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Awards

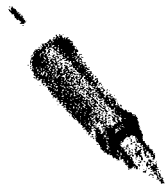
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Awards:

Pulitzer Prize, 2006, for explanatory reporting; Helen Bernstein Award, New York Public Library, 2010, for excellence in journalism; J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize, Nieman Foundation and Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, 2010, for *The Good Soldiers*; MacArthur "Genius" Grant, 2012; Carla Furstenberg Coehn Literary Prize for nonfiction, 2014, for *Thank You for Your Service*.

Personal Information:

Born October 28, 1955, in Reading, PA; married Lisa Hill; children: Julia, Lauren. **Education:** University of Florida, B.A., 1977. **Addresses:** Home: Silver Spring, MD. **E-mail:** davidfinkel@thegoodsoldiers.com.

Career Information:

Journalist. *Washington Post*, Washington, DC, writer and editor; worked previously at the *Tallahassee Democrat* and *St. Petersburg Times*.

Writings:

- *The Good Soldiers*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux (New York, NY), 2009.
- *Thank You for Your Service*, Sarah Crichton Books/Farrar, Straus & Giroux (New York, NY), 2013.

Sidelights:

David Finkel, a recipient of both the Pulitzer Prize for explanatory reporting and the New York Public Library's Helen Bernstein Award for excellence in journalism, is an editor for the *Washington Post*. Finkel is also the author of *The Good Soldiers*, a 2009 book for which Finkel was awarded the J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize by the Nieman Foundation and the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. *The Good Soldiers* depicts Finkel's experiences as an embedded reporter within the 2-16 battalion army unit as it was engaged in the Iraq War.

The nonfiction account takes place during the military operation in 2007 known as the Surge, wherein U.S. forces were dramatically increased in an effort to secure important cities, like Baghdad, within Iraq and to provide long-lasting stability to ensure a peaceful transition of political power. In an interview with Andrea Pitzer for the *Nieman Storyboard* Web site, Finkel explained his premise for writing the account and stated: "I went over there after promising the commander of the battalion that I had no agenda in mind. I wasn't writing a polemic. This was not a first-person book. My intent was not to pronounce the surge a success or a failure, or to declare the war won or lost. The

idea was to use the book to write about the experience of a battalion of infantry soldiers, to write intimately about character in this seemingly lost moment."

Writing in the third person, Finkel explains the military events to which he was a witness, the people and personnel involved, and the observable consequences of the prolonged martial action in a developing nation. The text, organized into chapters themed by George W. Bush's wartime commentaries, is related chronologically. Finkel told Pitzer: "If what I'm going to see is a transformation of character, and that transformation takes place because of certain events and takes place over a period of time, then maybe the best way to tell the story is the simple time-honored way of saying who they were, what happened to them, and then who they became. But it's not like I went over with that in mind. I went over with the idea of chronicling what happened to them, but I didn't know if anything would happen to them. And then it began happening." In his interview with Pitzer, Finkel also discussed the sensitive nature of the text and the reasons he was able to portray his experiences in a manner that evokes authenticity and realism: the trust he earned from the soldiers and his desire to represent the truth without personal judgment. Finkel stated: "And then the other part of it is that there's a part of the book that's so intimate in the way it chronicles the death of a soldier. At one point, there's a frantic effort to keep this guy alive in the aid station, and they're performing CPR on him. And basically every time they push on his chest, pieces of him drop to the floor. ... Of all the lines in the book, that's the one I hesitated the most to include, because you want to include details, but you don't want to include needless details that degenerate into war porn." In an interview with Tom Sabulis for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Lieutenant Colonel Brent Cummings, one of the military men depicted in *The Good Soldiers*, provided an appraisal of Finkel; when asked if he was wary of the journalist, he stated: "We all were. But David earned his way in by just being quiet and respectful and willing to experience what we were experiencing. I was very nervous as the book was getting ready to come out. But we had seen the articles he had written [in the *Washington Post*]. So that kind of gained our trust, too. I knew I was getting a fair shake."

In an article for the *Toronto Star*, Geoff Pevere commented on Finkel's authorial neutrality and observed: "He gets close enough to these men to watch and hear them at their most vulnerable and frightened, and he comes away with respect for their courage and admirably tight-lipped disgust at their plight. The latter is never spelled out--*The Good Soldiers* is journalism, not polemic." Finkel's book features numerous conversations, interviews, and other interactions that serve to represent the human element in the war and thus portray the realities of the U.S. occupation of Iraq. *Christian Science Monitor* contributor David Holahan concluded: "In *The Good Soldiers*, Finkel doesn't editorialize or inject himself into the action. He simply reports. If the Americans think the Iraqi security forces are a joke, and the Iraqis act the part, he reports that. When Iraqi soldiers desert in wholesale lots during an uptick of insurgent activity during the last few weeks that the 2-16 were in country, Finkel reports that."

