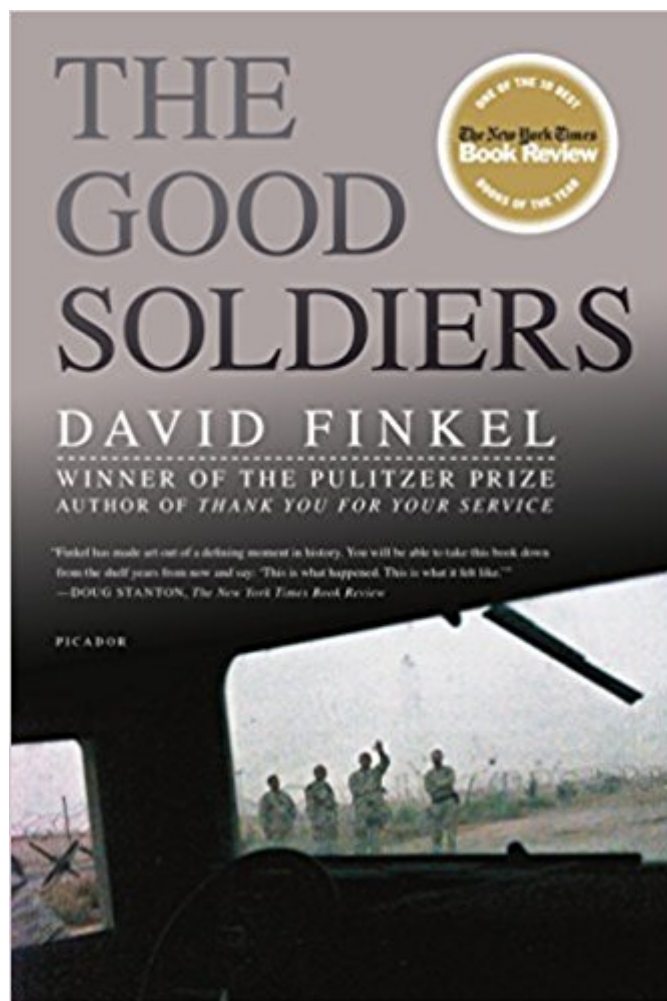


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# The Good Soldiers



## Synopsis

The Prequel to the Bestselling Thank You for Your Service, Now a Major Motion Picture With The Good Soldiers, Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter David Finkel has produced an eternal story not just of the Iraq War, but of all wars, for all time. It 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 forever changed. The chronicle of their tour is gripping, devastating, and deeply illuminating for anyone with an interest in human conflict. A BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR FOR: THE NEW YORK TIMES CHICAGO TRIBUNE SLATE.COM THE BOSTON GLOBE THE KANSAS CITY STAR THE PLAIN DEALER (CLEVELAND) THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR WINNER OF THE HELEN BERNSTEIN BOOK AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

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## Customer Reviews

**Book Description** It was the last-chance moment of the war. In January 2007, President George W. Bush announced a new strategy for Iraq. He called it "the surge." "Many listening tonight will ask why this effort will succeed when previous operations to secure Baghdad did not. Well, here are the differences," he told a skeptical nation. Among those listening 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 forever changed. Pulitzer Prize-winning Washington Post reporter David Finkel was with them in Bagdad almost every grueling step of the way. What was the true story of the surge? Was it really a success? Those are the questions he grapples with in his remarkable report from the front lines. Combining the action of Mark Bowden's *Black Hawk Down* with the literary brio of Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, *The Good Soldiers* is an unforgettable work of reportage. And in telling the story of these good soldiers, the heroes and the ruined, David Finkel has also produced an eternal tale--not just of the Iraq War, but of all wars, for all time. Faces of the Surge Beneath every policy decision made in the highest echelons of Washington about how a war should be fought are soldiers who live with those decisions every day. These are some of the faces of the U.S. strategy known as "the surge," as photographed by David Finkel, author of *The Good Soldiers*. Soldiers of the 2-16 Rangers wait for permission to enter a mosque. Two soldiers try to collect themselves after their Humvee was hit by a roadside bomb. Sergeant Adam Schumann, regarded as one of the battalion's best soldiers on the day he was sent home with severe post-traumatic stress disorder.

