



Hog Pilots, Blue Water Grunts: The American Military in the Air, at Sea, and on the Ground

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Experience the life of military personal on land, in the air, and at sea and how they prepare for the war or terrorism.

Hog Pilots, Blue Water Grunts: The American Military in the Air, at Sea, and on the Ground Details

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From Reader Review Hog Pilots, Blue Water Grunts: The American Military in the Air, at Sea, and on the Ground for online ebook

Liam says

Three stars is a provisional rating; I have to think about this book a bit more, then hopefully not be too lazy to write a review...

Neil says

I enjoyed reading this book. I thought it was well-written, and did a great job showing how the 'global war on terror' truly is global in nature. The media focuses exclusively on Iraq and Afghanistan, ignoring what the United States is doing in other parts of the world. It held my interest throughout the entire book, and I had a hard time putting it down. It covers a two-to-three year period where the author is embedded in various military units in the Middle East, the Pacific, Africa, Asia, and parts of South and Central America.

It does a nice job of revealing the inner thoughts on various military personnel with whom he interacted over the course of his traveling. There was a lot of humor in the book intermixed with serious subjects. I thought I had a pretty good idea about how the military worked, just from friends, family, and books I have read, but I felt this showed a side I had never seen or known about before. [I know, I know - it was pretty arrogant of me to think I had any kind of idea how the military worked; I won't make that mistake again any time soon.] I thought it had some amazing quotes scattered throughout the book; again, some were serious and some were funny. I enjoyed learning how the soldiers and sailors and airmen thought, though, over the course of the book. He might repeat various stories or quotes from different personnel, but he does so with an intent, a specific purpose in mind [to reiterate what was said, because he felt it was important].

A couple quotes [stories] that stood out to me:

I will fortify the moral high ground. People will attack me with stories about Abu Ghraib and the killing of Filipino civilians a hundred years ago by American troops, actions which I cannot defend. And I will respond that my troops can build a school, or fix a little girl's cleft palate at a MEDCAP [medical civil action program], whereas all the guerrillas of Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah can offer is a suicide vest. I will build my fortress on deeds, because I know that the only force protection I have is the goodwill of citizens. All the guns in the world won't keep an IED from going off. Army Col. Jim Linder of Fort Lawn, South Carolina.

I could have a well-paying job with a company like Dupont, and be home every night. But life is supposed to have meaning. Whenever I'm ready to collapse on the bridge at 3 a.m., I think of the chief's [chief petty officers'] retirement ceremony and the clanging bell that declares, "While others slept, you stood the watch." Navy Ensign Zephyr Riendeau of Colebrook, New Hampshire.

Take Army Sgt. 1st Class Paul Ray Smith of Tampa, Florida, thirty-three, married with two children. He had advanced alone under withering enemy fire near Baghdad airport on April 4, 2003, so that he could man a .50-caliber machine gun atop an armored vehicle and protect his wounded comrades from being overrun. Killed in the process, he was awarded posthumously the nation's highest, rarely bestowed decoration, the Medal of Honor, with his wife receiving the award. This first Medal of Honor in the Global War on Terrorism had drawn only 90 media attentions, though. By comparison, there had been 4,677 media

mentions of the supposed Koran abuse at Guantanamo Bay, and 5,159 of the court-martialed Abu Ghraib guard Lynndie England.

It also talked about how [some of] the Iraqis saw Abu Ghraib: *If you are so serious about security, why did you Americans release prisoners from Abu Ghraib?...Here the words (Abu Ghraib) meant American weakness and lack of resolve, not human rights violations.*

The book is laced with humor, as found in the following:

A soldier quoted as saying, "I married a liberal, but I'm going to take her back to North Carolina, teach her how to shoot, and make a good Republican out of her." This was followed by "There were nods of approval throughout the tent."

Or, another soldier talking about 'heaven': "I know where heaven is and it's Lithuania...The women are beautiful, pagan, with a practical view towards sex. Who says communism was bad? You're working three levels of advantages: you're a foreign male, you're a rich, exotic American, and their men are a bunch of drunken, criminal slob."

I thought it was an enlightening book. The author covers a lot of material, a lot of locations, a lot of good work being done by the US Military around the world. It opened my eyes to what the United States is doing around the world; I had no idea. It was fantastic to read about how the US Military was involved in so many humanitarian missions, in working with other military forces of Third World nations, to build interpersonal relationships with people in other countries. Yes, the missions are two-fold: [1] to help improve the military forces of the host country, and [2] to improve the relationship between the United States and the host country in hopes of working together more in the future and being able to utilize said country for potential future operations. But building relationships with other nations is key and lays the groundwork for future troop movements and operations to take place.

