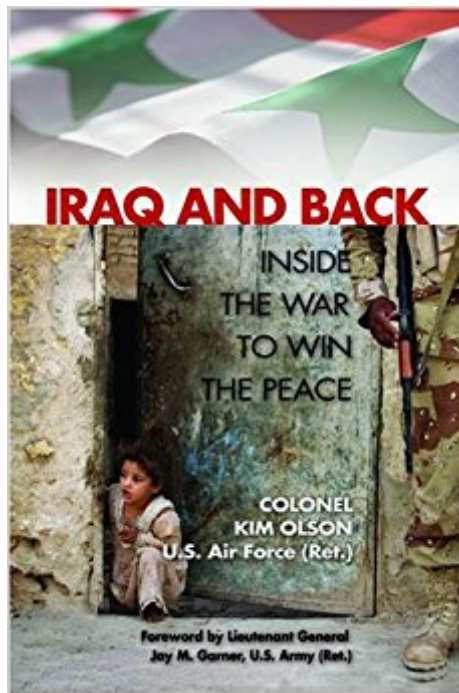


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Iraq And Back: Inside The War To Win The Peace



Synopsis

In April 2003, soon after Operation Iraqi Freedom had been declared a success, President Bush sent retired U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Jay Garner to Iraq to rebuild the country. As Garner's executive officer, the author of this book was part of the senior leadership circle charged with three tasks. They were to reconstruct Iraq's infrastructure, provide humanitarian assistance, and lay the foundation for a democratic process to take hold. But not long after their arrival in the rubble and ruin of Iraq, the political, military, and economic wheels ground to a halt and theirs became a mission improbable. In this book, Air Force Colonel Kim Olson tells how and why. Readers are privy to the candid discussions of U.S. generals frustrated by operating in a policy void. They sit at the table with Iraqi leaders who warn of an impending insurgency if the proclamations crafted by ill-informed and arrogant policy makers are implemented. And they share Olson's fear as Saddam's death squads attempt to assassinate her in an explosion of bullets. This gripping, firsthand account of what went wrong is seen from Olson's unique point of view as a senior female military officer, pilot, wife, and mother. Many of the stories she tells are known to only the handful of people involved, including a mission to rescue two Iraqi women and details of early meetings with tribal leaders to discuss building a coalition government—an effort quashed by Garner's successor. Her haunting descriptions of Shiite families searching for loved ones in Saddam's killing fields and malnourished children in the town of Umn Qasr untouched by the International Oil-for-Food Program, will remain with readers long after they close the book. From the decisions of political leaders and military commanders to everyday encounters with the Iraqi people and informal conversations with soldiers, such a wealth of honest, insider information is rare. No other author weaves together military, political, and humanistic insights so effectively.

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Customer Reviews

"We had shared good times and hardship; adventure and doldrums; happiness and heartbreak; security and danger. We had been participants in the greatest endeavor of this new century. As you read her book, you'll understand, as I do...they don't come any better than Kim."—from the Foreword by Jay Garner "Colonel Olson is a modern day Joan of Arc--born to inspire, to lead and to command. A top flight jet pilot in the Air Force, she entered Baghdad with General Jay Garner to begin the overwhelming job of rebuilding Iraq. Her story will inspire all who open it and can't put it down."--William Sessions, Former Director of the FBI and U.S. District Judge "This is one of the most provocative and compelling books on Iraq published to date. It encompasses that rare blend of insight and story telling from someone on the inside in the early days of the Iraqi reconstruction phase. This book makes me proud and mad simultaneously. That is told by a senior Air Force officer and pilot is all the more remarkable, because it gives tone, texture and human emotion to the devastation and destruction that defines war."--Ron Tammen "Kim Olson brings a mother's love and a warrior's courage to her first-person account of the effort to rebuild Iraq as she experienced it--from the inside. It is an unsparing tale; Olson is tough on people she didn't think were helpful and tough on herself, too, as she recounts a career that didn't end at all the way she hoped it would."--Louis D. Boccardi, Retired President, Associated Press "This is a story of a life on the edge, at the transition of emerging opportunities for women in the military. And Olson did it all: flying and command assignments, staff and field assignments. Competent, assertive, caring, and loyal, nothing could have prepared her for her final assignment: securing the ‘peace’ in Iraq. A breathtaking, unforgettable account."--Sheila Widnall, Secretary of the Air Force, 1993-97

Col. Kim Olson, USAF (Ret.) is Executive Director of Grace After Fire, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing equitable care to women veterans, and lives in Weatherford, TX.

I have read a lot of memoirs by women and men who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces (various eras). I liked this book in comparison to other memoirs by Iraq-war era female veterans because of the way it focuses on a larger narrative-- global events during the early days of the Iraq

war--and the way in which her narrative is intermingled with Jay Garner's. This move in particular shows readers how the military can build people up and quickly tare them down. We see Garner's rise and fall and Olson's rise and fall. We learn "inside" intel about efforts to "win the peace" in Iraq -- those efforts of the ORHA -- and the war to win her own personal peace, which she claims was won on the last page (and last sentence) of her book. Issues of gender and sexual discrimination are included at a minimum, supporting other women veterans' experiences. She does not do as much bashing as others have done in their memoirs! I think this is a good memoir for those interested in learning about a female officer's experience serving in the military and during the early days of the Iraq war.

