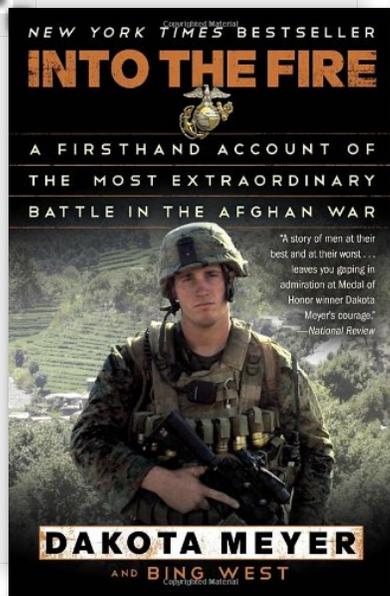


Into the Fire: A Firsthand Account of the Most Extraordinary Battle in the Afghan War



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Reviewed by: Nathaniel L. Moir

“... straightforward and personal . . .
inspiring . . . worth remembering.”

Among the numerous books on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, autobiographies by Congressional Medal of Honor recipients are truly unique. In the case of Sergeant Dakota Meyer, United States Marine Corps, the story of combat he and a small group of fellow personnel experienced in the Fall of 2009 is both inspiring and sobering.

Originally released in 2012 as a hardcover edition but now available in trade paperback, *Into the Fire* also leaves readers with plenty to consider regarding the larger mission of the United States in Afghanistan. On a more personal level, Sgt. Meyer's efforts as a Marine Advisor in Kunar

Province, a province bordering Pakistan, is gripping.

The book aptly focuses the majority of its 18 chapters on the events of a battle in the Ganjigal Valley of Kunar Province, Afghanistan, in September 2009. In this battle, Sgt. Meyer displayed self-sacrifice and valor in combat that clearly merits respect and led to his earning the Congressional Medal of Honor, awarded in 2011.

In several cases during the war in Afghanistan, Medal of Honor recipients have died in action and were awarded the distinction posthumously. These include Michael Murphy, Jared Monti, and Robert Miller. In addition to Sgt. Meyer, living recipients include Salvatore Giunta, Leroy Petry, and Clinton Romesha.

In this regard, *Into the Fire* deserves recognition as a rare book about Afghanistan and combat during that war. It also follows in the distinguished line of other books by Medal

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of Honor recipients such as Colonel Jack Jacobs' *If Not Now, When?* and Franklin Miller's *Reflections of a Warrior*.

On another level, Sgt. Meyer describes cases of reproachable behavior on the part of his fellow Americans. In one case, a team of logistics personnel remained in their armored vehicle for the duration of a battle, and not only did not engage the enemy, but left several Afghan Army soldiers stranded outside their vehicle to die of their wounds.

This occurred during one of Sgt. Meyer's repeated trips from a medical station to the scene of the same battle to rescue other allied Afghan soldiers. Another perhaps more egregious breach of trust is recounted in the book. During the battle in Ganjigal Valley, Sgt. Meyer and his fellow American soldiers requested artillery fire support from the headquarters at a nearby base, Forward Operating Base Joyce, in central Kunar Province.

The Tactical Operations Center at Forward Operating Base Joyce denied the requests, and when the requests were relayed to the higher Brigade Headquarters located in nearby Jalalabad, they were also denied. Both higher authorities later offered excuses but during the battle failed to send support until too late; they ostensibly stranded American and Afghan forces to face more numerous Taliban on their own.

Those responsible certainly deserved the investigation into their conduct and decision-making, which occurred after the battle. At the very least, their example serves as a miserable contrast to Sgt. Meyer and his fellow soldiers' valor.

Prior to the description of these events, the book admirably describes the training and life events that led to Sgt. Meyer enlisting into the Marine Corps. Notably, the final chapters of the book provide an articulate account of how Sgt. Meyer came to terms, and indeed, continues to come to terms with the events of September 2009 described in the book. This included the loss of several fellow Marines.

A strength of *Into the Fire* is the skillful approach to writing that delivers Sgt. Meyer's story in a straightforward and personal manner. In this regard, the fine efforts of fellow coauthor, Bing West, come through.

Mr. West, himself a former marine and combat veteran of the Vietnam War, looms large in this reviewer's esteem as the author of *The Village* which details his experience as a Combined Action Platoon leader. He is also the author of several other books, most recently a book on Afghanistan entitled *The Wrong War*.

Returning to Sgt. Meyer's story, there is a humility and recognition of personal shortcomings that is admirable and, more importantly, real. As the war in Afghanistan winds down, *Into the Fire* is an effective reminder that there is nothing glorious about it, or any war.

In contrast, the efforts to help other soldiers and in Dakota Meyer's case, mostly allied Afghan Soldiers is inspiring and a model of selflessness. That is something, despite war, that is always worth remembering.

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