I thought the author made many salient points over the course of the book, especially how the United States needs to develop and continue developing relationships with other countries globally if the United States wishes to remain a global power. Russia and China would be more than happy to displace the United States in terms of international influence. As former allies reject or push aside the United States, the United States is going to be forced to look elsewhere for allies in order to have potential weapons depots and ammo dumps and places for personnel and material to be kept for use at a later time.

I thought the author also made an excellent point that just because a country may or may not turn into a democracy does not mean that that country will remain friendly with the United States. Even if China and/or Russia were to fully embrace capitalism and renounce communism, that does not mean they would cease to be rivals of/with the United States. They would still have their own agendas, their own plans, their own desire for international prominence. They could [would] still be opponents of the United States, seeking to supplant the United States in the eyes of the World. So that is something else the United States needs to consider.

The author also does an excellent job at discussing the need to plan for the 'long term' and not to be so focused on 'immediate results.' Expecting 'immediate results' will only lead to shortsightedness and disappointment, which will lead to bad choices being made by shortsighted civilian leaders. America needs to learn how to look at the 'long ball,' at 'long-term goals' that may take a few Presidencies to come to fruition, so that the United States will be better equipped to continue to survive and even lead in the coming days ahead.

I could go on, but I think I will end it here. It was an excellent book. There is a lot of information in it, and the author presents a strong case for his concerns as well as his thoughts on how the military needs to grow

and develop for future conflicts. I could see myself reading this book again, it is so good. I shall have to look for the author's first book so that I can read that one as well.

As much as I enjoyed this book, over all, I think the thing I liked most about it was that it portrayed the United States military in both a realistic light and a positive light. I am already proud of the men and women in the US military and am in awe of what they have sacrificed for this nation, but this book makes me even prouder of what they have accomplished. I do not know how to adequately describe it, but it stirred something inside of me as I read what the author shared. It truly made me proud to be an American, what with these various men and women representing the Nation as they do, overseas. Corny it may be, but that's how I felt. It is a good book.

Dave says

Revealing in-depth embedded-reporter-type survey of US military operations and personnel around the globe. Published 7 years ago, many foreign situations discussed already are dated, but the they are not the point of this good book. Author is informative on history and local politics and he presents his philosophy on the need for our involvement in so many places.

Erwin says

the military embed travelogue singing the praises of the middle class and the individual soldiers is OK, but the afterward is excellent - definitely a five star review of where the military is today and where it is heading in the future (the empire will fall, China and perhaps India will advance).

it's almost as the author is traveling through the most remote outposts of the empire as he sees the entire mechanism is near an end, and he wants to, in the most friendly and flattering light, document the contribution these folks have made, as the end date for these posts will be coming soon.

Al says

There's more to this book than meets the eye. It starts off innocently (and perhaps a little boringly) as a picaresque recounting of the author's many and continuous embeddings with various of our armed services installations around the world. He discusses the functions of these installations in some depth; his travels involve visits with each of the armed services (Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force), including combat

environments, training of other countries' militaries, humanitarian aid, and just plain watchfulness. He features detailed profiles of various individuals at all levels in the chain of command. Just before you are ready to quit on these stories, though, his real point begins to come through: we have an extraordinarily well-trained, technologically savvy, dedicated, competent, idealistic and diverse military capability serving this country -- and the vast majority of these forces, and what they are doing, we know next to nothing about. One quote: " As I had been seeing on several continents for four years, the overwhelming majority of our deployments are generally not bellicose, not utopian, not a distortion of our values and, to the contrary, are the epitome of halfmeasures: full of compromises with the host nation, as well as recognition on a daily basis of our own limitations. The host nations in question have been overwhelmingly democratic, and have evolved as such over the years, rather than have us impose systems upon them. In many, (if not most) cases, these nations have specifically requested our assistance. Imperfect and pathetic though they might often be, not to assist such democracies would be irresponsible, given our resources and historic responsibilities as a great power."

If you don't feel like wading through the whole book, at least get it out of the Library and read the seventeen page Afterword entitled The Non-Warrior Democracy. Definitely worthwhile.

Peter Tillman says

Good book, even if it's somewhat dated. Kaplan reported on embeds with various American military units, 2004 thru 2006. He's a fine writer, and sympathetic to the warrior culture. As he writes, "America has a first-class, professional military that is respected, even as it is not reflective of society." The richness and density of his reporting is remarkable. Recommended to military, ex-military and those interested in the topic.

