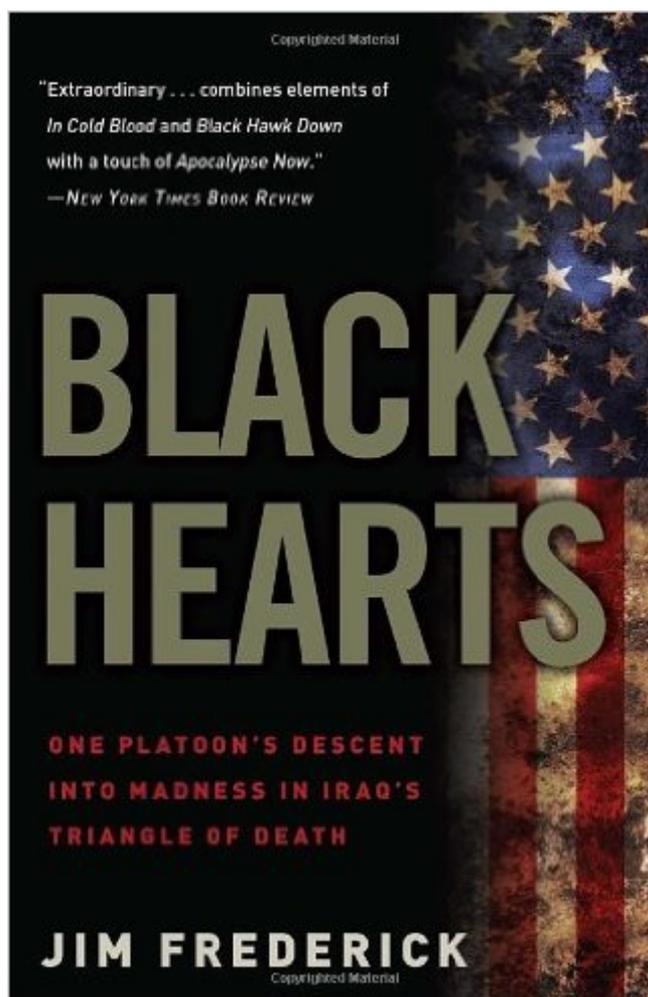


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# Black Hearts: One Platoon's Descent Into Madness In Iraq's Triangle Of Death



## Synopsis

This is the story of a small group of soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division's famed 502nd Infantry Regiment—a unit known as the Black Heart Brigade. Deployed in late 2005 to Iraq's so-called Triangle of Death, a veritable meat grinder just south of Baghdad, the Black Hearts found themselves in arguably the country's most dangerous location at its most dangerous time. Hit by near-daily mortars, gunfire, and roadside bomb attacks, suffering from a particularly heavy death toll, and enduring a chronic breakdown in leadership, members of one Black Heart platoon—1st Platoon, Bravo Company, 1st Battalion—descended, over their year-long tour of duty, into a tailspin of poor discipline, substance abuse, and brutality. Four 1st Platoon soldiers would perpetrate one of the most heinous war crimes U.S. forces have committed during the Iraq War—the rape of a fourteen-year-old Iraqi girl and the cold-blooded execution of her and her family. Three other 1st Platoon soldiers would be overrun at a remote outpost—one killed immediately and two taken from the scene, their mutilated corpses found days later booby-trapped with explosives. Black Hearts is an unflinching account of the epic, tragic deployment of 1st Platoon. Drawing on hundreds of hours of in-depth interviews with Black Heart soldiers and first-hand reporting from the Triangle of Death, Black Hearts is a timeless story about men in combat and the fragility of character in the savage crucible of warfare. But it is also a timely warning of new dangers emerging in the way American soldiers are led on the battlefields of the twenty-first century. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When I started to read this book I wasn't sure if I would like what I was about to read. But being in Bravo during this deployment I had to know what really happened and most importantly, how it happened. I wondered if my memories of the deployment would differ from what was in the book. I was so relieved to see the truth, however horrible it was. I literally couldn't put it down. I think this book will help people to understand what everyone in Battalion had to endure throughout the deployment, especially B Co. To extend the conversation of comments: Todd J. Harmon says: so you agree with the facts of the book? Yes, completely. It's funny when I was reading the book, I could have sworn that the guy who wrote this had to have been there with us, because it was the only way he could have been so dead on with everything. It is really a testament to how well he did his research. I haven't heard anything negative about the book from anyone who has read it and was actually there. I've read several books on Iraq and none go as far into the dynamics of the unit as much as this book does. To explain one part of my initial review that said "But being in Bravo during this deployment I had to know what really happened and most importantly, how it happened." I wanted to give some context. I was in Bravo company the entire deployment and in June of 2006 was moved to first platoon, two weeks before the attack on the Alamo and before the information about the crimes that were committed came out. We had such a high tempo in our company for meeting Battalion's demands that the platoons rarely spoke to each other more than when we would pass guard at the TCP's and at the JSB.

