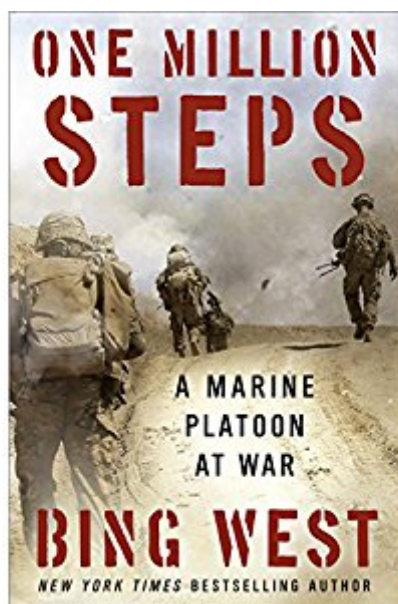


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# One Million Steps: A Marine Platoon At War



## Synopsis

Battalion 3/5 suffered the highest number of casualties in the war in Afghanistan. This is the story of one platoon in that distinguished battalion. Aware of U.S. plans to withdraw from the country, knowing their efforts were only a footprint in the sand, the fifty Marines of 3rd Platoon fought in Sangin, the most dangerous district in all of Afghanistan. So heavy were the casualties that the Secretary of Defense offered to pull the Marines out. Instead, they pushed forward. Each Marine in 3rd Platoon patrolled two and a half miles a day for six months - a total of One Million Steps in search of a ghostlike enemy that struck without warning. Why did the Marines attack and attack, day after day? Every day brought a new skirmish. Each footfall might trigger an IED. Half the Marines in 3rd Platoon didn't make it intact to the end of the tour. One Million Steps is the story of the fifty brave men who faced these grim odds and refused to back down. Based on Bing West's embeds with 3rd Platoon, as well as on their handwritten log, this is a gripping grunt's-eye view of life on the front lines of America's longest war. Writing with a combat veteran's compassion for the fallen, West also offers a damning critique of the higher-ups who expected our warriors to act as nation-builders - and whose failed strategy put American lives at unnecessary risk. Each time a leader was struck down, another rose up to take his place. How does one man instill courage in another? What welded these men together as firmly as steel plates? This remarkable book is the story of warriors caught between a maddening, unrealistic strategy and their unswerving commitment to the fight. Fearsome, inspiring, and poignant in its telling, One Million Steps is sure to become a classic, a unique and enduring testament to the American warrior spirit.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Bing West's *One Million Steps* is an excellent study of small unit warfare - the fireteam, the squad, the platoon. More than that, it is a testament to the men who are fighting the War on Terror. One million steps is about how many steps a Marine rifleman will take patrolling the fields, paths and ditches in the Sangin district of Helmand province in Afghanistan during a tour of duty. West is embedded with 3/5 (3rd Battalion, 5th Marine regiment) and sees the same war the young men of 3/5 do. More, he is a Marine Vietnam combat vet who can not only describe what's happening, but occasionally give the reader insight into not only this war, but also how it compares to America's other long, losing war. This book opens up the lives of young men in combat. There is magnificent courage, utter professionalism and gritty toughness of young Marines. There is even grudging respect for a hated, but adaptable enemy. But, mostly, there is sorrow. The author never shrinks from telling the reader of the IED blasts that tear limbs off young men or the bullet that ends the life of a man whose child is born the same week - a child he didn't live to see. From a strictly military point of view, there is some discussion of the strategic confusion caused by having generals, secretary of defense and President who do not share a common strategy (Obama is simply trying to find an exit). But, this is limited and for the most part, it's a squad and platoon war with small units of Marines versus small gangs of Taliban fighters. Each day, the Marines patrol around the district hoping to draw fire so they may use their advantage in supporting fires (artillery, air strikes) to kill the enemy in ever-increasing numbers to win a war of attrition.

Bing West's *"The Strongest Tribe"* and *"The Wrong War"* are must-reads about Iraq and Afghanistan, and *"One Million Steps"* offers a fitting conclusion to his decade of embedding and reporting from the wars. Like his previous books, West offers an up-close look, this time at Marines in the Sangin region of Afghanistan. A reader will appreciate the grinding, repetitive and brutal nature of the combat, which costs this battalion many dead and wounded servicemembers. There is little/no counter-insurgency here - the Marines are sent to fight, one general says, so they fight. West is harshly critical of higher-ups, from Presidents to generals, and offers nothing but high praise for the Marines who have to suffer from the mistakes and bad planning of those above them. However, at times I wanted to see more depth from the individuals; West offers brief biographical information, but most of the dialogue involves combat planning or motivational remarks. It's certainly "in the moment," but the Marines seem larger-than-life most of the time, and lose some of their essential

humanity. I reported from Iraq a few times in Iraq with the 82nd Airborne - and soldiers are profane, cynical, very funny and not quite as perfect and hyper-motivated as they seem here (but Marine culture is different than the Army). Mostly, though, West captures the violence and brutality of this kind of war. Whether it's an IED on the right, and a sniper on the left, there were dozens of ways for Marines to die. It happened quickly, without warning and without time to dwell on it. The Marines gave back in equal measure - and it's unnerving how the rules of engagement stretched from the obvious of shooting at those Afghans carrying weapons to those talking on radios.

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