Starred Review. A success story in the headlines, the surge in Iraq was an ordeal of hard fighting and anguished trauma for the American soldiers on the ground, according to this riveting war report. Washington Post correspondent Finkel chronicles the 15-month deployment of the 2-16 Infantry Battalion in Baghdad during 2007 and 2008, when the chaos in Iraq subsided to a manageable uproar. For the 2-16, waning violence still meant wild firefights, nerve-wracking patrols through hostile neighborhoods where every trash pile could hide an IED, and dozens of comrades killed and maimed. At the fraught center of the story is Col. Ralph Kauzlarich, whose dogged can-do optimism—his motto is "It's all good"—pits itself against declining morale and whispers of mutiny. While vivid and moving, Finkel's grunt's-eye view is limited; the soldiers' perspective is one of constant improvisatory reaction to attacks and crises, and we get little sense of exactly how and why the new American counterinsurgency methods calmed the Iraqi maelstrom. Still, Finkel's keen firsthand reportage, its grit and impact only heightened by the literary polish of his prose, gives us one of the best accounts yet of the American experience in Iraq. Photos. (Sept.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

David Finkel embedded with an army battalion known as the 2-16 who were part of President Bush's Surge. They occupied one of the least controllable and unfriendly quarters of Baghdad, Iraq. This book chronologically tells the story of the commander, soldiers and the killed and wounded

of the battalion during their 2007-08 deployment. Without delving into how well the surge worked, Finkel's story understandably describes the change some of the soldier's experienced from gung-ho ambassadors of American resolve to war weary and wary professionals bent on just finishing the job and coming home alive. Their assignment was perhaps one of the most difficult for a combat unit trained to meet an identified enemy, beat them and take territory. As the book shows, occupation of a hostile territory is a very different war assignment from battle and maneuver. The weight of having to search, destroy, occupy and re-occupy buildings and blocks in the 2-16's zone of assignment exacts a toll on soldiers. Not knowing what your enemy looks like and from where in the crowd they may be coming is perhaps the most stressful combat a professional can undertake. I did think Finkel played the battalion commander in a bit of a cartoonish way, and unfairly. The necessity of any commander is to believe in the mission and instill that confidence in subordinates. The author seemed to lean heavily on the Colonel's optimism with the benefit of hindsight and not on the many operational decisions he made over the course of the year. It seemed like back-filling to me to support the book's general theme that at the deployment was difficult and stressful and perhaps not successful (although one could argue the latter as people will for years). Finkel does an excellent job of portraying the human cost of this corner of the war by focusing on deaths and injuries the troops absorbed. A stateside visit to a rehab hospital with some of the battalion's seriously maimed is heart-wrenching and moving. Whatever one thinks of the war or the surge, the dedication of our young men (and continuing belief among some of them in what they did) who came close to paying the ultimate price of war needs to be held up and I think the author did a good job of this. An interesting and important book.

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.

One of the best, if not the best, story about what the "surge" did and didn't accomplish and how it affected the men who had to fight it. A lot of them died - and for what end ! This is a true story, including the name of ALL the soldiers in one Army Battalion who were deployed just for this SURGE. If this doesn't "get" you - you have never served in the US Military. Not an expose, just the truth of what happened and what the results were. You don't have to have been in the military to never put it down once you have started the book. Extremely well written.

This book is written by David Finkel. "The Good Soldiers". I am a soldier who was stationed at Fort Riley, KS and this book is part of the big red one family and those who are mentioned in it. I thank David for writing such a true and honest book.

As is true of Finkel's "Thank You For Your Service," "The Good Soldiers" is a wrenching read. Its exploration of the personal side of war as it is experienced by soldiers on the front line provides an insight with which some readers can relate, which some readers would prefer to never know, and which some readers find objectionable in its revelations of the brutality of war and its impact on those who fight it. Some find the book's depictions of the human response to the brutality of war objectionable. I don't. I know war for its brutality, as do millions of other combatants, as well as civilians, around the world. Read "The Good Soldier" and further your understanding of the human condition. The read may upset you; it should. War is brutal

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