I was assigned to MiTT Team 4 (2nd BCT, 101st ABN) and lived/worked/fought with all the men in this book from 2005-2006; I knew them well enough to know they wouldn't pull any punches and Jim Frederick did a great job of capturing the madness of the 2005-2006 deployment. What matters to me more than anything is that the fight that those guys fought was recorded for posterity while it was still fresh; their sacrifices and their risks and their love for each other were overshadowed by the awful events of a few, and all of their hard work was overshadowed by what followed. We hear Fallujah and Tal Afar talked about as household names but no one knows about Rusdi Mullah, the JSB and Route Sportster-- no one who wasn't there and suffered through it...except those who read this book. Well written, and no pulled punches. Everyone takes their lumps equally-- Ebel, Kunk, Goodwin, Norton, Fenalson-- all of them are part of this and no one gets off scot free. Even so, no one is painted as the only bad leader or the only good apple in the bunch. He captures the aspects of all of them-- Kunk's personality, Captain Goodwin sleeping in his plaid flannel pajama pants in his folding chair in the TOC, Fenalson's demeanor, the frustration of the platoon sergeants, the anger of the men, the sense of hopelessness...it is as real as it gets. I could almost hear the crackle of the

radios, hear Sergeant Loper on the mic in the TOC or SFC Laskoski telling someone they were stupid or hear Biggers laugh as someone was caught doing something stupid on the J-Lens. The criminals who raped and killed are portrayed accurately, too-- shown for all that they were and were not and the leadership decisions that were made or failed to be made that directly led to the events of February 2006.

Jim Frederick's "Black Hearts" chronicles two headline-grabbing, extremely negative events from the Iraq War in 2006: the ambush and murder of three 101st Screaming Eagles soldiers near Yusufiyah and then the news of a horrific murder-rape of a teenage Iraqi girl, who was murdered along with her parents and five-year-old sister by four troops from the same unit. I had just returned from a combat tour in Iraq in late 2005, and was therefore intrigued by the backstory of the two events not so evident in the immediate news accounts and coverage of the soldiers' violent deaths and those of the Iraqi civilians. I hoped this book would put that unit's challenges and struggles in context. It does just that and more, telling an important story in what I feel is a balanced, even-handed manner. Frederick interviewed just about everyone involved from the platoon level all the way up through brigade and while the actions of the leaders and individuals is often damning, one can never truly comprehend the kind of stress these men were under. Frederick's book lays out the facts and details surrounding the platoon of Army soldiers involved, and how failures of leadership at nearly every level, exacerbated by a herculean and often undefined mission in one of the most dangerous places in Iraq at the time, came together to form an imperfect storm out of which one unit of about 30 troops found themselves at the center of a disastrous deployment, and one that had a negative strategic impact on U.S. efforts there at a time when the Iraq War was spiraling out of control. The book is powerful because it deftly tells the story of an infantry platoon that seemed set up for failure from the get-go.

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