Finkel's second book, *Thank You for Your Service*, is a follow-up to *The Good Soldiers*. In an interview with Katherine Rowland, a contributor to the online edition of *Guernica*, Finkel explained that he did not expect to write a second book on soldiers. He stated: "I was done, and that first book was hard. I mean it was hard personally, and I was glad to be finished. But after I did finish and people began contacting me--not just soldiers but also family member--talking about the cracks that were beginning to appear, the creeping feelings of anxiousness, in some cases depression, in a few cases suicidal ideation, it reached a point where it dawned on me that I had not written the full story. I had written half the story, and as long as I had the first, I had to finish the thing. So I did." In an interview with John Williams for the *New York Times Online*, Finkel discussed the specific event that spurred him to begin research for the second book. He remarked: "What finally got me going was a conversation I was having one day with one of the soldiers, who said, 'I was a normal guy who got sent to Iraq and became crazy, so they sent me back to America to become sane, and now it's America that's driving me crazy.' He said that, and I remember thinking, 'Well, I don't know what that means, but I want to find out.' And off I went."

In the book, Finkel includes stories from the soldiers he profiled in *The Good Soldiers*, as well as numerous other men and women who have served in the military. Additionally, Finkel highlights the experiences of the soldiers' spouses. One particular soldier in the book is Sgt. Adam Schumann. Schumann was not wounded physically, but the mental problems caused by his three tours of duty proved debilitating.

Critics responded favorably to *Thank You for Your Service*. Elizabeth D. Samet, writing for the *New York Times Online*, suggested: "*Thank You for Your Service* is elegantly reported, free of the entanglements of crusading self-aggrandizement on the one hand and, on the other, an overidentification with its subjects." "It is impossible not to be moved, outraged, and saddened by these stories," wrote Carol Haggas in *Booklist*. A contributor to *Kirkus Reviews* commented: "The author gives a clear-eyed, frightening portrayal of precisely what it is like to suffer with post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury."

Related Information:

PERIODICALS

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- *Booklist*, September 15, 2009, Roland Green, review of *The Good Soldiers*, p. 19; September 1, 2013, Carol Haggas, review of *Thank You for Your Service*, p. 28.
- *Christian Science Monitor*, September 25, 2009, David Holahan, review of *The Good Soldiers*, p. 25.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, August 1, 2009, review of *The Good Soldiers*; July 15, 2013, review of *Thank You for Your Service*.
- *Law Society Journal*, February 1, 2010, Stephen Titus, review of *The Good Soldiers*, p. 83.
- *Military History*, March 1, 2010, Verlyn Klinkenborg, review of *The Good Soldiers*, p. 73; November, 2013, review of *Thank You for Your Service*, p. 72.
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- *New Yorker*, December 7, 2009, review of *The Good Soldiers*, p. 93.
- *New York Times Book Review*, October 18, 2009, review of *The Good Soldiers*, p. 22.
- *Nieman Reports*, December 22, 2009, "In an Instant, a Bomb Claims Lives and Devastates a Survivor," p. 5.
- *Publishers Weekly*, July 27, 2009, review of *The Good Soldiers*, p. 55; July 15, 2013, review of *Thank You for Your Service*, p. 160; November 4, 2014, review of *Thank You for Your Service*, p. 30.
- *Toronto Star*, November 8, 2009, Geoff Pevere, "Through the Surge with the 2-16; a Pulitzer Prize-Winning Reporter Profiles Eight Months in Hell with a U.S. Army Outfit, and the Broken Aftermath of That Other War," review of *The Good Soldiers*, p. 7.

ONLINE

- *Daily Kos Online*, <http://www.dailykos.com/> (September 19, 2009), Susan Gardner, review of *The Good Soldiers*.
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- *Guernica Online*, <http://www.guernicamag.com/> (October 15, 2013), Katherine Rowland, author interview.
- *Macmillan Web site*, <http://us.macmillan.com/> (January 6, 2014), author profile.
- *National Public Radio Online*, <http://www.npr.org/> (October 1, 2013), Melissa Block, author interview.
- *New York Public Library Web site*, <http://www.nypl.org/> (May 17, 2010), author profile.
- *New York Times Blogs*, <http://www.nytimes.com/> (November 6, 2009), "A Chat about *The Good Soldiers*."
- *New York Times Online*, <http://www.nytimes.com/> (October 11, 2009), Doug Stanton, review of *The Good Soldiers*; (September 26, 2013), John Williams, author interview; (September 26, 2013), Elizabeth D. Samet, review of *Thank You for Your Service*.
- *Nieman Storyboard Web site*, <http://niemanstoryboard.us/> (May 3, 2010), author interview with Andrea Pitzer.
- *Washington Post Online*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/> (September 13, 2009), David Finkel, "One Day at War: While Washington Argued, the 2-16 Rangers Fought a Different Battle."