I enjoyed the subject matter of this book. A story about Iraq, and our military was especially interesting since it was the perspective from a woman. I think it gave accurant account of the events as seen & experienced by Mrs Olsen, but also dealt into the emotions of those there - both foreign and those born there. I also liked that it showed the strengths of a woman and how difficult that can be, sometimes. My only complaint is you could tell this was Olsen's 1st attempt at writting. Not a bad attempt mind you. It just didn't flow as well as it could have. BUT then again, she is a military person, not a writter. I would much rather have the events told by one there - even if not expertly written, than to have a top writter try to convey what was going on. Bravo Kim Olsen!

It brought the struggle of the Iraqi people to life. A great read about the heroes and villains in our military.

Kim Olson was my squadron commander during my time assigned to fly in the 96th ARS at Fairchild AFB in the mid-1990s. Her effective leadership style and ability to balance the myriad of obligations she had at the time taught me important life lessons as a young captain. I use these lessons still today as a mother of three, as a veteran, as a speaker/author and entrepreneur. One of those lessons was "Yes, you can have it all, but you cannot have it at the same time." Her riveting account of her time in Iraq has it all: the horrors witnessed, the progress made, the small victories, the frustrating setback, her pride of service at that time in our nation's history, yet set against the palpable sadness of missing her daughter's 12th birthday. This mixed bag of emotions beautiful depicted in her book, of awesome moments where we can't believe how fortunate we are to be there, followed by sadness of separation from home, happiness at serving with enlightened men, then rage for unjust treatment by superior officers...all of it hit home for me. The rollercoaster life of

the military service experience is captured in this book perfectly. Those of us who have lived it, as well as professional civilian women who have chosen pathways requiring almost dual personalities, will appreciate Colonel Olson's writing and appreciate the important skill of "compartmentalization." To peek into the mind and life of one of the first women to fly for the Air Force, to command airplanes and then to command people, is a truly special treat. To read this book is to takeaway important lessons of what works when working with, for and when leading men. I am recommending this book for all young women trying to figure out how to position themselves as leaders in organizations that may or may not really want them there. Thank you Colonel Olson, for the book and for your leadership!

I had the great good fortune to attend a Veterans Day lecture by Colonel Kim Olson at the University of Texas at Dallas. Afterwards, I was invited to meet her. As if hearing Colonel Olson speak was not exciting enough, talking to her in person was electrifying. What a presence! From the moment I began reading *Iraq and Back*, I was captivated. I learned in depth about some of the topics she touched on in her speech--and more. Colonel Olson doesn't mince words, she just tells the story. And when you read her words it's like having a conversation with a friend: for example, when she talks about being prepared to go without many luxuries and necessities, but not chocolate. Also, because the book is written from a woman's perspective, we get a sense of the real people of Iraq--the mothers, the children, the shopkeepers, everyday folks. Colonel Olson's background was in teaching, but her stepfather suggested that she might make a fine military officer. After she joined the Air Force, she found that she desperately wanted to be a jet pilot. She had to compartmentalize her life and emotions. She loves her children, but she also loved to fly--the same kind of conflict between family and work that many women face. Somehow, Kim Olson manages to bridge the apparent contradiction between being an Air Force colonel and mother of 12 and 15 year olds. Her call sign is Jetmom. When Olson was asked to be part of a team to "rebuild Iraq" as the executive officer to retired General Jay M. Garner (director of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance), she was conflicted. She had been an Air Force pilot, above the battle and not involved in the ground war. In the book's foreword, General Garner had this to say about Olson: "She is a strong, articulate, intellectual pioneer with boundless energy--an exemplary officer and marvelous human being who has served and still serves as a role model and mentor to younger women. She was instrumental in forming a staff, developing plans, securing funds, producing a budget, arranging travel, coordinating meetings with diplomats, clerics, politicians, military commanders, and Iraqi leaders--Sunni, Shia, and Kurd. She would be the first person I would pick for my team." Before she

left on this assignment, she was advised by a historian to take composition books with her to record the daily events, a living document that would become the basis for this memoir. I smiled when she told of bossing men around and treating them like children. I cried when she wrote about leaving her husband and children and finding her kids stuffed animals hidden in her bag when she arrived in Iraq with a note to "Hug them when you miss us." I felt good when she stood over an Iraqi who told her she must cover her head and she replied: "I am not in a mosque and I am not a Muslim and military women do not cover." I felt sad when Olson came across an Iraqi woman who was holding the body bag of her child and she just put her arms around her and said "I'm so sorry." She knew that grief was a universal language. Colonel Olson realized that rebuilding a society requires its entire people, both men and women. Everyone needs to feel they have a voice and can make a difference. On a personal level, she knew this concept all too well. The slow integration of women into the military mirrors that of other predominantly male professions. She feels that women in nontraditional careers should start by unlocking the doors of opportunity and ally themselves with enlightened men who have a strong sense of self and are not threatened by powerful women. She was fortunate to find some good men that helped to further her career. When Olson won an Exceptional Leadership Award she gave a short but impassioned speech at the Women's Memorial in Washington, DC. "As I look out at this audience tonight, I am once again reminded that it is because of women like you that I get to fly jets, I get to command troops, and I get to wear this military uniform and defend my country. So tonight, it is I who thank you." She had finally balanced work, family, and community and knew that a nurturing style of leadership worked. I highly recommend this book, not only because it's written by a zealous woman, but because it offers a compelling insight into what the United States faced and is still facing in Iraq. by Doris Anne Roop-Benner for Story Circle Book Reviews[...] reviewing books by, for, and about women

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