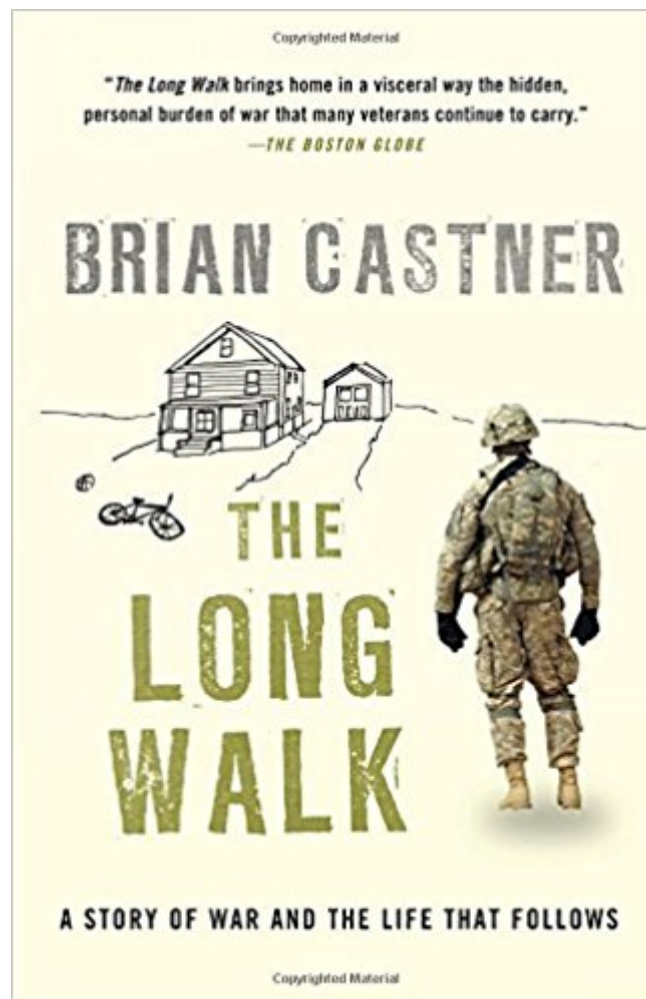




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The Long Walk: A Story Of War And The Life That Follows



Synopsis

Brian Castner served three tours of duty in the Middle East, two of them in Iraq as the head of an Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit. Whenever IEDs were discovered, he and his men would lead the way in either disarming the deadly devices or searching through rubble and remains for clues to the bomb-makers' identities. And when robots and other remote means failed, one technician would suit up and take the Long Walk to disarm the bomb by hand. This lethal game of cat and mouse was, and continues to be, the real war within America's wars in the Middle East. When Brian returned stateside to his wife and family, he entered an equally inexorable struggle against the enemy within, which he comes to call the "Crazy." This thrilling, heartbreaking, stunningly honest book alternates between two harrowing realities: the terror, excitement, and camaraderie of combat, and the lonely battle against the unshakeable fear, anxiety, and survivor guilt that he like so many veterans carries inside.

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Customer Reviews

Best Books of the Month, July 2012: To those trained in Explosive Ordnance Disposal, the last-resort tactic for defusing bombs is known as the Long Walk: a soldier dealing with the device up close, alone, with no margin for error. The Long Walk is Brian Castner's tale of two wars. He fought the first in Iraq, serving two tours dismantling roadside bombs before they exploded, or wading through the grisly carnage of unchecked detonations. The second battle began when he returned home, his life exploding as he stepped from a curb into what he calls the Crazy: a consuming froth

of panic and undiagnosed pain that alienated him from his family and compelled him to rig his minivan with ammunition clips for faster reloads while driving through suburbia. With its tense and claustrophobic portraits of the violent streets of Kirkuk, Castner's account is a dead-on description of modern warfare in an unfamiliar land. But it also offers sober insight into the stresses of war on the human body and mind (the effects of blast waves on soft tissues--especially in the brain--are chilling), destruction wrought on those left behind, and the long, lonely walk home. --Jon Foro --This text refers to the Preloaded Digital Audio Player edition.

“Castner's book maps out this new and sorrowful territory with the skill and focus of someone who has had to defuse a bomb inside his own body.” • Minneapolis Star Tribune “The Long Walk brings home in a visceral way the hidden, personal burden of war that many veterans continue to carry.” • The Boston Globe “The enduring treachery of memory . . . remains the real, unfinished story of The Long Walk. It takes as much courage for Castner to confront that memory as it does to face an active fuse.” • The New York Times Book Review “What makes Castner's astonishing memoir so unique is his forthright, unflinching look at postwar life.” • Dallas Morning News “Castner succeeds in taking readers into the mind of a man who is hopelessly scarred by war.” • USA Today “Direct and disturbing. . . . A painful but compelling read, even as Castner finds ways to cope, at least partially, with his long walk back at home.” • Morning Edition (NPR) “Brutally honest [and] sharply observed. . . . The Long Walk is both harrowing and poignant—an intensely personal story of what it takes not just to survive war, but also to fully leave behind the nightmare of combat and readapt to ordinary life.” • The Daily Beast “So viscerally engaging that it's hard to read it without shaking. Castner writes with a keen mind, sharp intellect and literary flair. . . . [and] the desperate immediacy of a man whose skin has been burned away.” • Austin American-Statesman “He gives equal, if not more, weight to the time and effort that goes into readjusting to his family life, and his straightforward, unself-conscious writing paints an absorbing picture of war in the twenty-first century. . . . Castner's experience isn't everyone's, of course, but a memoir like his can help to bridge that gap between civilians and today's military.” • NewYorker.com “A raw, wrenching, blood-soaked chronicle of the human cost of war. Castner's memoir brings to mind Erich Maria Remarque's masterpiece All Quiet on the Western Front.” • Jon Krakauer, author of Where Men Win

