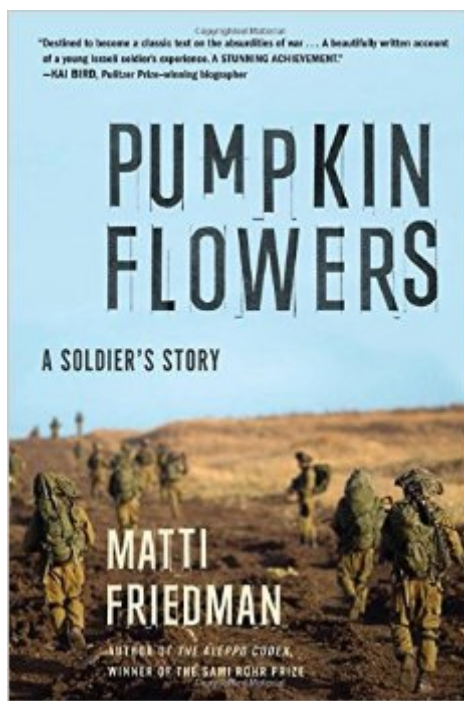


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Pumpkinflowers: A Soldier's Story



Synopsis

“A book about young men transformed by war, written by a veteran whose dazzling literary gifts gripped my attention from the first page to the last.” —The Wall Street Journal “Friedman’s sober and striking new memoir . . . [is] on a par with Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* — its Israeli analog.” —The New York Times Book Review It was just one small hilltop in a small, unnamed war in the late 1990s, but it would send out ripples that are still felt worldwide today. The hill, in Lebanon, was called the Pumpkin; flowers was the military code word for casualties. Award-winning writer Matti Friedman re-creates the harrowing experience of a band of young Israeli soldiers charged with holding this remote outpost, a task that would change them forever, wound the country in ways large and small, and foreshadow the unwinnable conflicts the United States would soon confront in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. *Pumpkinflowers* is a reckoning by one of those young soldiers now grown into a remarkable writer. Part memoir, part reportage, part history, Friedman’s powerful narrative captures the birth of today’s chaotic Middle East and the rise of a twenty-first-century type of war in which there is never a clear victor and media images can be as important as the battle itself. Raw and beautifully rendered, *Pumpkinflowers* will take its place among classic war narratives by George Orwell, Philip Caputo, and Tim O’Brien. It is an unflinching look at the way we conduct war today.

Book Information

Hardcover: 256 pages

Publisher: Algonquin Books (May 3, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1616204583

ISBN-13: 978-1616204587

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 1.1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars — See all reviews (61 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #60,852 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #2 in Books > History > Middle East > Lebanon #60 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Middle East #64 in Books > History > Middle East > Israel & Palestine

Customer Reviews

Matti Friedman’s *PUMPKINFLOWERS* is perhaps the best war memoir I’ve read this year, about his role in a “little war” I’d never even heard of. Friedman, Toronto-born, emigrated back to his parents’

native Israel after high school, where, like all Israeli youths of a certain age, he was drafted into the IDF in 1996. And like many of his male peers, he was sent "up the line" to serve in a small border post along the border with Lebanon, where the two countries had been engaged in a sporadic shooting and shelling war since the early 80s. The outpost was code-named Pumpkin. Wounded soldiers were 'flowers.' Dead soldiers were 'oleanders.' Hence the title. Although most of us here in the west were largely oblivious to that conflict between the IDF and Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon, Friedman shows us, one brief, terse chapter at a time, how 'his' war was actually the beginning of the hit-and-run terrorist wars of today, waged by Al Qaeda, ISIS, or whatever you wish to call that shadowy enemy that continues to spread terror with sneak attacks not only in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Turkey, but also in Europe and even in the U.S. Because Hezbollah was already using IED's and roadside bombs, and, by the end of the 90s, even suicide bombers began showing up in the marketplaces of larger Israeli cities like Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Through extensive research and interviews, Friedman traces the history of the Pumpkin and the young men who served at the remote post over a period of more than fifteen years, many of them maimed, mutilated and killed. He begins with the story of a young would-be writer named Avi, a dreamer and an idealist who recognized early that the army has "no room for innocence ...

Matti Friedman's book, *Pumpkinflowers: A Soldier's Story*, deserves to join the ranks of the best war memoirs. But though it deserves to join those ranks, I think it will still stand apart, for several reasons. First, and foremost, Mr. Friedman's book will stand apart because it deals with Israel's Lebanon War. No, that's not quite right. The first Lebanon War was in 1982; the second was in 2006. Mr. Friedman's book deals with the period between those wars when the Israel Defense Forces and Lebanese Christian militias fought Hezbollah and other Lebanese Muslim guerrillas within a security zone established by Israel in South Lebanon. Though that period, which lacks a name and wasn't technically a war, spanned 15 years, Mr. Friedman's book covers two periods in the 1990s, one concerning the experiences of a soldier named Avi, and one concerning Mr. Friedman's own, later, experiences in the same conflict. This period of the conflict was odd in many senses, not the least of which is the fact that there weren't many real battles as our world thinks of them. The conflict seems to have consisted solely of small skirmishes, with soldiers in sight of their bases, and regular missile attacks on them while at their bases. Which doesn't mean that the people involved didn't risk their lives, show bravery, and die for their country; they did, on both sides. A fair number of them, in fact. But it means it was a quieter war than what is considered 'normal' for wars. With far fewer deaths, but also with far less certainty

as to the purpose and meaning behind those deaths.

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