



Dustoff 7-3

Erik Sabiston

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This book is for heroes. Dustoff 7-3 tells the true story of four unlikely heroes in the rugged mountains of Afghanistan, where medics are forced to descend on wires to reach the wounded and helicopter pilots must fight wind, weather, and enemy fire to pluck casualties from some of the world's most difficult combat arenas. Complete opposites thrown together, cut off, and outnumbered, Chief Warrant Officer Erik Sabiston and his flight crew answered the call in a race against time, not to take lives but to save them. The concept of evacuating wounded soldiers by helicopter developed in the Korean War and became a staple during the war in Vietnam where heroic, unarmed chopper crews flew vital missions known to the grateful grunts on the ground as Dustoffs. The crew of Dustoff 7-3 carried on that heroic tradition, flying over a region that had seen scores of American casualties, known among veterans as the Valley of Death. At the end of Operation Hammer Down, they had rescued 14 soldiers, made three critical supply runs, recovered two soldiers killed in action, and nearly died. It took all of three days.

Dustoff 7-3 Details

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From Reader Review Dustoff 7-3 for online ebook

Michael Gunter says

Outstanding story of some of America's heroes. Very well written, kept me on edge throughout the entire book. The character development is wonderful, helping you to understand and feel a connection with them. Thank you, Erik and crew, for what you did and continue to do. Thank you to those who paid the ultimate price. God bless!

Lena Cox says

When I was twenty-seven, I audited a military history course. At the time, I was convinced I wanted to study, then teach, military history. The course disenchanted me, not with history, but with man's unquenchable thirst for violence.

What lacked in the course's syllabus was material that demonstrated humanity. An account like Erik Sabiston's *Dustoff 7-3* would have helped balance the brutal war strategies. Sabiston's story of his time as a Medevac helicopter pilot in Afghanistan offsets the dark side of war with examples of humanity, bravery, and dedication to life that exist in and above a battlefield.

Sabiston's viewpoints are refreshing and daunting. Daunting because they dissolve the detachment most people leverage when ingesting lethal events via CNN, BBC, etc. Reading the personal experiences of Sabiston's crew forces an individual connection to the ongoing battle against ISIS, Al Qaeda, and the Taliban.

The story's source shouldn't make a difference, but it does. Ideally, our minds would recognize the deaths major media reports as the death of someone's sister, brother, mom, granddad, but our emotional safeguards erect walls and turn the deaths into spreadsheet numbers. Reading accounts like Sabiston's demolishes the mind's walls. Battles, bombings, troop movements, death counts begin to reverberate in the mind as individual lives being detoured or ended and a murmur of grace is said for the soldiers being evacuated by Medivac crews and for the men and women who risk their lives for golden rules.

Dustoff 7-3 invites the reader into a weekend in the life of a Medevac crew in Afghanistan. Sabiston covers the difficulty of flying a helicopter, especially while being shot at with missiles; the integrated actions a crew must execute on missions; day to day life in the military; motivation for joining the military; and a non-political view of the Afghani battleground.

Dustoff 7-3 is available via Barnes and Nobles, Amazon, and most major book retailers. You can learn more about Erik Sabiston's career at eriksabiston.com.

Kelly says

I read this book after hearing Sabiston on Morning Edition (I think... something on WNYC). I recently lost my uncle, who, among other things in a long Army career, flew Blackhawks on medevac missions in Afghanistan. So I hoped to learn something about what that life was like, and this book amply fulfilled that

goal. The quality of the writing varies - it's strongest during the most detailed action scenes, weakest when he describes more general aspects of Dustoff crew life and when he tries to provide a moral or "takeaway" for each event.

But let's leave the writing aside - the content of this book is interesting and inspiring enough that even a snob like myself kept turning the pages. What Sabiston and my uncle and others like them did was crazy, and brave, and really freakin' hard. And their job looks positively easy when compared with what the medics had to do. To give you just a taste, can you imagine riding a hoist down into an active battlefield to rescue an injured soldier? While bullets whiz by you -- and AT you? Amazing. (I also really liked that the medic on Sabiston's crew was a woman... I realize that was just chance assignment, but wow. Julia Bringloe is awesome.)

Danielle Tannehill says

Reading this book has opened my eyes to the realities of war, on a different level than I've ever known. As a child I was taught to honor our troops, and to give them the respect and dignity they deserve. My grandfather was a member of the 815th Airlift Squadron- the "Flying Jennies"- in the Air Force, and served in the Korean war. Several more of my family members served active duty in Afghanistan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. To say the least, American Pride runs thick through my blood.