David Feinstein says

This is a really good book about the American military and the people who carry out a variety of missions in the service of their country. Kaplan is on globe trotting the globe and getting embedded with a variety of Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force units. His profiles of soldiers bring into focus the diversity and culture of each branch of the military. Kaplan also provides an analysis of what America's mission is in different parts of the globe. It really brings into focus the role of the US in trying to promote security in many far flung countries.

I was about 3/4 of the way through the book when we had a special forces operator due in Africa. It was through this book that I realized that soldier was in one of the same countries Kaplan had visited back in 2003 or 2004.

It's a really good informative book that will keep you engaged.

JoséMaría BlancoWhite says

A fast paced, straight-forward, honest talk on the state of the American military forces spread all over the world, updated until late 2006. Filled with lively analysis and real soldiers' opinions on their reasons for fighting and their viewpoints on country, freedom and life in general. Soldiers' talk and respectful, brilliant on the ground witness by Kaplan make this book -and his previous one- gems of contemporary journalism.

Humor: *"I know where heaven is and it's Lithuania", "The women are beautiful, pagan, with a practical view towards sex. Who says communism was bad? You're working three levels of advantages: you're a foreign male, you're a rich, exotic American, and their men are a bunch of drunken, criminal slobs."*

Humor with a twist of un-PCness from a soldier who had worked in the Texan state prison: *"The death row inmates were easy to deal with -they didn't want to mess up their appeals by attacking a guard. I looked at their case files, though. I'll tell you something: they deserved to die. Texas doesn't bullshit, it executes."*

Here is the real people's talk, not the media-filtered PC babble and elitist preaching of the millionaire liberals. A tour of the world that pampered youths in America should read so they could learn to love their hated America in comparison with other countries like: *"Thai mafias are disciplined. They provide some order and useful intelligence. In the Philippines the government is the mafia, and a poorly run one."*, *"The corruption here, they all agreed, was a perfect fit with China's, whose own criminal networks couldn't wait to extract Filipino girls for prostitution and set up local methamphetamine rings."*

A sensible soldier talks: *"I married a liberal, but I'm going to take her back to North Carolina, teach her how to shoot, and make a good Republican out of her."*, *"There were nods of approval throughout the tent."*

And the Iraqis also talk: *"I like your soldiers. They are poor, simple people. The Army was the only opportunity they had. I can tell that by looking at them. In a way, they are in the same boat as us. They mean well, but what can they do?"*

Another way -the Iraqi way- to look at Abu Ghraib: *"If you are so serious about security, why did you Americans release prisoners from Abu Ghraib?"*, *"Here the words (Abu Ghraib) meant American weakness and lack of resolve, not human rights violations."*

Fairness of the liberal (in Europe it means Socialist) media, you say?: *"Army Sgt. 1st class Paul Ray Smith of Tampa, Florida ... awarded posthumously ... the first Medal of honor in the Global War on Terrorism had drawn only 90 media mentions. By comparison, there had been 4,677 media mentions of the supposed Koran abuse at Guantánamo Bay"*, etc.

And much, much more. A juicy analysis all through. And Kagan can write. He can't write a boring page. And everything calmly, never getting our of tone. Pure journalism is letting the facts and the people do the talk and just bring the picture into scope, not out of scope.

Steve Smits says

Kaplan presents an interesting and thoughtful perspective on the US military in the 21st century. He embedded with a number of units in the Army, Marines, Navy and Air Force over a several year period. His approach is to show how the diverse missions of these units fit within an evolving US global strategy in the post cold war and post 9/11 time. There are two overarching themes of his analysis: positioning the nation to deal with the rising power of China in the Pacific rim and the world and how the military can be used to develop the capacities and cooperation of emerging democracies throughout the third world.

Regarding China, Kaplan shows that our relations with Pacific rim countries like Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines and Nepal have evolved far away from the "big base" large magnitude show of force strategy of the post WWII era. Small units are engaging with joint operations and training programs with these nations aimed in part at cementing their affiliations with the US. This approach is mirrored in other countries like Algeria, Niger, Mali and Georgia.

Another key feature of this new approach is how humanitarian efforts of the military can bring the American presence in positive ways on small (e.g. villages in Algeria) or large (e.g. tsunami relief) scales.

Two other aspects of the military's engagement are notable. The logistics that support the military have changed in scale and approach. Rather than a large footprint for positioning ourselves in countries, we are relying on low key arrangements, often secured and run by civilian "embeds" who know the customs and language of the countries of interest. The second feature highlighted by Kaplan is the depth of competence shown by today's military, particularly the junior officers and NCO's. This beneficial result of the volunteer professional military deserves the attention Kaplan gives it.

