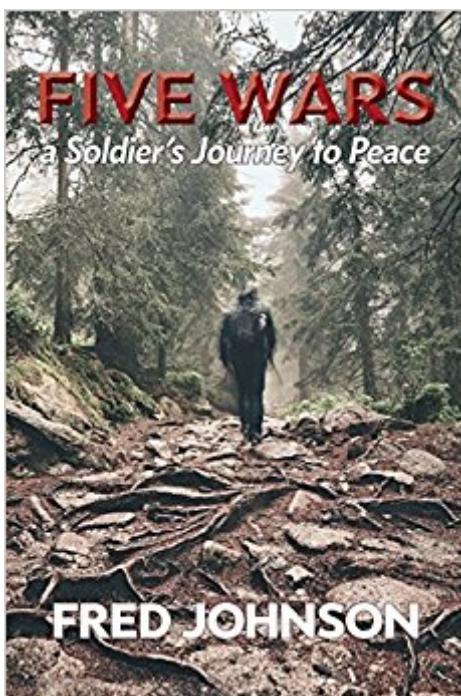


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# Five Wars: A Soldier's Journey To Peace



## Synopsis

FIVE WARS: A Soldier's Journey to Peace is the memoir of a 29-year Army veteran with two tours in Iraq and one each in Afghanistan and Bosnia. Johnson weaves stories over his lifetime from basketball player growing up in southern Illinois to Army Colonel and combat leader and finally, to husband and father who failed to see how war had changed him until it was almost too late.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Those who volunteer to fight our nation's wars possess a special level of courage. Fred Johnson shows us another level of courage with his transparency, sharing with the reader his regrets and his darkest moments in his journey as a husband, father and soldier. His story captured me and I read it in one sitting. This is a great book for any warrior as well as those close to him or her." Colonel Rob Campbell  
US Army Retired  
Iraq and Afghanistan Veteran

Well done, Fred

I've known Fred Johnson since we were both Army lieutenants in the Tenth Mountain Division in 1986. I was honored to read an advance review copy of this tremendous book, and can't recommend it highly enough. Fred served our nation as an infantry officer in Desert Storm, the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan, and numerous other places in the course of a career that spanned three

decades. His description of that journey is alternately poignant, humorous, and uplifting. It is also beautifully written, highly engaging, and scathingly honest. You'll be glad you read it.

100% Pure Courage! Thank You Fred Johnson for writing an amazing soldiers story about the real challenges of returning home and facing the hidden wounds of war. *Five Wars* combines humility, humor, military history, cultural perspective, bone chilling goose bump reality, tragedy, psychology and love that is nested into one amazing military career, reads like a novel. A must read for any active duty member, put this on your professional development reading list, lessons in leadership and perfect for pre and post deployment family and military member training. There are a lot of military books out there that discuss the "been there and done it", but Fred Johnson provides an open and honest reflective journey to overcoming and facing the demons of PTSD. The message I took away from reading *Five Wars: A Soldier's Journey to Peace* is one of encouragement and optimism for those of us who suffer from the trauma of returning home. Your stories brought me home to my Brothers in Arms!

About three-quarters of the way through his memoir of soldiering, *Five Wars: A Soldier's Journey to Peace* (2017), Col. Fred Johnson (Ret.) recalls a scene from his time in Bosnia. It's January 1995, and his commander is meeting with the Serbian military leadership in their area of operations. Fred takes a stroll around a bombed-out school, finds a room littered with crayon-covered drawings of the sort children make in the earliest grades. "Except," he writes, "when I picked one up, I saw that the child had drawn a house completely engulfed in flames. Green blobs with rifle barrels and tanks, I assumed lined the background. Stick figures formed a line out of the burning building; one of the stick figures was on fire, scratched over red and orange and yellow. Another stick figure was drawn in the yard beside the house, laid horizontally, with red crayon coming away from its mouth in drops." Like so much in this book, it is the contrast between the comic and the tragic, the sacred and the abundantly profane, that penetrates our consciousness like one of the Iraqi EFPs (Explosively Formed Penetrators) that can cut through the heaviest tank armor like a seasoned Sergeant Major through BS. Reading works of this type, military memories and the like is part of my job. I have read dozens of them, from the classics to the offbeat and iconoclastic and can say that Johnson has accomplished something special. There is no lack of literature that takes us inside the world of soldiers at war. From Ernst Junger's *Storm of Steel* which paints a picture of trench warfare in World War I as

sublime to Piers Platt's *Combat and Other Shenanigans* which is subtitled *Tales of the Absurd from a Deployment to Iraq*. Five Wars delivers the quiet pathos of too-wise children's drawings alongside the frenetic summary of the Bosnian peacekeeping mission with endless repetitions of the lyric from the Offspring's song "Come Out and Play." It puts the perennial soldier's game of dropping the perfect quote from a hit movie into conversation as in the case of the memorable Staff Sergeant Hudgeons who would invariably end his daily briefing on the insurgents in the area with, "And that's all I have to say about that." There is, however, another layer to this book, in my mind the most important. Col. Johnson delves into the aftermath of war. At this point, PTSD has become something akin to a cliché in American culture, all-too-often imagining combat veterans as psychological basket cases. Fred's story—the story of a retired bird colonel and twenty-eight-year veteran—humanizes the reality of psychological damage. He recounts the siren call of suicide and the useless oblivion of self-medication. He admits to basking in the addictive drug of war and to an obsessive push to physical challenge. Most importantly, he relates the complex ways in which soldierly experience intertwines with memories of beloved friends who never came home and the pain of those who continue to wait for a spouse or parent present in body only. If you are a veteran or a family member of a veteran, there will be much here that is familiar, though it is crucial to bear in mind every veteran's story is unique. Near the end of the book, Col. Johnson tells us about the healing power of art in conjunction with a willingness to seek help from therapeutic professionals. On a personal note, I will add that as a beneficiary of the Shakespeare With Veterans program that he created in collaboration with the wonderful folks at Kentucky Shakespeare, I will add that you have done more than I can say for your fellow vets. Fred, reading your story only confirms for me what I already knew: we are, as human beings, made of stories at the most fundamental level. Thank you. "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers."

Fred Johnson is a first-time author - and as such, he opens a first-time window into the soul of a soldier, and an officer, who served in the US Army for nearly thirty years, with the last half during the Global War on Terror (GWOT). Fred is a respected infantry leader, who nearly lost his career when he received a DUI (which was indeed a foreshadowing of the PTSD to be eventually diagnosed). War saved his career, but kept him on a path that few can walk without carrying a heavier load upon

completion. As a veteran of OEF, the raw honesty struck a chord within, and made me appreciate further the burden borne by not only the soldier, but the family he leaves behind. This is a war story, a family story, a soldier's story, and above all, a personal story of achievement, shortcomings, and reconciliation. Thank you, Fred, for your service, your sacrifice and your long hard look into the mirror of self-reflection. This book is a must read for anyone who's ever served or watched the war on TV.

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