Thank You for Your Service (Finkel)

Summary	Author Bio	Book Reviews	Discussion Questions	Full Version	Print
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(http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0374180660/ref=as_li_qf_sp_asin_il?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0374180660&linkCode=as2&tag=litl-20)

Thank You for Your Service

David Finkel, 2013

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

272 pp.

ISBN-13: 9780374180669

Summary

A profound look at life after war.

The wars of the past decade have been covered by brave and talented reporters, but none has reckoned with the psychology of these wars as intimately as the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist David Finkel.

For *The Good Soldiers*, his bestselling account from the front lines of Baghdad, Finkel embedded with the men of the 2-16 Infantry Battalion during the infamous “surge,” a grueling fifteen-month tour that changed them all forever. In Finkel’s hands, readers can feel what these young men were experiencing, and his harrowing story instantly became a classic in the literature of modern war.

In *Thank You for Your Service*, Finkel has done something even more extraordinary. Once again, he has embedded with some of the men of the 2-16—but this time he has done it at home, here in the States, after their deployments have ended. He is with them in their most intimate, painful, and hopeful moments as they try to recover, and in doing so, he creates an indelible, essential portrait of what life after war is like—not just for these soldiers, but for their wives, widows, children, and friends, and for the professionals who are truly trying, and to a great degree failing, to undo the damage that has been done.

The story Finkel tells is mesmerizing, impossible to put down. With his unparalleled ability to report a story, he climbs into the hearts and minds of those he writes about. *Thank You for Your Service* is an act of understanding, and it offers a more

complete picture than we have ever had of these two essential questions: When we ask young men and women to go to war, what are we asking of them? And when they return, what are we thanking them for?. (*From the publisher.*)

Author Bio

- Birth—1955
- Where—N/A
- Education—B.A., University of Florida
- Awards—Pulitzer Prize; J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize; Robert F. Kennedy Awards for Excellence in Journalism
- Currently—lives in the Washington, D.C. area

David Louis Finkel is an American journalist. He won a Pulitzer Prize in 2006 as a staff writer at the *Washington Post*. He wrote *The Good Soldiers* and *Thank You for Your Service*. He is a 2012 MacArthur Fellow.

Finkel's book *The Good Soldiers* describes several months he spent in 2007 as an embedded reporter with 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, also known as the "2-16 Rangers," as they worked to stabilize a portion of Baghdad.

The logs of Bradley Manning's IM chats with Adrian Lamo state that Finkel had the video which was released as Collateral Murder by Wikileaks but did not release it. Finkel has never publicly disclosed whether he had the video or not. In a washingtonpost.com webchat, he said, "I based the account in my book *The Good Soldiers* on multiple sources, all unclassified. Without going into details, I'll say the best source of information was being there [in Iraq]." (*From Wikipedia. Retrieved 10/20/2013.*)

Book Reviews

This is a heartbreaking book powered by the candor with which these veterans and their families have told their stories, the intimate access they have given Mr. Finkel... into their daily lives, and their own eloquence in speaking about their experiences... The stories of the soldiers and their families portrayed in *Thank You for Your Service* possess a visceral and deeply affecting power...that will haunt readers long after they have finished this book

Michiko Kakutani - New York Times.

As he did in *The Good Soldiers*, Finkel absents himself from the narrative, immersing the reader in the quotidian life of soldiers and their families. *Thank You for Your Service* is elegantly reported, free of the entanglements of crusading self-aggrandizement on the one hand and, on the other, an overidentification with its subjects. Finkel refuses to pathologize soldiers, even as he concentrates on the 20 to

30 percent who have been psychologically damaged to some degree by their service in Iraq or Afghanistan...This is not—nor should it be—an easy book. But it is an essential one. Finkel refuses to gild the misery and ugliness of the last decade and the unpoetic aftermath of war with the kind of sentimentality that has so often clouded our thinking, not only about our military commitments but also about the veterans they produce

Elizabeth D. Samet - New York Times Book Review

(*Starred review.*) These soldiers have names and daughters and bad habits and hopes, and though they have left the war in Iraq, the Iraq War has not left them. Now the battle consists of readjusting to civilian and family life, and bearing the often unbearable weight of their demons.... [T]heir stories give new meaning to the costs of service.

