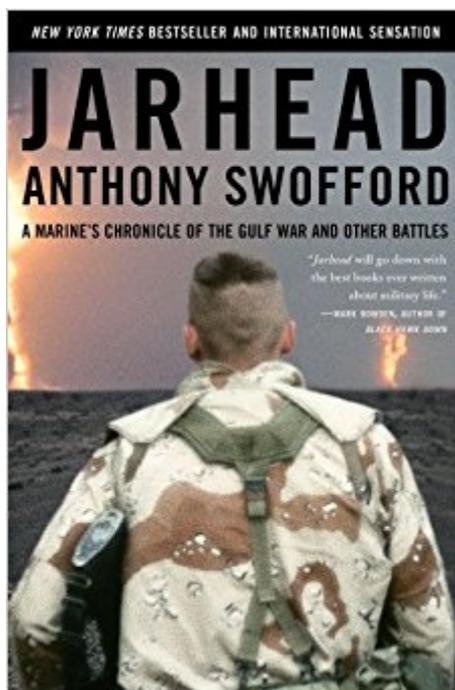


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Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle Of The Gulf War And Other Battles



Synopsis

In his New York Times bestselling chronicle of military life, Anthony Swofford weaves his experiences in war with vivid accounts of boot camp, reflections on the mythos of the marines, and remembrances of battles with lovers and family. When the U.S. Marines -- or "jarheads" -- were sent to Saudi Arabia in 1990 for the first Gulf War, Anthony Swofford was there. He lived in sand for six months; he was punished by boredom and fear; he considered suicide, pulled a gun on a fellow marine, and was targeted by both enemy and friendly fire. As engagement with the Iraqis drew near, he was forced to consider what it means to be an American, a soldier, a son of a soldier, and a man.

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Customer Reviews

Wow, surprised at all the emotion here. I didn't think this many people read books like this. Couple of bullet points after reading the book and the reviews. 1. Swofford really downplays the honor of being a marine sniper. I was a line company machinegunner in 2/5 and all of the snipers I knew were a cut above. Not only that but if someone was deemed immature they would be dropped back to their line company platoon, no matter how well they did in sniper school. 2. I agree that the book is rife with inaccuracies, exaggerations and downright lies. Then again, it is a memoir, not a history book. 3. The story about the guy watching a videotape from home that shows his wife having sex with another guy is the biggest urban legend in the Corps. Second-place going to the oft-repeated Mr. Rogers was a sniper story. 4. I am not wanting to sound like a tough guy but I don't know once person who pissed their pants in combat or talked about being afraid. By the time you've gone through boot camp, SOI a work-up for deployment and a trip to Oki, you're going to be ready to eat

nails, if for no other reason than that all of the hard and miserable training has made you mean. Pissing your pants in boot camp is very common because of all the forced hydration and few chances to use the bathroom.⁵ His whining is actually pretty common, especially in the grunts. I know I'm guilty of it. What is uncommon is his lack of sense of humor. The funniest people I met were in the Marines. If you don't have a sense of humor, you won't be able to laugh off all of the bad things that happen to you.⁶ Raunchy tales of whoring and drinking are 100% accurate.⁷ His story about pulling a rifle on another Marine is probably false.

'Jarhead' by Anthony Swofford is bound to make some people angry. A Marine sniper (STA) during Desert Storm I in the early 1990s, he recounts his experiences there with vivid emotion, weaving in his experiences of boot camp, adolescence, and civilian life after the Corps in the process. Swofford has a chip on his shoulder - something he'll most likely readily admit. He has a 'bad attitude', and in fact revels in it. One wonders if this is a product of his war experiences, his Marine Corps training, or his upbringing. At one point his mother, who never really liked the idea of her son being in the Marines, but who wouldn't stand in her son's way, said 'I lost my baby boy when you went to war.' She described Swofford as being sweet and gentle prior to that, and angry and unhappy afterwards. One wonders how much of a change is there - if one can take the stories at face value, this is the same boy who had a fist-fight with his father over going in the Corps at the age of 17, and who had Marine Corps decals put on his shirts as a child. One of his drill instructors even gave Swofford what he considered a great compliment - 'you'll be a great killer someday.' I make the caveat that one might not be able to take all of this at face value, because like many men in this kind of situation, Swofford is likely to exaggerate - making some pieces more dramatic and other pieces less so. Swofford recounts many tales of men in his sniper platoon who had adjustment problems after the war; one can but wonder if that is true for Swofford, too. Also, Swofford admits to being willing and able to lie if the cause is, in some internal sense, justified - his dealings with brother, in the Army in Germany who later died of cancer, is a case in point.

I was in the Seventh Marines like the author. I was in Kilo Company, 3/7 (3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment for those not in the know), some five years before the events experienced by Mr. Swofford. I also knew some of the guys in our own Battalion's STA platoon. While I don't know anything of their indoctrination, their training regiment or what else, it seemed to me like they spent a lot of time on working parties or just plain skating their way through their enlistments. Gulf War memoirs are beginning to pour forth from publishers. I wonder about the timing sometimes, but it

wouldn't surprise me that Swofford's slim volume is the best of the lot. Like James Webb's classic "Fields of Fire" Swofford catches the lingo of Marines perfectly, but he also discusses the ups and the many downs of being one of the Few and the Proud (sometimes I felt like pride had little to anything to do with my own enlistment). I don't necessarily agree with whomever wrote the dust jacket in comparing this book to Caputo's "A Rumor of War" or "The Things They Carried," by Tim O'Brien. "A Rumor of War" is still probably the best Vietnam memoir out there, and Caputo's experiences are as far from Mr. Swofford's as they get. Tim O'Brien's book is a work of fiction, something "Jarhead" is not. If they tried to compare it to say, "If I Die in a Combat Zone," I feel that would have been more appropriate. Swofford's book entails his peacetime experience as well as the Gulf War. He shows how his fellow Marines wage war on each other long before the Iraqis intrude. The deployment ("Desert Shield") is a long and monotonous one, and despite some brief but terrifying moments, 2/7 STA platoon's war is frustratingly short.

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