minds.

Greitens, thank you! I salute you for your service, as a SEAL and as an American who stands for the highest American, and deeply human, ideals. Thank you for all you're doing to inspire the world to live magnanimously.

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## **Jacqueline J says**

A very worthwhile read. This is not a gungho description of military action but is the story of a man's personal experience as a humanitarian and a US Navy SEAL. The gist of his story was not so much an autobiography but a story of a journey to understanding. The author as a young man travels the world doing humanitarian work and begins to understand that helping after the fact is not the answer but that the horrible acts of man that lead to the necessity of humanitarian aid need to be stopped before they happen. That is the reason that he becomes a SEAL. The author explains his philosophy of ways that humanitarians and the military alike could make changes and be better at both ends of the dilemma. During the course of the book, he also illustrates what it means to be a man whether he intends that message or not.

This is a book that anyone who is searching for some way to serve, to have an impact on the world, to achieve something important with their life would benefit from reading. I believe that a person searching for such meaning could come away from this book with a reinforced commitment to finding their personal mission and following after it.

As to the book itself, it was well written and easy to read. Each episode was interesting and full of details that made the episodes easy to visualize. It did not bog down anywhere and the reader got a very broad view of the different types of humanitarian efforts that go on in the world as well as a very good overview of what the SEALs and other special operations soldiers do.

This book was provided for me free for review from the publisher.

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### **Andrew says**

This book isn't and doesn't attempt to be a great work of literature, but it's far more about content than form. It resonated very strongly with me personally and has a lot to say about questions I've grappled with on war, peace, justice, aid, violence, and the impact one person can make through their choices.

The author is a pretty incredible guy - boxer, Duke grad, Rhodes Scholar, aid worker all over the world, Navy SEAL, founder of a nonprofit that asks wounded veterans to continue serving their community and country, rather than merely asking them to accept our thanks and charity. It's all in the balance -- he asserts that doing the right thing requires both titular body parts -- and it's inspiring.

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### **Bruce says**

Although the book was rather uneven (at times), the message shone through very clearly. I was just so taken by the author's humanitarian inclinations. Yet, so that he could not easily be categorized, he is also a warrior (Navy Seal), articulate, well educated and well-read. He is truly the prototypical renaissance man, one whom I admired greatly as I made my way through the book. Given his educational background, he could have very easily chosen to make large sums of money in the corporate world upon his graduation from college. Yet he chose the humanitarian path and then, later, to fight for our country. He is currently the founder of an organization that helps to assist our wounded veterans to get back on their feet. When you've had your fill of the type of bad behavior that is unfortunately newsworthy these days, read this book. If you're like me, you will be (and feel) better for the experience. This book is highly recommended.

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### **Mary says**

I was awestruck by the amount of "phronesis" (practical wisdom), that Dr. Greitens has gained through his rich experiences in his life. Wow! I believe some people are born with great gifts and Mr. Greitens would fall into that category. In my mind, it has always been a difficult tension between the need for humanitarians and those that carry the sword to protect our freedoms. Truth be told, I've learned you can be both. I love the following two quotes from the book:

First, "I'd learned that all of the best kinds of compassionate assistance from Mother Teresa's work with the poor to UNICEF's work with refugee children, meant nothing if a warlord could command a militia and take control of the very place humanitarians were trying to aid. The world needs many more humanitarians than it needs warriors, but there can be none of the former without enough of the latter."

Second, "The world, I believe is not constructed so that it presents us with perfect choices. I'd joined the military in part, because I saw that to protect the innocent, we have to be willing to fight. It is also true,

however, that for all the warrior's discipline, when we pick up the sword, innocents will suffer."

Click! After many years of humanitarian work, leadership positions, and concerns about war, I now get "it." Thank you for the epiphany and an awesome read. Best wishes to you and your foundation's future success. Brilliant.

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### **Owen says**

I read Eric Greitens book, *The Heart and The Fist*. He is cooler than anyone you know. He has lived a better life than most people you know. Worse for me, my path now seems like a poor imitation of his- he got his PhD from Oxford, on a Rhodes Scholarship after years of going to terrible places and doing wonderful things. Then he joined the Navy SEALs and did some hella-cool stuff (though as a Marine, you would expect me to like the SEAL stuff more than the humanitarian aid. Or just as a boy). To borrow from Bill Simmons, I am the homeless man's Eric Greitens. I mean, the guy is impressive but it did demoralize me. He did lots of cool stuff, though.

He did talk at length about why people quit SEAL school. He remembered that the largest amount of people quit while they were waiting for training events. he also said he thought it was easier to go through as an officer because you had so much to do, you didn't have time to worry about how much longer Hell Week would be. While I did not (and never will attempt to) do Hell Week, I understood. At OCS (Marine OCS is apparently significantly more intense than Navy OCS judging by his description) it was the waiting that broke people. the guys who couldn't physically cut it were gone by week 5 (of 10). After that it was all mental. I actually used the same strategy as him- meals. Just survive to the next meal. It worked very well for me. I thought it was because I really liked to eat. He said the largest amount of people who dropped did it while they were waiting to do something in the water at night. They had to wait for the sun to go down, so they stood on the beach. And people quit, terrified. They were watching a sunset on Coronado Island! Sure, things were about to get much worse than almost any human could endure, but they'd already done worse. His point was that letting fear take control is what finishes people, what breaks them. his method was to survive small pieces and not get overwhelmed. Great idea... but the big things look awfully scary sometimes. I guess it's nice to know that Navy SEALs sometimes survive training the same way I do.

