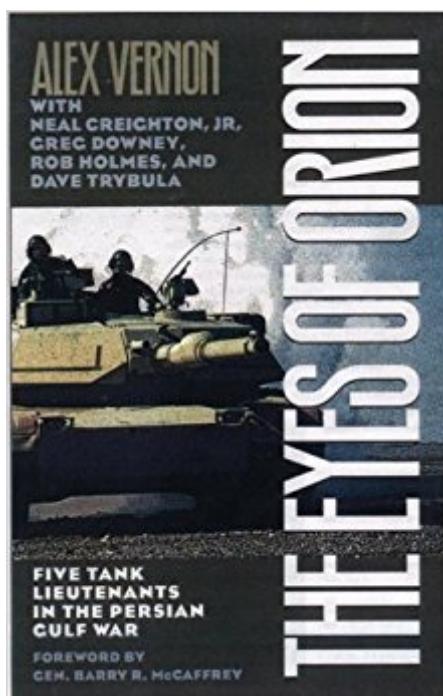


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The Eyes Of Orion: Five Tank Lieutenants In The Persian Gulf War



Synopsis

Winner of the Army Historical Foundation Distinguished Book Award, *The Eyes of Orion* is a highly personal account of the day-to-day experiences of five platoon leaders who served in the same tank battalion in the 24th Infantry Division during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. While professional soldiers and historians will undoubtedly glean much from this narrative, the heart of the account concerns the experiences of the five young lieutenants as they prepared for and served in combat—from their deployment to Saudi Arabia through their six months in the desert training for war, their four days in combat and several weeks of occupation in Iraq, and finally their homecoming. The authors treat their combat experience in Saudi and Kuwait from the perspective of junior officers, all in their twenties and just out of college (four are graduates of West Point and one received his commission through an ROTC program), who served on the front line—facing physical, personal, moral, and leadership challenges.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The single best book on the Persian Gulf War on the market today." -- Military Heritage, October 2000

Winner, 1999 Army Historical Foundation Distinguished Book Award.

A few years after the conclusion of Desert Storm, four veterans of that war decided to get together and write a memoir of their experiences. Eventually they added a fifth member. What distinguishes

them was that all five served as platoon commanders in a single Armor battalion that was a part of the 24th infantry Division. This division conducted the "left hook" campaign where they entered Iraq in the desert, raced to the main Basra - Baghdad roads, and blocked them so the Iraqi Army could not retreat. Four of these Lieutenants graduated in the same West Point class and so knew each other even before the war, and by the time Desert Shield started, they had already been in command of their platoons for almost a year. Nonetheless, they were still relatively junior 2nd Lieutenants who directly led their platoons from the hatch of an M1 tank or from a Bradley fighting vehicle. The period that this book encompasses starts from when the 24th Division went on alert to deploy to Saudi Arabia until they return home to Fort Stewart, Georgia. A final chapter allows each of them to reflect back on their experiences in the intervening six years and update the readers on what happened to them since the war ended. The main parts of the book divide into the activities of Desert Shield; the activities during Desert Storm, and then their reflections. Each of these parts tells its story in a mélange of stories and recollections from each of the five authors intermingled with each other. It is sometimes unclear who is telling what story. However, one of the positive (and very interesting) attributes of this style of writing is that sometimes the same event or anecdote is told from different perspectives and you can try to piece together what really happened yourself. We start with reading about Desert Shield. The five authors deploy to be the initial elements of the U.S. Army in Saudi Arabia with the intention of making the Iraqi forces fight them if they attack into Saudi Arabia. Of course, the authors realize that they are no more than a speed bump to the Iraqi army that was the fourth largest army in the world at the time - while they are only one small Battalion. Nonetheless, they deploy to some points in Saudi Arabia miles away from the border and set up defensive positions. As additional units deploy, they move to a different area where they establish their camps. During this six-month period, they are essentially acclimatizing to the environmental conditions of the Saudi desert and training. This training was much more valuable to them in the end than what they undertook in the U.S. as they kept together as a unit and did not have to deal with the distraction of personnel shifts nor with the myriad other activities that a peacetime army does. As I read these pages, it was clear though that the main enemy they were facing was simple boredom. The lack of information shared with them is amazing. One story they tell is when they perform a training exercise in the desert behind their camp and almost collide with a parked Helicopter unit, since they had no idea they were there! Desert Storm arrives and with it comes the certainty that they will be in the front of the battle line. During the Air War phase, there is nothing much for them to do but they do move forward to an advanced position and the author who leads a Scout Platoon is ordered to take his people and scout out the Iraqi side of the border - moving

