Delve Deeper into Almost Sunrise
A film by Michael Collins and Marty Syjuco

This list of fiction and nonfiction books, compiled by Sophie Maier of the Louisville Free Public Library, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the POV documentary Almost Sunrise.

In an attempt to put haunting combat experiences behind them, two friends embark on an epic 2,700-mile trek on foot across America, seeking redemption and healing as a way to close the moral chasm opened by war. Almost Sunrise is an intimate, vérité film that eschews stereotypes and instead captures an unprecedented portrait of veterans — one of hope, potential and untold possibilities.

ADULT NONFICTION

Castner, Brian. The Long Walk: A Story of War and the Life that Follows. New York: Doubleday, 2013. Brian Castner served three tours of duty in the Middle East, two of them in Iraq as the head of an Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit. Whenever IEDs were discovered, he and his men would lead the way in either dismantling the deadly devices or searching through rubble and remains for clues to the bomb-makers’ identities. And when robots and other remote means failed, one technician would suit up and take the Long Walk to disarm the bomb by hand. This lethal game of cat and mouse was, and continues to be, the real war within America’s wars in the Middle East. When Brian returned stateside to his wife and family, he entered an equally inexorable struggle against the enemy within, which he comes to call the “Crazy.”

Klay, Phil. Redeployment. New York: Penguin Press, 2014. Redeployment takes readers to the frontlines of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, asking us to understand what happened there, and what happened to the soldiers who returned. Interwoven with themes of brutality and faith, guilt and fear, helplessness and survival, the characters in these stories struggle to make meaning out of chaos. In “Redeployment”, a soldier who has had to shoot dogs because they were eating human corpses must learn what it is like to return to domestic life in suburbia, surrounded by people “who have no idea where Fallujah is, where three members of your platoon died.”

Ryan, Tim. A Mindful Nation. Hay House, 2012. Based on the timeless practice of mindfulness, the natural capabilities of our brains and minds, and the core American values of self-reliance, determination, and getting the job done, this new way is affecting every sector of our society—from education to defense to health care to environmental stewardship. In A Mindful Nation, Congressman Tim Ryan connects the dots between what’s happening in the classrooms, hospitals, boardrooms, research labs, and military bases across the country.

Williams, Kayla and Michael E. Staub. Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005. With a passion that makes her memoir “nearly impossible to put down” (Buffalo News) Williams shares the powerful gamut of her experiences in Iraq, from caring for a wounded civilian to aiming a rifle at a child. Angry at the bureaucracy and the conflicting messages of today’s military, Williams offers us “a raw, unadulterated look at war” (San Antonio Express News) and at the U.S. Army. And she gives us a woman’s story of empowerment and self-discovery.

McEwen, Kyle, Chris, Scott and Jim DeFelice. American Sniper: The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History. New York: W. Morrow, 2012. From 1999 to 2009, U.S. Navy SEAL Chris Kyle recorded the most career sniper kills in United States military history. His fellow American warriors, whom he protected with deadly precision from rooftops and stealth positions during the Iraq War, called him “The Legend”; meanwhile, the enemy feared him so much they named him al-Shaitan (“the devil”) and placed a bounty on his head. Kyle, who was tragically killed in 2013, writes honestly about the pain of war—including the deaths of two close SEAL teammates—and in moving first-person passages throughout, his wife, Taya, speaks openly about the strains of war on their family, as well as on Chris.

Sherman, Nancy. Afterwar: Healing the Moral Wounds of Our Soldiers. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. Sherman addresses the question of the moral injury of war; the creation of soldiers capable of doing things in the act of war that go against ingrained and intuitive responses of humanity and compassion. With years’ experience in academic study of ancient philosophical ethics and psychoanalysis, she has served decades with the military. Through stories and interviews of veterans with whom she has worked, Sherman offers practical solutions of how a community can holistically support returned service people who must confront these complex psychological injuries without again being traumatized in the process. Sherman calls for greater conversations, collectively and individually, to address the philosophical complexities of war and its warriors.

Solomon, Andrew. The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression. Simon & Schuster, 2001. The Noonday Demon’s contribution to our understanding not only of mental illness but also of the human condition in general is stunning. The book examines depression in personal, cultural, and scientific terms. Drawing on his own struggles with the
illness and interviews with fellow sufferers, doctors and scientists, policymakers and politicians, drug designers and philosophers, Solomon reveals the subtleties, the complexities, and the agony of the disease.

