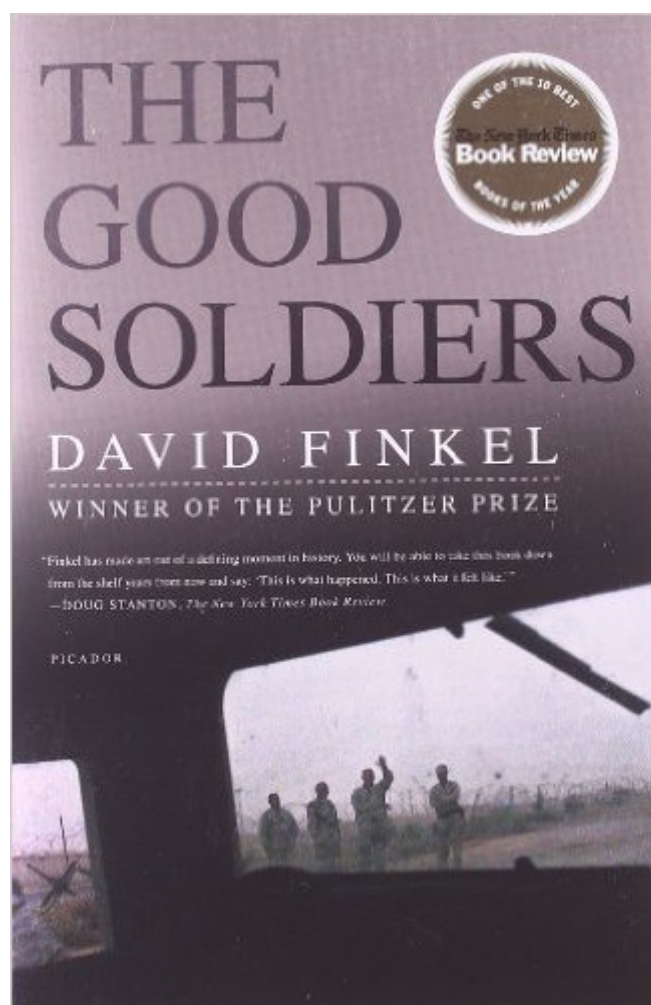


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The Good Soldiers



Synopsis

A BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR FOR: THE NEW YORK TIMESCHICAGO

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BOOK AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISMIt was the last-chance moment of the war. In

January 2007, President George W. Bush announced a new strategy for Iraq. It became known as

"the surge." Among those called to carry it out were the young, optimistic army infantry soldiers of

the 2-16, the battalion nicknamed the Rangers. About to head to a vicious area of Baghdad, they

decided the difference would be them.Fifteen months later, the soldiers returned home â • forever

changed. The chronicle of their tour is gripping, devastating, and deeply illuminating for anyone with

an interest in human conflict. With The Good Soldiers, Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter David Finkel

has produced an eternal story â • not just of the Iraq War, but of all wars, for all time.

Book Information

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: Picador; Reprint edition (August 3, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0312430027

ISBN-13: 978-0312430023

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (412 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #26,497 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 inÂ Books > History > Middle

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Strategy

Customer Reviews

I have embedded as a freelance photojournalist with US soldiers in Iraq three times, including a small part of the time that Finkel describes here, in 2007. At that time, and as excellently described here, the country was basically a hellstorm. There are z-e-r-o images or anecdotes in this book that come across as anything less than powerfully true, and many of his observations mirror in some ways things I saw on a much smaller scale. So for me, the credibility was rock solid. I kept thinking to myself, "oh yeah, I remember when something like X happened." But, the most factually accurate book won't work if it's not written well. That is NOT a problem here. He tells it straight and without a

lot of florid adjectives and overwriting. It's a strong enough story to succeed on its own merits, without the author trying to make us notice him as well. I really respect how he keeps himself totally out of it. There's nothing wrong with an "I" biographical style, but it's good to see the soldier's stories told here with a minimum of editorializing. It just tells us what happened; a lot of it's pretty horrible, some of it is very funny, with plenty in between. Dexter Filkins' "The Forever War," had been my most respected book about Iraq, but this surpasses it only because it focuses so closely on an individual unit and the men doing the job. Filkins does a lot more in his book, but I think the tight focus of "Good Soldiers" helps it stand even more apart. I'm not even sure it could be summed up as what it's "about." It doesn't have a happy ending, there's no big defining battle, just a lot of fights that don't seem to add up to much. It's not pointless, because we know that the 'surge' the men suffered through actually did work to some extent (though no one knows the future), so we can look at the sacrifice of the men who died a lot differently. It's not easy to read. It's not fun. It always seems like the audience wants these types of books to be either blatantly anti-any-war polemics, or rah-rah, wave-the-flag screeds. Iraq was neither of those places. It wasn't anything other than the worst place on earth, with a lot of bad things happening, and everybody telling a lot of funny stories while they were hoping to get home okay. Nobody really remembers or considers the soldiers who had to go out there, into that fight. They think they do, but they don't. This book will help you understand.

My son was in this battalion and is an admirer of the battalion commander, "Col K" as everyone calls him. I had heard many of the stories in this book but not in their totality. David Finkel has written an intense, compelling, and emotional account that succeeds in covering the war on so many facets simultaneously: strategic, operational, tactical, homefront, and the Iraqi perspective as well. A map would have been nice but this was not an account written to stop and reference maps, but to be read and felt. Every chapter has a chronologically correct statement from President Bush about the war. We read what is happening at home with the wives and in the hospitals where the severely wounded are recovering. We also learn about the Iraqis who work as translators for the battalion. We follow the soldiers home on leave from the war zone. It's the story of this battalion, its commander, some officers, and those wounded and killed during an extended deployment who just kept on giving and doing their duty. This book to quote Col K's motto, "it's all good."

In "A Note on Sources and Methods" at the end of this book, the author writes, "From the beginning, I explained to [the soldiers of the 2-16] that my intent was to document their corner of the war, without agenda." The result is the most intimate and touching story about the lives and deaths of

American servicemen not just in Iraq, but in any other war for that matter, that I have ever come across. Other excellent books about the war in Iraq have achieved greatness in other ways, but this account is unique by virtue of the author's ability to open windows into the souls of the men who experienced the war - their hopes, dreams, nightmares, and fears - and to give readers unprecedented insight into the way the war has touched those men and the families they left behind when they deployed. This book is neither pro-war nor anti-war. It does not represent an effort to glorify or demonize any person or policy. It is, quite simply, an honest account of the realities on the ground for one battalion of soldiers based in a hostile environment during one of the most crucial periods of the war. In meticulous and thoughtful detail, Finkel recounts the experiences of the individuals who served in the 2-16, from the early days of anticipation, to the final days of dealing with the realities of a complex and often frustrating conflict with no easy answers and no clean conclusion. Much of the book focuses on the confident and optimistic commander of the 2-16, Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Kauzlarich, but readers will also come to know dozens of other personalities from the battalion, running from the top to the bottom of the chain of command. In that sense the book achieves its goal of documenting the war on multiple scales, from the private thoughts of individual soldiers to the overall experience of the battalion. Anyone with an interest in the war in Iraq or military affairs in general will benefit tremendously from reading *The Good Soldiers*. I felt at various times while reading it excited, impressed, or deeply sad, but always enlightened by the intimate details of the story. It is a powerful book that sets aside politics and ideology to reveal war for what it really is and how it affects those who are closest to it.

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