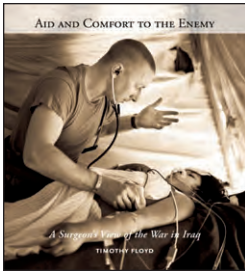


BOOK REVIEWS

BOOK BELIEVERS?

Aid and Comfort to the Enemy: A Surgeon's View of the War in Iraq

Timothy Floyd, MD
Artbook Press, 2010.
Review by R. Alan Hester



From oral histories to weighty tomes, stories emerge during and after war, and our current wars are no different. After America's combat role ended in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and nears its conclusion in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), our warriors have been sharing their

experiences. The most popular of these place the reader inside the danger and conflict of Special Operations. Stories of Navy Seal snipers and perilous missions abound. This segment of the genre allows readers to experience the exhilaration of war at a safe distance, and offers a reprieve from the dreary daily onslaught of negative news stories. Although these may be the most titillating and offer a positive perspective, they ignore other aspects of the experience. Timothy Floyd's book, *Aid and Comfort to the Enemy*, serves as a window into the other characteristics of war. Using his personal photographs and diary entries to bolster a skillful narrative, he tells the story of 934th Forward Surgical Team's (FST) deployment in Iraq.

Floyd begins with the event that engendered many Americans with a sense of anger and urge to serve one's country: 9/11. Descending from a long line of warriors who have answered the call of duty, the author volunteered to serve as surgeon in the U.S. Army, in part because the likelihood of forward deployment would be increased. After a year of preparation, his unit was activated for deployment to support OIF. This pre-deployment activity that served to halt his civilian life for his scheduled deployment – completion of wills, notifying medical boards and insurance carriers, saying goodbye to friends and family – acted as a mask, covering the reality of the awaiting deployment. In true military fashion, reality emerged as they staged for the invasion, wherein the tediousness of waiting began. As anti-heroic as these events may seem when compared to shooting terrorists, they are reality. Practically every unit activated for deployment goes through this process. Highs and lows

during deployments deserve to be shared equally, which sets the tone of the book.

His story continues with his time in Iraq, which comprises the majority of the book. The FST's primary mission was to provide medical support to enemy wounded, ranging from the Republican Guard and Fedayeen Saddam to the average conscript. He noted "feeling like I am part of one of this century's greatest event." After awhile, however, the initial enthusiasm of the mission began to wane. The cycle of establishing the FST, treating patients, counting the slow time between patients, breaking down and moving again, coupled with the inhospitable geography and realities of war, eroded his fervor and altered his perspective. One example of his changing worldview was his disillusionment with the U.S. media's coverage of the war. He witnessed an example of activist editors maligning the mission by altering an embedded war correspondent's report from the field to suit an agenda. Portraying the whole force negatively because of the acts of a few (e.g., Abu Graib), he noted, betrays the good of the medical mission and the actions of the majority. He concluded that it was an affront to the intent of the First Amendment. Nonetheless, Floyd had positive realizations, also. He remarked, for instance, "how similar to, rather than different than, these people we are," specifically families. Extended families cared for the healthy and infirm with equal love and attention, and "all seemed like people that only wanted to live their lives without interference or oppression." He captures this sentiment with vivid pictures of a local family, which bolsters his realization and highlights one of the many strengths of his book.

This book serves as Floyd's After Action Review (AAR), and it is illuminating. He has adroitly combined his pictures and diary entries with a narrative as he shares his attempts to reconcile how his attitude and ideology evolved during his deployment. This work is an intimate story of the deployment of his unit to Iraq, and it elucidates aspects that are often hidden by the fog of war, as well as an exploration of broader issues of patriotism and morality.