**ADULT FICTION**

**Fountain, Ben. Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk. New York: Ecco Press, 2012.** A novel that looks statewide at the commodification of soldiers in an overseas invasion that no one understands yet everyone seems to want. Fountain sets his narrative during a 2004 Dallas football game, and all the toxic American forces of politics, sports, and celebrity come bearing down upon these young "heroes" as they are made part of the halftime entertainment. Obscured by the agendas of others, the soldiers’ reality is neither seen nor understood except through the powerful art of Fountain’s intricately orchestrated portrait.

**Robinson, Roxana. Sparta. New York: Picador, 2014.** Conrad Farrell does not come from a military family, but as a classics major at Williams College, he has encountered the powerful appeal of the Marine Corps ethic: Semper Fidelis comes straight from Sparta, a society where every citizen doubled as a full-time soldier. When Conrad graduates, he joins the Marines to continue a long tradition of honor, courage, and commitment over the course of a four-year tour in Iraq. When we meet him, he has just come home to Katonah, New York. As Conrad attempts to find his footing in the civilian world, he learns how hard it is to return to the people and places he used to love. Gradually, he awakens to a growing rage and the realization that something has gone wrong.

**Gallagher, Matt. Youngblood: A Novel. New York: Washington Square Press, 2016.** The US military is preparing to withdraw from Iraq, and newly minted lieutenant Jack Porter struggles to accept how it’s happening—through alliances with warlords who have Arab and American blood on their hands. Day after day, Jack tries to assert his leadership in the swirling, dreary atmosphere of Ashuriyah. But his world is disrupted by the arrival of veteran Sergeant Daniel Chambers, whose aggressive style threatens to undermine the fragile peace that the troops have worked hard to establish. As Iraq plunges back into chaos and bloodshed and Chambers’s influence over the men grows stronger, Jack becomes obsessed with a strange, tragic tale of reckless love between a lost American soldier and Rana, a local sheikh’s daughter.

**Heller, Joseph. Catch-22. Simon & Schuster, 2011 (originally published 1961).** Set in Italy during World War II, this is the story of the incomparable, malingering bombardier, Yossarian, a hero who is furious because thousands of people he has never met are trying to kill him. But his real problem is not the enemy—it is his own army, which keeps increasing the number of missions the men must fly to complete their service.

**NONFICTION FOR YOUNGER READERS**

**Montalván, Luis CarlosBrett Witter. Tuesday Tucks Me In: The Loyal Bond Between a Soldier and His Service Dog. New York: Roaring Book Press, 2014.** As narrated by Tuesday, Tuesday Tucks Me In is a day in the life of this service dog extraordinaire and tail-wagging ambassador for all things positive and uplifting in the world. The book takes us through a typical day of adventures, starting with Tuesday waking military veteran Luis Carlos Montalván in the morning and greeting him with dog broadcasts in his face, and then ending with Tuesday cuddling up to Luis on their bed, the last moment they spend together before sleep.

**FICTION FOR YOUNGER READERS**

**Mazer, Harry and Peter Lerangis. Somebody, Please Tell Me Who I Am. New York: Simon & Schuster BFR, 2012.** Ben lives a charmed life—effortlessly landing the lead in the high school musical, dating the prettiest girl in school. When he decides to enlist in the army after 9/11, no one thinks he’ll be in real danger. But his decision has devastating consequences: His convoy gets caught in an explosion, and Ben ends up in a coma for two months. When he wakes up, he doesn’t know where he is—or remember anything about his old life. His family and friends mourn what they see as a loss, but Ben perseveres. And as he triumphs, readers will relate to this timely novel that pairs the action and adventure of the best war stories with the emotional elements of struggle and transformation.

**Kadohata, Cynthia. Cracker! The Best Dog in Vietnam. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008.** Cracker, a prize German shepherd, belongs to the U.S. military, trained to sniff out bombs, traps, and the enemy. She doesn’t believe that she will find a loving master until she meets seventeen-year-old Rick Hanski, an army private in basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia. Rick enlisted in the military knowing that he would go to Vietnam, but he never intended to go as a dog handler. An unlikely pair, Cracker and Rick must become a team before they ship off to Vietnam and face dangerous search-and-rescue missions. Told in part through the eyes of a German shepherd, Cracker! masterfully blends the reality of war with the heartwarming friendship between a dog and her handler.