

Hunting the Caliphate: America's War on ISIS and the Dawn of the Strike Cell

Dana J. H. Pittard

Wes J. Bryant

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Hunting the Caliphate is a raw and honest account of how ISIS was beaten, told from the inside by those who brought the caliphate down.

Dana J. H. Pittard and Wes J. Bryant's dual memoir *Hunting the Caliphate* reveals the inner workings of the US-led coalition in the fight against ISIS.

Though it seemed to have come out of nowhere, the vicious and violent group ISIS also seemed to be unstoppable. It conquered almost one-third of Iraq and gained a hold in Syria. It executed, persecuted, and enslaved those who opposed it.

Today, the book says, ISIS is beaten, if not quite defeated. *Hunting the Caliphate* is the story of a group of unlikely allies who joined forces under a US-led military command and brought ISIS down. It's told by two people who played a crucial role in the events: Major General Dana Pittard and Joint Terminal Attack Controller Master Sergeant Wes Bryant.

The text alternates between Bryant and Pittard's perspectives, starting with the turning points in both of their military careers: September 11th, 2001. They chronicle their professional evolutions, which led them to work together in Iraq in 2014, when the United States found itself returning to a theater where hostilities had ceased. Their different perspectives of single situations are highlighted, as are their different personalities. Their positions are augmented by their respective levels of command and generations. Pittard—near retirement—looks at problems from the outside, searching for ways to solve them, while Bryant (who is mid-career) is more self-reflective and self-critical, addressing problems with a desire to understand them.

Providing an in-depth view into the worlds of military commands and strike forces on the ground, the book reveals insider details such as how the use of drones and airstrikes—representing a significant change in American warfare—came about. Though primarily a memoir, the text straddles several genres, all of which keep Pittard and Bryant at the fore. They provide both a historical account of the fight and psychological insights into the mentalities of professional soldiers. The book's honesty on such topics can be disconcerting; it is, the book acknowledges, the military's task to destroy property and take lives.

Pittard and Bryant take turns telling the story, but the narrative is cohesive and engaging, revealing stories that most of the general public will not know. Early chapters are stiff, but as the mission starts to come together, the text begins to flow. Bryant's narration is the more immersive, immediate, and literary of the two. The many military acronyms pose a challenge in the text, but a glossary is provided.

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ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (May 29, 2019)

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