

War is Hell. But for a child it's ten times worse.

Dr. Christopher Coppola knows that all too well. He's seen how a child's large head and closeness to the ground make it an easy target for explosives. He's seen how burns that cover more than 50% of a child's body – cases that could be easily treated in US hospitals – are often fatal in war-torn Iraq.

Dr. Coppola went through two deployments to Balad air force base in Iraq during his time as a Pediatric Surgeon for the US Air Force. During his first deployment, he saw the damage done to children during the war. But he also saw the overall hope of a nation that was certain after the war things would be better. Then in his second deployment – some two years later – he saw new threats to children as troop numbers surged and al-Qaida turned its focus from targeting US troops to targeting civilians.

Working in extreme conditions while battling bureaucracy and lack of modern equipment, Dr. Coppola did his best in every surgery or procedure to save lives.

And in his memoir 'Coppola', the good doctor tells what happened during those years in Iraq.

The book is nicely written, nicely paced, and sprinkled with diverse elements: Coppola's letters home, sketches of Iraqi bases and palaces, and his academic papers.

But it doesn't seem enough. There always seems to be something missing.

It's certainly not that the book is overly censored. Coppola is bringing you the honest truth, no matter how shocking it may be. Like the story of how he consulted the Iraqi family of a hermaphrodite who insisted on raising the child as a boy. Or the story of an unforgettable little girl named Leyla, and how the Doctor unknowingly treated the insurgent who started the house fire that killed her. These are all stories that will stay in your mind and come back to visit you when you least suspect them.

But still... it's never quite enough.

Perhaps it's Coppola's kindness and compassion, so evident in the care of his patients, that prevents us from seeing what we're looking for. We can see in his anecdotes of breaking bad news to parents, fellow soldiers, and even his wife, that Coppola understands the necessity of being candid about the true face of difficult situations. But when it comes to discussing the nitty-gritty variables – the things he and he alone has to worry about in order to turn the situation around – things get strategically left out.

It feels as though the good doctor treats his readers like his patients. We see the circumstances that fuel his worry, his insomnia, and his frustration. But we never seem to be lurking by his side. He wants to show us the exposed, beating heart of the situation of Iraq. But not so close that we might compromise the operation.

"Coppola" is a book two inches from greatness. By the end of this book you will know the man, know the necessity, and instinctively understand why the doctor is so good at what he does. This book will get you thinking things about US involvement that tend to get pushed to the back of your mind.

I'm glad I was given the opportunity to read it. More people need to read it. More people need to understand the lives US soldiers and surgeons are living thousands of miles away from US soil. Brave

men and women are dying for a mission most people would rather go to the mall than think about. And the more I read Coppola's story the more outraged I felt about that sense of national disinterest.

But the book, as it stands, is more school assignment than masterpiece. Perhaps a little more openness about the facts, perhaps a ghost writer's polish, perhaps one more heart-wrenching story of a patient in need could have pushed it those last two inches.

"Coppola" cannot be said to be a great book. But it is a good, though-provoking read, and one that I highly recommend.