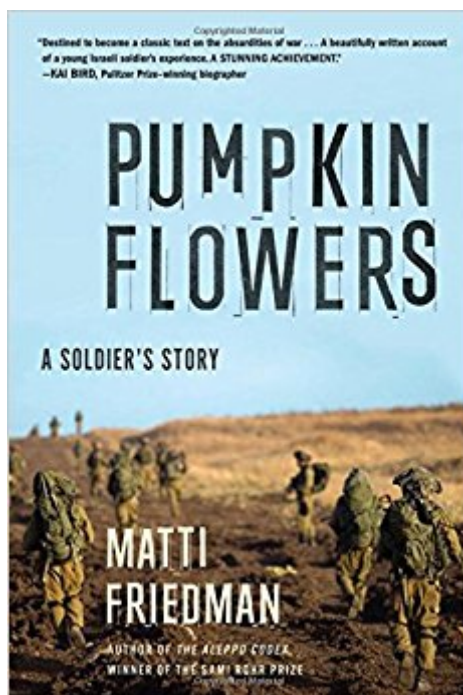


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Pumpkinflowers: A Soldier's Story



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.

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Customer Reviews

“In *Pumpkinflowers: A Soldier’s Story* Mr. Friedman has written a top-notch

account of this under-analyzed war, persuasively arguing that it heralded a new style of combat in the Middle East, though no one knew it at the time.

• Jennifer Senior, *The New York Times* “This superb book is partly a history of the war, partly a personal memoir, and partly a work of political analysis. But mainly it is an effort to tell the story of the young men who fought to defend something “the size of a basketball court” not all of whom survived. *Pumpkinflowers* is rich enough to allow different readers to draw their own political conclusions, if they choose to draw them at all. Above all, it is 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.

• Bret Stephens, *The Wall Street Journal* “Sober and striking” on par with Tim O’Brien “The Things They Carried” its Israeli analog.

• The *New York Times Book Review* “phenomenal” “extremely moving” “compelling”

• *Parade.com* “Matti Friedman’s powerful memoir of his IDF service in Lebanon in the late-’90s foreshadows the complexities of 21st-century warfare.”

• The *New York Jewish Week* “Pumpkinflowers is a beautifully written, gut-wrenching book. a poetic account of an Israeli army veteran’s time in southern Lebanon.”

• Shelf Awareness “Friedman, a journalist and author of ‘The Aleppo Codex,’ writes with great feeling and insight. The author’s account of military life transcends the particulars of this tale.”

• *Christian Science Monitor* “Powerful account of youthful Israelis maturing, fighting, and dying at a forgotten Lebanon outpost. In this limber, deceptively sparse take on the Middle East’s tightening spiral of violence, Friedman combines military history and personal experience on and off the line in deft, observant prose. The narrative is reminiscent of novels by Denis Johnson and Robert Stone, linking combat’s violent absurdity to the traumatized perspectives of individual participants. A haunting yet wry tale of young people at war, cursed by political forces beyond their control, that can stand alongside the best narrative nonfiction coming out of Afghanistan and Iraq.”

• *Kirkus Reviews*, starred review “Remarkably educational and heartfelt: Friedman’s experiences provide a critical historical perspective on the changing climate of war in the Middle East, shifting from short official conflicts into longer unwinnable wars full of guerilla tactics and the deliberate creation of media narratives and images. His lyrical writing, attention to detail, and personal honesty draw the reader into empathy along with understanding. Friedman’s memoir deserves wide readership.”

• *Publishers Weekly*, starred review “fast and engaging” “A compelling

war memoir containing elements of terror, observation, boredom, and grim (at times absurd) humor. This is an excellent read. Library Journal, starred review "A compelling narrative, freighted with explosive geopolitical implications." Booklist, starred review

"A compelling narrative, freighted with explosive geopolitical implications." Booklist, starred review When I went back to the Pumpkin in the fall of 2002 I thought it was a conclusion--an end to that war, and to the disquiet it left me and the others it touched. But I know now that I was wrong. It wasn't a conclusion. On the hill in 1995 we had been at the start of something: of a new era in which conflict surges, shifts, or fades but doesn't end, in which the most you can hope for is not peace, or the arrival of a better age, but only to remain safe as long as possible. None of us could have foreseen how the region would be seized by its own violence--the way Syria, a short drive from the outpost, would be devoured, and Iraq, and Libya, and Yemen, and much of the Islamic world around us. The outpost was the beginning. The present day might still be the beginning. The Pumpkin is gone, but nothing is over. from Pumpkinflowers "Poignant and fascinating. Matti Friedman tells a war story with a journalist's rigor and eye for detail, and a poet's touch. He manages to be lyrical, graceful, and deeply evocative even when tackling the harshest subjects imaginable." Lucette Lagnado, author of *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit* "Evocative, emotionally wrenching, and yet clear-eyed and dispassionate, Matti Friedman's haunting war memoir reminds one of Michael Herr's unforgettable Vietnam memoir, *Dispatches*." Kai Bird, author of *The Good Spy* "A historical jigsaw puzzle and an examination of Israel's fraught national identity. Friedman illuminates the confusion at the heart of the conflict and chillingly echoes America's own slide into prolonged wars in the Middle East." Siobhan Fallon, author of *You Know When the Men Are Gone* "Inspiring, heartbreaking, illuminating. Matti Friedman's brilliant account of a forgotten war seen through the lens of a simple soldier is at once a coming-of-age story and an essential chronicle about how the twenty-first century was born." Yossi Klein Halevi, author of *Like Dreamers*

