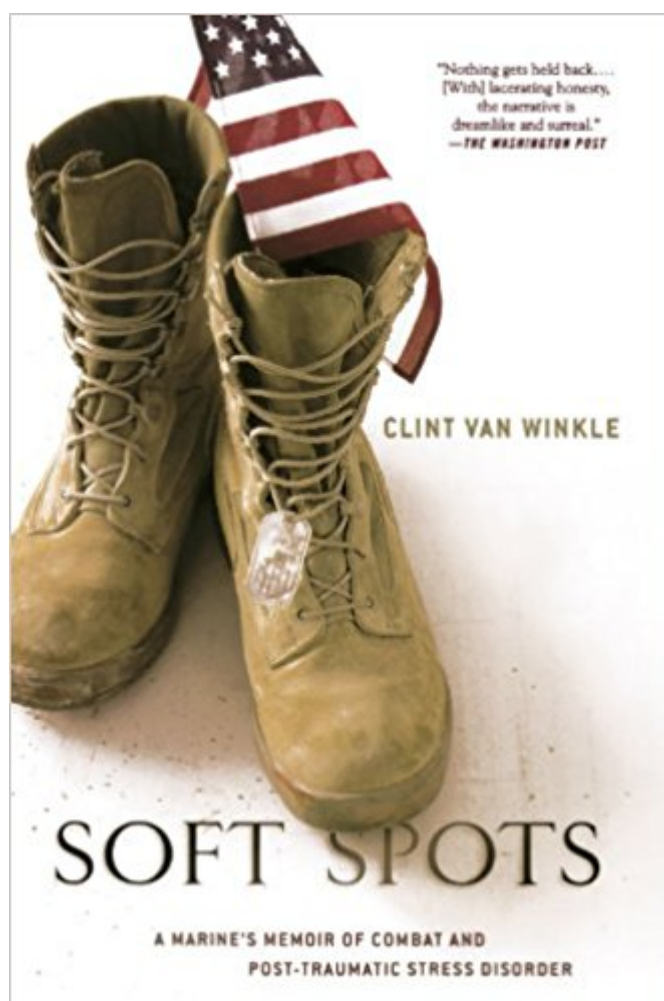


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# Soft Spots: A Marine's Memoir Of Combat And Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder



## Synopsis

A powerful, haunting, provocative memoir of a Marine in Iraq and his struggle with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in a system trying to hide the damage done Marine Sergeant Clint Van Winkle flew to war on Valentine's Day 2003. His battalion was among the first wave of troops that crossed into Iraq, and his first combat experience was the battle of Nasiriyah, followed by patrols throughout the country, house to house searches, and operations in the dangerous Baghdad slums. But after two tours of duty, certain images would not leave his memory—a fragmented mental movie of shooting a little girl; of scavenging parts from a destroyed, blood-spattered tank; of obliterating several Iraqi men hidden behind an ancient wall; and of mistakenly stepping on a "soft spot," the remains of a Marine killed in combat. After his return home, Van Winkle sought help at a Veterans Administration facility, and so began a maddening journey through an indifferent system that promises to care for veterans, but in fact abandons many of them. From riveting scenes of combat violence, to the gallows humor of soldiers fighting a war that seems to make no sense, to moments of tenderness in a civilian life ravaged by flashbacks, rage, and doubt, *Soft Spots* reveals the mind of a soldier like no other recent memoir of the war that has consumed America.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This memoir of combat in Iraq, and the post-traumatic stress disorder that followed, contains more literary touches than most, and its an admirable effort. Marine sergeant Van Winkle (who earned an M.A. in creative writing after returning from Iraq) emphasizes that every marines desire was not to

spread freedom but to come home alive, and while the book describes some firefights, there are even more incidents of Van Winkle and his comrades blazing away at vehicles or distant figures only to discover they had killed civilians. After discharge, fearful memories and violent rages drove him to seek help from a surprisingly unhelpful V.A., but the passage of time, a few sympathetic therapists and a loving wife set him right. The text jumps back and forth between Van Winkle's war experiences and postwar life, when marines from his unit, some dead, reappear to badger him. Most readers will forgive this exercise in creative writing techniques because it presents a vivid picture of what many vets endure. (Mar.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

