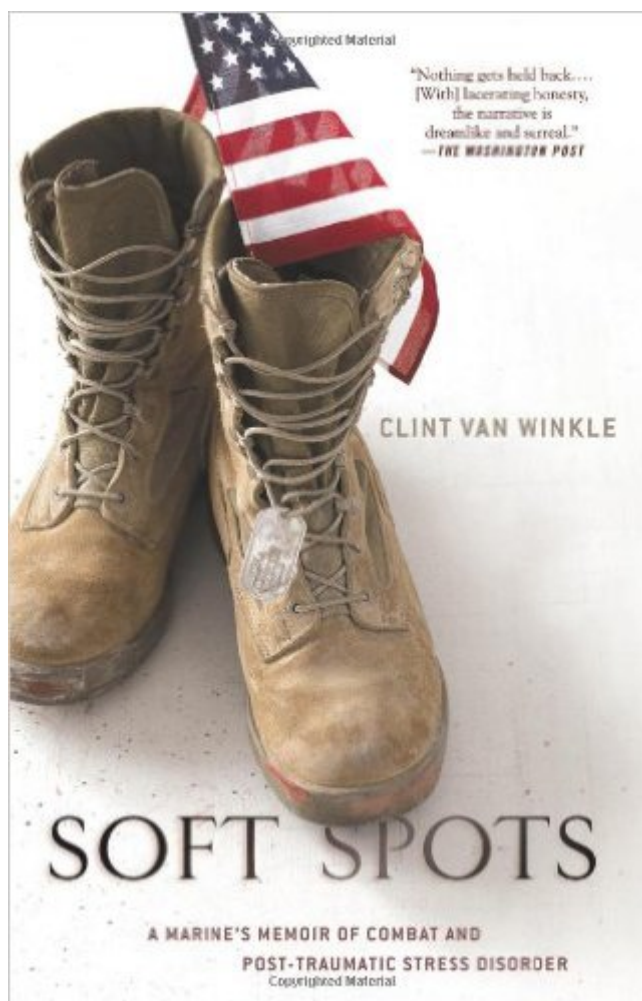


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# Soft Spots: A Marine's Memoir Of Combat And Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder



## 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 slim book feels like something all Americans should read. The author paints a portrait of his experience as a Marine in Iraq which is fascinating, chilling, horrifying, and at times even briefly funny. He succeeded in helping me better understand both the mindset and the experiences of

young Marines coming home from the war. The author vividly describes his life with his Marine buddies and comrades, painting a picture of personalities, places, events, and dilemmas... and eventually the emotional reactions which begin to filter through. It's an incredibly powerful piece of writing, and a real example of "courage after fire". I'm grateful to the author for sharing both his experiences and his process of beginning to face how the war has changed him (and hundreds of thousands of other men and women). I think this book is especially valuable for those who love a Marine (or soldier) serving in Iraq or Afghanistan, since it is unflinching in sharing an inside view of a military culture which rewards toughness and suppression of emotions. While the episodes of violence, fear, rage, and horror are at times difficult to read, they may be very helpful in understanding what the person you love has lived through. Even the harsh language and vulgar humor of the men in this story are helpful in picturing their lives and world view. The episode in which a pathetic dog is repeatedly shot at by a fellow Marine for absolutely no reason (and neither the author nor anyone else intervenes to save it) was very powerful for me, especially knowing that the author owns a yellow lab at the end of the book. (The moment in which his dog nudges his arm to ask for a pat on the head was one of the first moments when it began to feel as if the author was really home.

I should probably begin by saying that Clint Van Winkle, the author of *Soft Spots*, is as much of a hero as most of the other US Marines with whom he served. Not more and not less. Those of us who haven't served seem to idolize our soldiers, but Van Winkle seems, in turn, to not want idolatry. There are as many stories about fighting wars as there are people who are involved in war. Van Winkle wrote about something that's been whispered about for centuries, even today: mental illness. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a severe, debilitating anxiety that develops after a person is subjected to terrifying events, such as rape, witnessing a murder... or being part of a war. PTSD occurs, as per a recent [2009] study, in approximately 17% of US armed forces (all branches). Van Winkle talks about, early in his story, opening a sandy box of mementos he brought back from his most recent tour in Iraq, a land that's mostly desert. "The box released the land when I opened it," he said. The velocity of his mental sandstorms varied. They had no rhyme, reason, or mercy. His sandstorms occur randomly throughout the book. In most books, this jumping around would be unnecessary and, in fact, annoying. However, why should the reader be able to sift through the story neatly when the author could not? The job was to "carry out your mission, and keep your honor clean." Marines leave no man behind - but sometimes they had to. A Forward of the book defined "Soft Spots" as the remains of a US Marine who had died in combat.

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