A good story about the coming of age / rite of passage experience that all young Israeli's go through when they serve in the military. In this instance it was against the backdrop of serving in the buffer zone of southern Lebanon in the mid-nineties. The buffer was supposed to prevent terrorists from

infiltrating into northern Israel but the isolated strongpoints ended up being targets for Hezbollah attacks. Many Israeli military casualties were incurred which led to protests in Israel and ultimately withdrawal from Lebanon. Years later the author visits Lebanon and hears the Hezbollah account of the conflict. The Israeli withdrawal was considered a victory by Hezbollah. This is a good account of citizen soldiers serving in direct defense of their country.

A soldier's story and one from a sensitive one. As Friedman writes, nothing may be as it seems, especially as it may have been reported by an ignorant, willfully so or not, press. It is not as much a story as a memoir but because it strips away any pretension, or false bravado, from the author's (and I suspect by extension others') combat experience while recognizing both his and their fears and bravery it is well worth reading. Interestingly, Friedman visits "undercover" and after his military service that area of Lebanon under Hezbollah control in which he had been in combat. That further provides Friedman and therefore the reader with a personal perspective of war that other books seldom do.

Matti Friedman's clear writing shows how it was for the young Israeli soldiers holding an obscure hill in Lebanon. He then describes how four mothers with the help of the Press influenced the government to withdraw, leading to the second intifada. He then relates the strategy learned by Hizballah in those years to the situation in the middle east now. A moving, fascinating, and informative book.

A well written account of a forgotten war where young Israelis were wounded and died protecting the North of Israel in the buffer Zone between Lebanon and Israel in the nineties. At an out post called the Pumpkin Friedman describes the events over these years in simple but powerful language. Battling Hezbollah militants in a time when the 'suicide bomber' was yet to make a mark, the boys on the Pumpkin obeyed orders and wished for the normal life of a teenager. This story is a tribute to those boys, some of whom never returned to their families and a look at the political climate of Israel and the Middle East at the time. Israel is a country forever struggling to maintain their sovereign right to the land surrounded by hostile countries who would like to annihilate them. I can't imagine how it would be to live with the constant threat of rockets being fired over the border into the country and almost daily attacks on the population by suicide bombers and the like. I'm sure everyone would like to see peace in the area but that seems like a pipe dream with the ever growing threats and hostilities.

To understand where we are it is necessary to understand where we have been. In beautiful prose and a compelling narrative *Pumpkinflowers* leads you back in time to a forgotten past that gave birth to the present. A people. A nation. A war that has spread far and wide from a small forgotten hill in south Lebanon. We owe a debt of gratitude to the author who has gifted us with this memory. I feel it's weight. To remember. To pass it on. Never to forget. Read this book.

A little written about subject, but gripping for sure. It follows Israeli soldiers stationed at 'The Pumpkin Outpost' set up to protect the border with Lebanon. The 5th & last section brought it all together and I thought was pure genius. Moving account and definitely worth the read if you are interested in how wars go on forever. Sombering, no real answers.

The author reveals his experiences as a soldier in the IDF, particularly of the time he served on the Israel, Lebanon border. Some of the stories are riveting, some heartfelt, the writing is mostly succinct, however, still expressive. The author lightly explains the different politics in Israel: the reasons for, and the resistance to, the security zone in Lebanon, the effects of withdrawal, the rise of terrorism in Israel, and the world, with the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. However, above all, Friedman remembers the men, mostly young teens, with whom he served, and especially, those young men who did not return alive from the Pumpkin outpost.

Pumpkinflowers. A book about Israel v. Lebanon. I don't know how I stumbled across this book but I'm grateful that I did. I almost didn't read it. I'm not enamored of soldier stories and when he explained his layout of topics, I thought, "Nope. This is not something that will interest me at all." But then despite that thought I began to read. Short chapters, many about 5 pages. Easy segments. By the end of the first chapter I knew I had found something special. Something to really delve into. A story of soldiers as people, people integrated into two societies -- the military and real life. If they survive. Moving. Humanizing. Contemplative. Brilliant. I highly recommend it. Pumpkin is where they were stationed. Flower was their slang for the dead. Read it. Moving.

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