Redeployment by Phil Klay

Interwoven with themes of brutality and faith, guilt and fear, helplessness and survival, Klay takes readers to the frontlines of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, asking us to understand what happened there, and what happened to the soldiers who returned.

Why you'll like it: War writing, short stories, diverse viewpoints.

About the Author: Phil Klay is a veteran of the US Marine Corps who served in Iraq's Anbar Province as a Public Affairs Officer. A graduate of Dartmouth College, he received an MFA from Hunter College. His writing has appeared in the New York Times, the Washington Post, and Newsweek, among other publications. Redeployment is his debut collection and won the National Book Award in 2014.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does the title, “Redeployment,” mean in the context of the first story in the collection?

2. Have you or anyone close to you ever served in the military? If so, did Klay’s stories resonate with your and/or their experience?

3. In “Unless It’s a Sucking Chest Wound,” the narrator refers to “the idea of Iraq all my civilian friends imagine when they say the word, an Iraq filled with honor and violence” (p. 238). What was your “idea of Iraq” before you read the book? Did the book confirm or change your view?

4. Klay’s book is a moving and satisfying read, but also extremely emotionally challenging. Which parts did you find the most difficult? What was your favorite story?

5. The narrator of “Bodies” tells the story of a Marine who had burned to death clutching a small rock in each hand. He describes it as “the worst burn case we ever had. Worst not in charring or loss of body parts, just worst” (p. 69). Why?

6. If you were to describe Klay’s writing in three words, what would they be?

7. The stories in Redeployment often include military terms that might have been unfamiliar to you prior to reading the book. If so, what effect did this language have on you?

8. In “Psychological Operations,” why does Waguih describe to his father the profanities he used against Laith al-Tawhid (p. 210)? Why does he tell Zara?
9. Reading a collection of short stories is a very different experience than reading a novel. How did you approach the book? What enjoyment do story collections provide that longer works (novels and nonfiction) do not?

10. Look at the last paragraph of the last story in the book. How is this an effective end to the entire collection?

(Questions by publisher)