Publishers Weekly

Finkel did an extraordinary job of explaining the Iraq War in *The Good Soldiers*.... Now he brings the war home, following many of the same men as they try to figure out how to engage again with both family and society.

Library Journal

(*Starred review.*) Finkel delivers one of the most morally responsible works of journalism to emerge from the post-9/11 era.... [T]he breadth and depth of his portraits of the men and women scarred by the 21st century's conflicts are startling.... The truly astonishing aspect of Finkel's work is that he remains completely absent from his reportage; he is still embedded. A real war story with a jarring but critical message for the American people.

Kirkus Reviews

Discussion Questions

Use our LitLovers Book Club Resources; they can help with discussions for any book:

- How to Discuss a Book (helpful discussion tips)
- Generic Discussion Questions—Fiction and Nonfiction
- Read-Think-Talk (a guided reading chart)

Also, consider these LitLovers talking points to get a discussion started for *Thank You for Your Service*:

1. What kind of hope do these soldiers have to develop a reasonably "normal" life given their lingering physical and psychological wounds?
2. What was the emotional impact this book had on you? What were your primary and secondary responses: sadness, anger, frustration, a sense of unfairness, guilt?

Anything else?

3. Talk about the individual soldiers whose stories most struck you. Adam Schumann, for example: how did he change over the course of the war? What was his attitude going in and, after three combat tours, coming back about? Or Tausolo Aieti—what hope does he have in life?

4. What do we owe the men and women who return from the wars? In what way is society living up to its obligations...and in what way is it failing to do so?

5. What could be done better to help these veterans readjust to civilian life?

6. Are you related to any veterans? Are you yourself a veteran? How does Finkel's book resonate with your experiences?

7. Nic DeNinno continues to be haunted by the memory of breaking into a house, throwing a man downstairs, hearing a woman scream and seeing a baby covered with shards of glass—only to be told later by his lieutenant that they'd "hit the wrong house." Nic feels, he says, "like a monster." Should he feel responsible for that mistake or others like it? What would you say to him if you were called upon to counsel him?

8. Talk about the urge many veterans have to commit suicide? What would you say to someone to dissuade him or her from taking his own life?

9. Are the two current wars, in Iraq and Afghanistan, different from the other wars this country has fought? Why does it seem that so many veterans are returning emotionally or mentally shattered from these confrontations? Or are we simply more aware this time round of the damage that combat can do to the psyche?

10. What is Peter Chiarelli, vice chief of staff, told about the state of brain/neuroscience when it comes to helping victims of PTSD? How well does the underlying ethos of the military, its CAN DO! orientation, cope with the slow, even passive, pace of mental health recovery?

11. What do you predict for Adam and Saskia Schumann?

(Questions by LitLovers. Please feel free to use them, online or off, with attribution. Thanks.)

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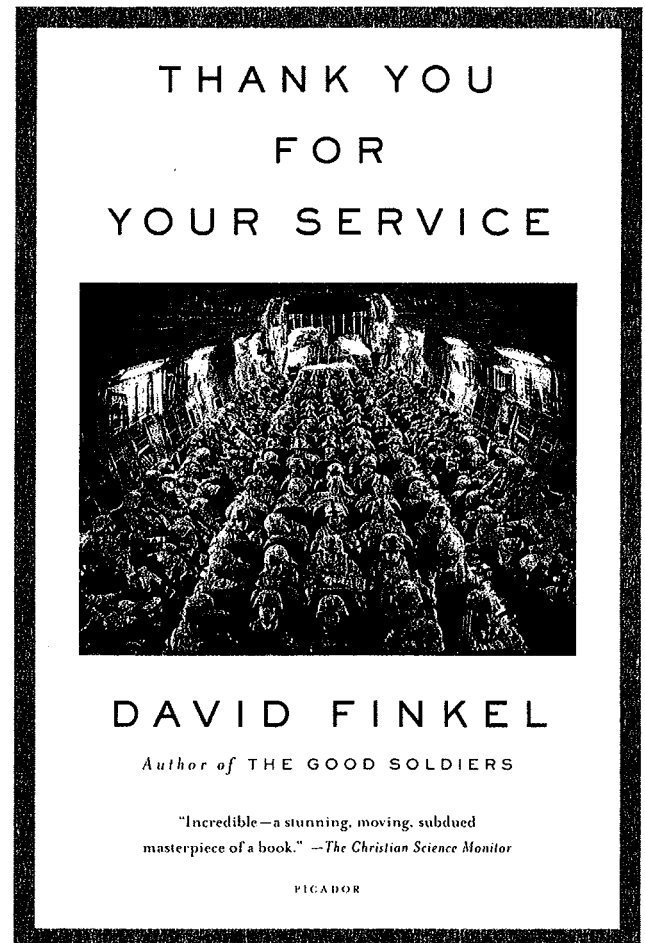
Thank You for Your Service