• Nothing gets held back in *Soft Spots*, Clint Van Winkle's account of his two years of duty as a Marine sergeant in Iraq...lacerating honesty, the narrative is dreamlike and surreal. • The Washington Post • Van Winkle doesn't attempt to analyze the wrongs or rights of the Iraq war, engage in political arguments, or blame politicians. He saves his energies for willing his fellow Marines to come home from Iraq alive and in one piece. • Washington City Paper • [Van Winkle's] book describes his spiral from the inanity of war to the insanity of the world-weary...Happy trails? No. Trauma? Yes, this is how one veteran carries his war. • Army Times, Navy Times, Air Force Times, Marine Corps Times • 'Soft Spots' is a survival story, not just of combat but the mental warfare that follows, the oppressive nightmares that flesh is heir to, but mostly, it's a restoration of what's human, an unflinching stab at forgiveness, desperately in search of a meaning. Van Winkle, who spent much of his childhood in Charleston, now gives voice to the thousands of forgotten soldiers returning home from Iraq, or those whose souls are still stuck there. He gives us his poor haunted head, only mapped out and numbered, and the effect will make you weep. • postandcourier.com

An illuminating first-person account of the Iraq War and PTSD. Van Winkle successfully merges experiences from his post-war life with memories of the war. The resulting scenes can be disorienting at times, but that is likely the point. Unfortunately, Van Winkle's personal progression with the disorder is spotty at times. For example, in the second chapter, Van Winkle depicts a scene in which he verbally abused his then-girlfriend, an event that seems to signal a major strain in their relationship. Yet somehow, 150 pages later, the two are married and moving to Wales to begin graduate school with little explanation of how their relationship healed. Read *Soft Spots* to

understand what it's like to suffer from PTSD, but don't expect a fully composed personal memoir.

PTSD is a life sentence that consumes your life energy to deal with it. We've seen the stereotypes on film: the Vietnam-era Vet, the "shell-shocked" WWII Vet, and now we find ourselves swamped with a tide of new Vets from the Middle East campaigns. Clint Van Winkle shows us his own personal hell that returned with him to the States. It's uncomfortable on many levels. Some of the details are graphic, but sometimes the less-graphic ones are more appalling. Your heart will stick in your throat when he tells of the actions he lived through and the way those moments come back to interfere with his here-and-now. This book should definitely be required reading for high school and beyond, to educate those generations coming of age to the grim realities and legacy of what it means to be a soldier in time of war.

I read the book for a psych class and am grateful to have been assigned this book. It was hard to read and not connect with Clint or Sgt. Van Winkle, his mates, and the price that was extracted from them for their service. I would recommend this book to anyone, it's written in such a way that you can feel his inner battle pulling him in so many directions. The clarity with which he describes his feelings and the confusion they cause him are heart wrenching at times but the result is a book that gives the reader a greater understanding for what it is these soldiers need help unburdening themselves from.

This book was a page-turner for sure. I chose this because I wanted to understand post-combat PTSD. I feel that you can really begin to try to understand by reading this book. Loved it.

I studied Van Winkle's memoir as part of a project I did to earn my master of humanities degree and read it more than once. As a former Marine, I understand the struggles Van Winkle experiences with alcohol and finding stability in life after the Corps. The lifestyle of drinking and spending endless hours in VFW halls is all too familiar and true. I would have given Soft Spots a "5" star rating if it were more fluid to read. There are some passages that require slightly more eye muscle to turn the page. But, overall, one will come away with a better understanding of a struggling Marine's life after the Corps and the characteristics seen in most recovery narratives.

I really enjoyed this book although it is rather graphic in description. If you want to get an idea of what these men go through during war then you should read this book.

I read this book for class and thoroughly enjoyed it. It was a quick read and helpful in getting into the mind of a combat veteran.

Thanks to Van Winkle for writing this book. I've read several other books by recent veterans of the war in Iraq. I valued this book for several reasons: it provides insight into a soldier's experience during the war and how it impacted him AFTER he returned home. VW vividly interweaves stories from his wartime experience with his post-war life which helps the reader understand the effect of PTSD. It is a creative style that had a real impact on this reader.

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