On Iraq (his travels cover 2004-2006) there's only one chapter. Kaplan describes the nation-building efforts of Army units around Mosul. Here again, the civil affairs work of the units are admired, although Kaplan is critical of the mistakes of policy makers in wrong-headed decisions and failure to provide sufficient resources for the civil activities of units at the ground level.

There is some deep analysis of the Koreas, the last vestige of the cold war. Kaplan poses some interesting ideas about the interests of the region's countries (China and Japan mainly) in the bellicosity of North Korea and the possible outcomes of events in or by North Korea.

Although now a few years old, this book presents a very different perspective on military strategy than is seen in superficial media coverage. It is pro-military but not in the sentimental ethos of popular media, but rather in the sense of how very competent and committed professionals are working in smart ways to help secure our nation's interests.

Rob Saunders says

An engrossing and informative book about the US role and policies for the US military in an increasingly complex and dangerous world. Kaplan gained behind the scenes access to personnel and strategy by embedding with units in all four major US military branches during various deployments over a period of years between 2002-2006.

Published in 2007 the book is thus dated. Yet I still found value in these snapshots in time. Kaplan's nice mix of historical perspective and boots-on-the-ground vignettes sparkles. The section about the Korean peninsula danger potentialities and clash of interests is a must-read.

Some conclusions that left me wishing for deeper analysis. But overall this was an enjoyable and thought-provoking read. Highly recommended.

James says

This is the sequel to Imperial Grunts and rounds out the tour of the cutting edges of the American military begun in that earlier book. Kaplan researches his work exhaustively both in the writings of others and in

person, and he seems to have logged enough travel to take him around the world a dozen times in the several-year course of writing these two books.

I appreciated the fact that he avoided oversimplifying or showing unbalanced views of the many issues. Kaplan makes no bones about the fact that at the moment, the US is an imperial power. He sees both the dangers in that and the potential to use that power to benefit the rest of the world. In his travels with the men and women who patrol the edges of that empire his respect and affection for them comes through clearly, without the unquestioning, myopic, jingoism of a Tom Clancy. He is bluntly critical about the blunders of Bush and Rumsfeld in Iraq, as he is of commanders who failed in earlier wars like Westmoreland in Vietnam, even as he spotlights the expertise, dedication, and sacrifices of the troops carrying out the missions decided upon far away by men in suits rather than uniforms.

I also appreciated Kaplan's comprehensive consideration of the sociological and geopolitical implications of today's trends and situations, including his speculation about what the world will look like after the American empire fades from primacy like every superpower before it has.

All in all, an excellent read, dense and informative while managing to flow well, useful in light of current events.

John says

I didn't read "Imperial Grunts", but after thoroughly enjoying this second of Mr. Kaplan's trilogy, I may. His writing style is easy and flowing, and he keeps you on the edge of your seat. Current through 2006, the author gives the reader an idea of what modern combat is like, in the air, on and below the sea, and on the ground. Though I'm a veteran, I'm also damned glad that I wasn't embedded with him as he was collecting the data for this book! Gritty. Page turner. Definately recommended.

Chad Manske says

An exceptional book and first hand raw account of the warriors who are doing the work laced with the geopolitical context enveloping that work. No domain is off limits for Kaplan as he relates tales from the foxhole, submarine or cockpit of a B-2 bomber. Easy read with lots of funny stories with an ability to deconstruct common military jargon for the uninitiated civilian audience. I laughed aloud in numerous places as Kaplan gets this work right!

Jeph says

If it is possible to romanticize the United States military, this book does it. Robert D. Kaplan, in the crash journalism style of writing I enjoy, embeds himself with various crews of the four military divisions. He spends time on rifle ranges with the U.S. Marines, experiencing the organized chaos of underway refuelings aboard the USS Benfold, fighting claustrophobia on a nuclear submarine, and base-hopping with the A-10 Warthog pilots of the Air Force.

I expected this book to be a sort of travel narrative that revealed the realities of war, but instead this book

explores the intricacies of enlisted life. If anything, this book is a good insight into military culture, complete with hierarchy, terminology, soldier opinions, motives and experiences. This book would be a good pick for any military aficionado, but seems spiked with an overly patriotic "Support Our Troops" bias. I'm looking forward to trying a few other books along this military narrative line that hopefully won't pull as many punches as Kaplan's "Hog Pilots" does.

Hank says

This is an excellent insight into the life of an American military member executing his/ her duties in an operational theater. Dr. Kaplan weaves the individual experiences into the historical and political context of the mission resulting in enlightening an entertaining descriptions of our military at work. Of particular interest to me were the activities where our folks are quietly successful, outside of the limelight, implementing U.S. foreign policy while creating stability and furthering prosperity around the globe.