Glory” “A powerful book about the long cost of combat and the brotherhood of men at arms. . . [Castner’s] honesty is refreshing and the book is written with such candor and openness that one can’t help but root for him.” • Anthony Swofford, author of Jarhead “Do you want to know a little something about our war in Iraq? Begin with The Long Walk, Brian Castner’s elegant, superbly written story about the bomb disposal guys. . . Here is the reality of the exhausted mind, and of profound thought wandering all Creation: this is what I saw, this is what I did, this is what I have become.” • Larry Heinemann, author of the National Book Award-winning Paco’s Story and Close Quarters

I’ve read many books in the military genre and I can honestly say -- The Long Walk is like none other. The reader needs to understand that this is heavy reading and requires your utmost attention -- forget about multi tasking (like watching a sporting event on tv). Mr. Castner did a nice thorough job explaining his role as an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Officer. He does a masterful job explaining his mindset "crazy" and it’s easy to decipher those moments. The reader does tend to get a bit confused keeping up exactly where he is physically. I would also recommend an Appendix -- to summarize the various synonyms he uses throughout the book. The only reason I’m not giving this a 5 Star rating is because it would have been nice for him to have included more of his wife’s point of view -- she must be one very incredible woman. As a military veteran, I really commend Mr. Castner for coming forward and having the ability to put his feelings into words -- as this is no small task and as a life member of the Disabled American Veterans organization, I can tell you -- Mr. Castner is not alone!!!

How does one rate something that reads like their own diary at times? I was also part of 03-080S and have fond memories of the exhaustive training and partying that was NAVSCOLEOD. Jeff Chaney was an inspiration to the lower enlisted in that class and I’m sure we all felt defeated the day we heard he had been taken from this world. Brian (previously known to me as Lt. Castner) has masterfully laid before you a glimpse into the life of an EOD Technician. Every service member will walk away with a different experience from their time in but this was an insightful view into Brian’s and helped open my eyes to the different tools with which others cope. While the story does read as a sporadic leap across space and time, I was able to follow along (partly because we have shared the same experiences in EOD). I have thoroughly enjoyed this read and will recommend it to one and all!

Brian Castner's "The Long Walk: A Story of War and the Life That Follows" is his memoir of three tours of duty in Iraq, two of them as the commander of an Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit, and his life after coming home, dealing with "the Crazy." Here are the first few paragraphs of the book: * *

"THE FIRST THING you should know about me is that I'm Crazy." I haven't always been. Until that one day, the day I went Crazy, I was fine. Or I thought I was. Not anymore. "My Crazy is a feeling. It's the worst, most intolerable feeling I've ever had. And it never goes away." When you're Crazy, you make a list of people you have told, the people you have come out to. My list is small. One best friend but not another. Jimbo and John and Greg, but not the other guys on the team. Your wife but not your mother. Those that you think will get it, will understand. "And now I'm telling you. That I'm Crazy, and I don't know why." The second thing you should know about me is that I don't know how to fix it. Or control it. Or endure from one moment to the next. The Crazy is winning. "So I run." I run every day, twice a day sometimes, out the front door of my peaceful suburban home, past sticky blast scenes of sewage, and motor oil, and bloody swamps of trash and debris, ankle deep, filling the road, sidewalks, shop and house doorsteps. I run through dust clouds, blown in off the desert or kicked up by the helo rotor wash. I run past the screaming women that never shut up, don't shut up now. I should have made them stop when I had a chance. I run as fast as I can, as long as I can, my feet hitting the pavement in a furious rhythm, along the river near my home. "I run in the hottest part of the day, the full afternoon blaze, the heat of the black asphalt, baking in the summer sun, rising through my shoes and into my feet. I speed up, but the Crazy feeling is still winning. It overwhelms. Sweat pours down my flushed face, in my eyes. Albietz is chalk white skin and brown dried blood from head to toe." * * * Aside from "Johnny Got His Gun," "Catch-22," and "Slaughterhouse-Five" (all novels, although Vonnegut based his novel on his experience as a POW), I am not a huge fan of the war genre in literature, fiction or non-fiction. Fortunately, I gave this book a chance. A friend of mine highly recommended Castner's memoir last Friday, I bought it that same day, and finished it this morning (one week later). It is without doubt one of the most engrossing memoirs I have ever read, and with no ghost writer it is exceptionally well-written and constructed. The sentences are often short, almost staccato, and Castner uses an image ("the foot in the box") as a hook throughout the text that seems at first part of his PTSD and then is revealed - in an unexpected way - that sheds light on the theme of the memoir. There are a lot of action scenes set in Iraq, in the field, doing their jobs - all of which are riveting because of the imminent threat of death, and made even more so through the writing style.

But there is also humor, brief glimpses of joy, yoga, and the daily battle with "the Crazy." This is a book, in many ways, about men working with men in a predominantly male world. Yet I think the women who love the men who have served in Iraq might better understand their men through this book. This is also one of the best examples of combat-induced post-traumatic stress disorder that I have seen in a memoir. It would be nice if all of the politicians and generals who send our kids into war would read this book and take seriously the trauma that even a non-combat job can inflict on these young men. Highly recommended - this was an Best Book for 2012.

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