ForeWord Reviews

HISTORY

Kaboom: Embracing the Suck in a Savage Little War
Matt Gallagher
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"It would definitely suck to die. And it would suck even harder to die in Iraq," mused Private Cold Cuts, one of the many colorful and brave soldiers who served under the author, Lieutenant (and later, Captain) Matt Gallagher. The author served a fifteen-month tour of duty in Iraq during 2008-09. His blog, [title=blog]Kaboom: A Soldier's War Journal[/title], was popular with enlistees, some officers, and civilians stateside, until it was shut down by the military. This gritty, in-your-face account, based on the blog, holds its own with the best memoirs of Vietnam and World War II veterans.

Gallagher was a platoon leader for the troop nicknamed the "Gravediggers." They provided security and searched for IEDs (improvised explosive devices) in Saba al-Bor, a hellhole in Baghdad province known as "Paradise." Gallagher describes colorfully the challenges of keeping order in a tribal society run by Sunni and Shia sheiks who hated Americans but loved American dollars. Descriptions of Iraqis, especially children, left starving and hopeless in crushing poverty, and stories about the "terps," Iraqis who risked their lives by serving as translators for the Americans, round out the picture of life in this war-torn country. Sixteen pages of black and white photographs illustrate an already vivid book.

Gallagher was embittered when he was transferred from the Gravediggers, the men with whom he bonded. He was then assigned to the "Wolfhounds" as legal targeting officer, in charge of flushing out insurgents and assassins in Sadar City (formerly Saddam City). Here again he writes about the camaraderie and loyalty of the troops. Conversely, the author compares the disconnected military brass, who had cushy gigs in secure areas, with the Three Stooges. Officers "Larry, Curly, and Moe" were unaware of the "Joes "—the grunts who faced death every day—but were attentive to their own promotions and creature comforts.

Similar to other memorable wartime remembrances, Gallagher provides compelling accounts of the sacrifices made by the military, while questioning the purpose of war, especially the Iraq War, which was fought without a home front, or as expressed on a Porta-Potty wall: "America isn't at war. Soldiers are at war. America is at the mall." Gallagher returned from Iraq

in 2009; his narrative, which will greatly appeal to readers of military history and battlefield accounts, shows that he has more questions than answers about Iraq's future.

Karl Helicher