You can watch the movies, and you can read the articles, but for me, reading from the perspective of soldiers in the midst of doing their best to save the fallen, has changed me. I couldn't help the tears that came with the retelling of multiple missions the Dustoff 7-3 crew accomplished, and I can't tell you how much this book has deepened my gratitude for those who have both fought and died for my freedom!

If you're looking for a fast-paced, thrilling read, this book is for you! If you're like me, and you're usually more of a fiction reader, you might just be pleasantly surprised by how much this book will grip you.

Alex Silverstein says

I really enjoyed this book. There are a number of technical references, both to flying and the Army, but I like that sort of thing. Great story about unsung bravery and heroes.

Matthew says

This is the interesting story of a Medevac pilot and his crew during a harrowing tour of duty in the Afghan War.

The book is reasonably well written, interesting, and it clearly communicates the dedication that the Medevac community demonstrate to their work. I would give it 3 1/2 stars.

The book, written by the pilot, describes mission after mission and the challenges encountered. And the challenges are not inconsequential. At the same time, while you get an interesting and insightful glimpse in

to the world of the Medevac community, it lacks a bit of the larger context of events. This is understandable as the work is basically an eyes-on account of the pilot's experiences. However, this results in the surrounding events being only briefly sketched, so the book deals with a focussed sliver of the experience and is short on the larger context of events.

Despite this, I enjoyed the book and would recommend it to those with an interest in the subject.

John says

A quick and thoroughly enjoyable read.

Dustoff 7-3 by Erik Sabiston will not sit unread on your bedside table for long. Instead, you'll find yourself tearing through the pages. The book focuses on a short but intense tour of duty in Afghanistan in 2010. Sabiston is pilot in command—or as he puts it, "locked in the cockpit of a big, vibrating sauna"—of a Medevac (or "Dustoff") UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter.

The book's first five words are written in all caps and set the stage for what is to follow: I AM NOT A HERO. Although the author is documenting his own hair-raising experiences flying Medevac missions in combat, he does not dwell on his own thoughts and actions. Instead, Sabiston goes out of his way to acknowledge others—his fellow crew members and those in the line combat organizations he serves... especially the ones having "the worst day of their lives" and needing his unique set of skills.

This book is quite realistic. So much so that the reader will be immersed in the action—and introduced to all the acronyms and lingo used by Army medical evacuation units: PC, TOC, Wobbly One, Meat Servo, to mention just a few. Keeping track of it all can be a bit daunting; but worth the effort—especially when combined with the author's unique sense of humor. For example, I've read many similes for what it's like to hover a helicopter; but none quite like the author's. He likens hovering to "riding a unicycle on top of a bowling ball while juggling three rabid raccoons and reciting the alphabet backwards while you're half-drunk."

The author's sense of humor and matter-of-fact writing style combine to make his highly-skilled and dangerous job seem almost routine. He fairly easily inserts the reader into near-unbelievable situations. Despite his self-deprecating humor and understated style of writing, the author's (and the others with whom he serves) bravery and professionalism come through loud and clear in Dustoff 7-3.

I recommend this book for readers who want to learn about today's US Army Medevac mission—and especially their role in the battles taking place in Afghanistan.

John Cathcart
Reviewer, Military Writers Society of America
Award-winning author of "Delta 7"

Mike Slawdog says

Disclaimer: I received this book for free as part of Goodreads' First Read Program.

Dustoff 7-3 is written by an Army medevac helo pilot about a specific series of missions in Afghanistan in the summer of 2011. In the book, Sabiston details his own background and that of his crew and then describes in detail the missions they were asked to fly in support of Operation Hammer Down.

This book has a very plain-worded feel to it, and you as the reader can almost hear the author speaking to you. While it could be more polished, I think it helped make the story feel more genuine. His descriptions of flying and the army were easy for me to understand, though I am familiar with military aviation (albeit fixed-wing), so everything might not be as clear to a relative stranger to that community. For example, Sabiston uses terms like "crew dog," "skosh," "red-headed step child," and "drank the Kool-Aid." For anyone reading this, they refer to someone who is willing to make their crew a priority over their own comfort, sketchy, oddball/unique, and buying into the hype/company line (ie like cult members drinking Kool-Aid). Likewise, the use of the author's own words seems to make the story come to life. In one example, he writes "Kenny pulled us clear of the mountaintops and pointed the nose at the ground to gain airspeed. In moments we were cranking along at 160 knots on a fast dive toward the floor of the Pech River Valley...." This kind of description is common in the book and was effective in keeping me engrossed in the story.

