



In the Gray Area: A Marine Advisor Team at War

Lt. Col. Seth W.B. Folsom USMC

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In the Gray Area is a Marine officer's reflection of his tour of duty as the leader for an advisor team embedded with an Iraqi Army infantry battalion. In February 2008 Major Folsom deployed to Iraq as Team Leader, Military Transition Team 0733. During this deployment his advisor team was embedded with the 7th Iraqi Army Division. Tasked with the mission to train, coach, mentor, and advise the new Iraqi Army's 3rd Battalion, 28th Brigade, the Marines of Military Transition Team 0733 – the “Outlanders” – quickly found the reality of their advisor mission fraught with challenges.

In the Gray Area explores the bond between Folsom and the fourteen men that comprised his advisor team, as well as the tenuous relationship forged between the Marines and their Iraqi counterparts as they struggled to assume independent control of – and maintain security in – Iraq's western al-Anbar province. Highlighting the obstacles faced by Marine advisors as they live, work, eat, and operate with an army whose language and culture are vastly different from their own, Folsom creates a compelling picture of the challenges faced by the Marine Advisor Teams working with the Iraqi Army to drive al-Qaeda from al-Anbar.

In the Gray Area builds on Folsom's *The Highway War*, his award winning memoir of his experience as the commanding officer of Delta Company, First Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, U.S. Marine Corps, which was one of the first into Iraq in March 2003. In *The Highway War*, he conveyed the stress, excitement and uncertainty of modern ground warfare from the viewpoint of a young combat leader. *In the Gray Area* centers on an Iraqi Army that is more mature and on the cusp of independence from its American partners, and it takes place during a period in which there are increased calls for the United States to withdraw from Iraq. In his new book, Folsom shows his maturation as a commander as he thoughtfully details the difficulties posed by a possibly premature American departure from Iraq and questions if the advisor mission is really the key to our attempt to exit Iraq?

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