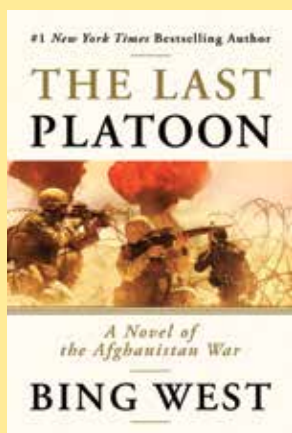


# For Further Reading



The Last Platoon: A Novel of the Afghanistan War  
By Bing West  
Post Hill Press, New York, Nashville 2020  
ISBN 978-1-64293-673-5

Reviewed by Col Chris Woodbridge, USMC(Ret)

Francis J. "Bing" West—Vietnam veteran, captain of Marines, former assistant secretary of defense and bestselling author—has added a novel to his opus of a dozen nonfiction books uncovering the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. This collection of factual works includes *The Village* and the New York Times #1 bestseller, *Call Sign Chaos: Learning to Lead*, co-authored with General Jim Mattis.

*The Last Platoon* joins *The Peppercorns* as Mr. West's second work of fiction. The author's extensive personal experiences on the ground with combat Marines, Soldiers, and Special Operators lends a level of realism and authenticity to the tactical action of his novels that few writers can approach.

***Publisher's synopsis:***

*A small team of CIA operatives and a platoon of Marines commanded by Captain Diego Cruz are protecting a tiny base in Helmand—the most violent province in Afghanistan. In a series of escalating fights, Cruz must prove he is a combat leader, despite the growing disapproval of the colonel in overall charge. At the same time, the president has ordered the CIA to capture a drug lord. But with a fortune in heroin at stake, the Taliban joins with the drug lord to wipe out the base. As the president negotiates a secret deal, Cruz must rally the Marines to make a last stand. Bringing you into America's longest war with vivid immediacy, *The Last Platoon* portrays how leaders rise or wilt under intense pressure. A searing, timeless story of moral conflict, savage combat, and feckless politics.*

Mr. West has been described by the L.A. Times as "the grunt's Homer." In the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Homer drew on real events from the long war between the Mycenaean and Illyrian Greeks to create archetypes of warriors, adventurers, and kings. Mr. West draws on many characters and anecdotal vignettes born of our twenty-year odyssey in Afghanistan to create a fictional version of the war still fully recognizable to those readers who have fought. This is an Afghanistan and an operational environment not exactly "as it was," but perhaps what the reader, especially the veteran, "hoped it would be." Characters are more vivid, more ideal, seeming to combine the attributes of several real individuals we've all known, served with, or at least heard of. Even the personal stresses of deployment, the complexities of interagency operations, and the malign influence of bureaucrats and politicians are clearer and more dramatic than the intractable quagmire of the real world. In some ways, this dramatic clarity makes the tragedy, waste, and frustration almost satisfying to read.

Like much good fiction, there is also an implied element of the cautionary tale, or a "moral to the story." In today's warfare, digital satellite communications give commanders unprecedented capabilities to command and control forces with secure teleconferencing and realtime full-motion video. However, the ability of senior military and civilian leaders to reach all the way down to the level of tactical decision making requires supreme judgement in its application. The moral? Just because you have a "7,000-mile-long screwdriver" between the briefing room in DC and the Combat Outpost in Helmand does not mean you should use it.