forward as much as six miles into Iraq. When the ground phase launches, the whole division races through the desert to attain its various objectives. In the case of the Battalion that we are following, the majority of the time they are moving forward and they only get involved in a single combat situation in the Jalibah Airfield. At this stage, we read each Lieutenant's individual viewpoint. Following this battle, the Battalion continues to move forward, reaches its main objective, and stops there while the initial cease-fire takes place. Individual skirmishes still take place even after the official Cease Fire, but eventually the war is over and the unit quickly repatriates back to Georgia. The stories they tell of the battles, of the various incidents that took place as they were in motion throughout the 100 hours of the ground war, and their different views of it are absolutely fascinating. What becomes abundantly clear is that they are simple little cogs in this huge machine. They do not know much about what they are doing nor why as they are simply told to move to a certain point and deploy in a certain method. Then, once there, move on again to another point, and so forth. The battle on the Airfield from their viewpoint was a sweep across it from one side to the other, shooting at anything that looked like an active Iraqi - whether in a vehicle, or on foot. What is particularly sad, is that each time there are American casualties (with only one exception), those casualties are caused by mistaken identity in the heat of action and are friendly fire incidents. I cannot recall one situation where the Iraqis managed to kill any of the American soldiers. Following the Homecoming come the reflections of the authors. What I found striking here, is that within a very short time from the end of the war, three of the five have left the Army as they were extremely dissatisfied and could not see themselves continuing to serve. A fourth joins them shortly after they start writing this book so that by the time it is published, only one of the five is still in the Army. They each explain their reasoning and it is clear that having experienced combat, being part of a peacetime army is simply not challenging enough for them. This is a shame, as they indicate that they are quite representative of the bigger picture - when a very large percentage of young combat-experienced officers chose to leave and pursue civilian careers rather than stay with an Army that could dearly use their experience. This book was on the U.S. Army's Chief of Staff Reading List to allow junior leaders (like Platoon Commanders) to understand what war is really like in this day and age. While it has its warts, it is still a very important read for anyone who wants to understand what Army life is like during peace and war, and what war is like for a Platoon Commander. You are on the front line, you are shooting at the enemy, but you have a very vague idea of where you are going and why. This book deserves its five star rating for conveying this picture in a very vivid way.

What I liked about this book was how it took you through every stage of a deployment. Starting in Hinesville, GA to the Persian Gulf and back to Hinesville. Too many books these days glorify war stories but this book is more of a deployment story and a story of what a LT is thinking when challenges surface. I am a newly commissioned Armor Officer and this book is helpful. What I did not like about the book was the skipping around from one author to the next without clarity in who is speaking. Another thing is that most of these officers seem awfully proud they went to West Point, it is mentioned in too many of the paragraphs. Not that they shouldn't be proud of having gone there, but they sort of belittle their comrades from OCS and ROTC with their comments.

The attack on the USS Cole came just hours after I had just finished a book on the Gulf War. The book was titled "Eyes of Orion". Its subject was five 23 year old US Army M1 tank/ Bradley Fighting Vehicle commanders' experience during Desert Shield through Desert Storm. Their accounts held no punches and left me feeling on the bounds of horrible that our country had to ask these boys to do this, but happy that they survived. A large portion of the book was dedicated to the 5 months of Desert Shield which in my own terms I could sum up as my own experiences as a US Marine in practically any CAX I participated in at 29 Palms. The desert is a brutal place to live and work. That part of the book was refreshing to remember some of the hardships I had endured. However it was the actual battle that was horrifying. It left me with the impression of some components of our Army as being a group of "I'm not going home til I shoot something". This story doesn't cover tank vs. tank battle with the Iraqi army (however it does cover US Army Tanks Vs. US Army tanks). "IRON SOLDIERS" (Tom Carhart) is the book you want to read if that's what you want. Once the ground war started they were constantly under fire from their own units. In our military there is a special unit assigned to Division level that has radar which can electronically "see" enemy (as well as friendly) artillery firing through the air. It can immediately plot where the rounds came from, send out these coordinates to a counterbattery unit which within moments fires its own volleys on the artillery position the radar had tracked. Too often in these accounts, when an American artillery unit fired, they themselves were fired upon by our own Divisional artillery. And in each major enemy engagement this unit had, there was fratricide, or a serious attempt to do so. The sick part is, after they stopped shooting at the Iraqis (and themselves) they would find the surviving Iraqis with their achilles tendons cut (so that they couldn't desert) and no will to fight at all. It was a great book in the case that it presents. Having read a dozen books on this subject...the others left me with a vision of John Wayne on the Sands Of Iwo Jima, with his helmet strap hanging and throwing his hand high in the air and yelling "follow me!". I am proud of their service, and as well they should be as indicated

in their story. But they do make an excellent point of the emptiness of the way the battle ended without closure. By all means I recommend this book to anyone. It is a fitting account to read for any 18 year old going into Military service. It should tone down an individuals affixation with the need to mount weapons and go off killing folks without knowledge of what it leaves you feeling like.

First let me say that the author's writing style was somewhat annoying. He weaves together the tales of five lieutenants during the war. The tales are all great but he does a poor job of letting you know whose tale you are reading. It takes some extra effort to figure this out the first third of the book or so until you get to know the folks in the book well enough. Now having said that, the book is an excellent and almost painfully honest look at what it is like to lead men into battle. All of the fears of the unknown as well as deeds done are included here. If you are going to be an officer in the military (or think you might like to be) or recently became one you need to read this book. You will appreciate the honest tales that let you know that your own feelings are not unique and what it truly takes to be a leader.

Written from the tank commanders point of view This is an awesome book Blah blah blah blah blah

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