I found Dustoff 7-3 to be an engaging and exciting read, and it held my interest throughout. It also gave me a great appreciation for the specific challenges that medevac crews face on a daily basis, such as hovering/landing under fire where there is no designated/cleared landing zone in bad weather. While their existence is well known, these types of exploits don't typically make headlines and they end up as unsung heroes.

I'd recommend this book for anyone interested in war stories from Afghanistan, but particularly for those interested in and familiar with the military and/or aviation.

Chuck says

An excellent read about the lives of the men and women who fly the medivac missions in war. You felt like the story was being told to you as you listened to the author share his experiences.

Melanie Adkins says

This is the true story of one medevac team and their work in Afghanistan. They work near the area known as the Valley of Death. It was Dustoff 7-3's job to get the injured soldiers back to the base. After they were checked and treated, the soldiers then went to the hospital. Each team worked with precision timing. The crew consisted of four soldiers and they went about their work quickly and quietly. The area was known for all of the action it saw. The story is real and raw.

First, let me address the author's statement, "I am not a hero." He's right. they are not heroes, they are angels with nerves of steel. I felt as if I was right there beside Mr. Sabiston as they raced from one injured soldier to another. Mr. Sabiston grabs you from the first page and I was yelling for more of the story. Solid writing and making sure it's in-your-face, Mr. Sabiston does a fantastic job of pulling back the curtain and giving us a REAL peek inside. Having this book on your shelf will show others just how informed you really are. Get this one and some tissues because you are going to need them. This book was eye-opening for me. I had no idea the soldiers were working under such conditions.

I found no issues with this one.

I gave this one 5 cheers out of 5 because it gave real a chance to see the inner workings. ~Copy of book provided by author in exchange for a fair review~

Rachel Gillern says

I found myself struggling to put down this book. It is a good read, a great store, and about a team with a great heart.

Edward says

The book was reasonably well-written and provided info about an aspect of the Afghan war that I'd only read about from the other side of the medevac.

Interesting info about flying helicopters in general, challenges in the Afghan mountains, and the dangers to the crew.

The timeline seemed to blur together while I read it, and what I thought was covering one combat deployment turned out to be an account of an entire year of operations. I didn't sense that time passing in the narrative, maybe I was too focused on the missions themselves.

Hope Irvin Marston says

Many of the books I choose to read attract me because I am looking for a relaxing story, rather than one that will send my heart racing. The exception comes when I know the ending will be worth the fright along the way. I chose to read DUSTOFF 7-3, because my husband and I became friends with Erik Sabiston and his wife Tess when they were stationed at Fort Drum.

I knew about Erik's medevac rescues before I read this riveting account of them. I did not know how often he and his crew risked their lives to rescue an injured comrade. Or to pick up one who had given his life for the cause of freedom.

Though we generally think of this kind of rescue operation to be a man's job, readers will soon appreciate the remarkable strength and skill displayed over and over again by Sergeant Julia Anne Bringloe, as the fourth member of this gutsy group of rescuers.

The you-are-there accounts of each of the attempts in Operation HAMMER DOWN attest to the author's ability to write thriller non-fiction.

When Erik stated in the prologue, "All I could think about was that Sergeant Julia Anne Bringloe should have been with us" in "The Hero Issue" of NEWSWEEK, I am sure he was remembering the strategic, death-defying rescues in which she played a major role. However, I could not get that comment out of my mind. As I raced through the pages, I constantly worried about what was going to happen to Julia. I breathed a sigh of relief with each situation as she managed to get her patient into the air and to hang on to him until they were safely back into the helicopter.

The final rescue attempt they dared to try before the tired crew ran out of fuel was being carried out in a sea of fog. Their comrade was a huge soldier....probably weighed 250 pounds! His ruck and gear would have added another 70. Somehow Julia managed to get him hooked up and into the hoist. She signaled that they

were ready to be picked up. When she looked up, the Blackhawk helicopter had disappeared above the clouds.

You must read for yourself to see how this nail biter book ends.