This is a good book by a singularly incredible human being. Well worth the read.

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### **Mike says**

WTF happened with this guy? Found the book preachy but had a lot of respect for someone who chooses the hardest road when he joins the Navy and completes SEAL training. He said SEAL training tests the soul but doesn't clean it. A real disappointment to see what he has turned out to be.

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### **Maureen says**

3.5 stars. This book started off a little slow - talking about the author's early years and introduction to/ awareness of the the scale of global problems. While the writing felt a little clunky at times, overall this was a fascinating look into the world of Eric Greitens. I think his background as a humanitarian aid worker and academic before becoming a Navy SEAL brought a deeper level of philosophical exploration than one would

expect in a military memoir. I think the arguments he makes for strength and caring combined is certainly a thought provoking and compelling one. How can a humanitarian really help improve the lives of the poorest of the poor if warlords or terrorists are waiting around the corner to rob, rape and pillage? How can military alone support the rebuilding of lives and communities, when they lack the relationship building skills and local knowledge necessary to such efforts? These are hard situations without good solutions, but the author's thoughtful exploration of his own story and motivations was inspirational and at times, heartbreaking. Recommended for anyone interested in global aid work, Navy SEALs, military ethics

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## Jeff says

Let us assume about *The Heart and the Fist's* author, Eric Greitens, what he would have us assume: That he is a courageous and worthy warrior for American values abroad, just the sort of person we want to be "the tip" of the American "spear" in the world. The question, obviously, is whether we want our "tip" pointed in the world's direction, and here we're reminded that, fashioning himself a classicist, the Rhodes Scholar Greitens invokes the value of *phronesis* to the effect it "allows soldiers to fight well and leaders to rule well." Socrates critiques Athenian democracy, that is, for its educating citizens in a mishmash whereby rulers don't study the good, soldiers defend the state who have been allowed to read Homer, and farmers cultivate needs greater than the land that sustains them. Greitens is the warrior would-be politician, unfortunately, but that's not this book's problem. His resume (four summer fellowships from Duke to the world's crisis zones; Oxford PhD; SEALs; tours in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Kenya, Iraq) is a spear pointed at the soul's target; yet his family circumstances are modest, a middle class Creve Coeur (St. Louis) upbringing. His talent gave him opportunities, and it's in his interpretation of himself and his unmarked privilege that he's a bother. The bother is complex. Greitens reads himself as an innocent, American exceptionalism shining happily on his optimism, his idealism, those things his grace allowed him. At the "heart" of this book's title, a coeur of his family and himself, America extends its privileges. These aren't unreal, just so no one of them hasn't its own logical matrix, its own circumstances, material conditions, misery. "I love American idealism," he writes, "I love the hopeful spirit of Americans endeavoring to shape the world for the better. A lot of times, though, many Americans -- especially those in senior positions in government and the military -- *who have never spent a day working with people who suffer*, can be blinded by the bright shining light of their own hopes" [emphasis mine]. This is one of the rare places in the text where, *phronesis* be damned, the soldier tells the philosopher-ruler off. But in autobiography, working outside the framework of his military and government bosses, Greitens can come to seem as if he's saying "because I work with them, they *must* be suffering." Such is the nature in his sense of his own grace. Its atmosphere of vaunted self-idealization is suffocating to the autobiography -- a mode of writing that emerges, after all, from confession. This book is a self examination-free zone.

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## Steve says

OK, Eric Greitens convinced me he's a smart and good guy with unique ambitions. It sure seems that he impresses those he comes into contact with. In his telling he comes across so uniformly awesome that at times I wished to read accounts from some of his critics, just to get an alternate and more nuanced view. Speaking of nuance, I was surprised to find so little of it in this book from so smart a man with so many diverse experiences. It all just seemed too smooth and shiny. The book has a stories-from-the-front format that above all entertained because of the many truly unusual things Greitens has done, in poor neighborhoods as a humanitarian and in war zones as a military officer. It feels much like the better GoPro camera footage dispersed across the internet. And if you want to get an idea of what Hell Week is like for those trying to become Navy SEALs - here you go. HOOYAH! But after the action and entertainment, the themes and

philosophy Greitens espouses struck me as rather unassuming and simplified. In the end, I didn't find myself inspired or enlightened by some revealed truth - which was clearly Greitens' intent. What I might have found more interesting than his plug at the end of the book for his nonprofit organization would be to know why Greitens left the Navy.

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### **Daniel Namie says**

"The Heart and the Fist" is interesting thus far. A different read from other book about Navy SEALs. Eric Greiten was Rhodes Scholar turned Navy SEAL--that's like a nun turning "tricks" for a living.

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