by David Finkel

Introduction

Named a best book of the Year by NPR, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *Publishers Weekly*, among others, *Thank You for Your Service* delivers a profound look at the psychology of life after war. Tracing the experiences of soldiers who survived the infamous fifteen-month “surge” in Iraq and the widow of one who perished, Pulitzer Prize winner David Finkel brings to life the human stories behind the statistics. As the suicide rate among the military has reached record levels, and headlines expose an overwhelmed VA hospital system, Finkel introduces us to unforgettable wounded warriors—and the families, friends, and case workers who struggle to bring them hope and healing. Just as he was embedded with the men of the 2-16 Infantry Battalion overseas (an experience captured in his bestseller *The Good Soldiers*), Finkel embedded himself with the 2-16 on the home front, chronicling their journeys with the unflinching honesty that has won him coast-to-coast acclaim. Whether you are an educator, a caregiver, or a soldier yourself, the men and women you encounter in *Thank You for Your Service* will bring you a new perspective on the true cost of war.

We hope that the following discussion topics will enrich your experience of this timely portrait in the aftermath of modern war.



Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. David Finkel's previous book, *The Good Soldiers*, vividly captured the isolation and the constant threats experienced by the 2-16 throughout the surge. In *Thank You for Your Service*, what is the source of the threats? How does PTSD create its own form of isolation?
2. As you followed Adam Schumann's path, what did he teach you about the road to recovery? How did your understanding of PTSD deepen as his condition changed? With regard to Adam's wife, Saskia, what does her story reveal about the trauma experienced by the partners of wounded warriors? In Adam and Saskia's marriage, what does it take to stop the escalation of their rage and insecurity?
3. Like many of the men and women featured in the book, Amanda Doster is haunted by a violent image. Though she didn't witness the death of her husband, James, she compiles details about his final moments and wants to be close to those who were under his command. Is she truly a survivor, or did pieces of her life perish alongside James?
4. Tausolo Aieti embodies the guilt experienced by many veterans. Blaming himself for James Jacob Harrelson's death, he cannot see his own heroism. How is his devotion to his battalion different from his relationship with his wife, Theresa? What causes his guilt to become so powerful?
5. Do veterans of the war on terror carry emotional scars that are different from those of previous generations of soldiers? How do the stories captured in the book compare to the military experiences in your circle of family and friends?
6. Chapter 15 describes Adam's reunion with Christopher Golembe. As they talk about the day Sergeant Doster lost his life, what does their conversation tell us about memory, history, and the way we understand fate?
7. The book features many children, some in infancy and some who are old enough to understand what their parents tell them. How do sons and daughters affect the lives of wounded warriors?
8. A medical miracle, Michael Emory beat all the odds physically, but he struggles with emotional agony. In *The Good Soldiers*, how did the troops cope with constant danger? In homecoming stories like Michael's, what do we learn about the limitations of making it home alive?
9. As you read about Jessie and Kristy Robinson, and Danny Holmes and his fiancée Shawnee Hoffman, how did you react to the tragedy of a completed suicide?
10. In chapters 5 and 15, as General Peter Chiarelli tries to address the sharp rise in suicides in the U.S. military, what did you discover about the power and the limitations of the Army's top brass?

11. What is Fred Gusman's Pathway Home able to do that the military or private hospitals can't? How does Adam's experience there compare to Tausolo's experience in Warrior Transition Battalion (WTB), with its case managers, chaplains, and pharmacists? How does the book enhance your understanding of recent publicity over delays in treatment at VA hospitals?

12. When Adam is about to leave Pathway Home, we learn that the program was on the verge of closing but was saved, temporarily, by a private donor. Did the book inspire you to find ways to assist veterans in your community? What more can civilians do than say, "Thank you for your service"?

13. Iraq continues to struggle with sectarian violence and terrorism, proving that the country is still a long way from being a stable, functioning democracy. How did *Thank You for Your Service* affect your opinion of U.S. foreign policy? What do you predict for our newest military recruits?

About the Author

Named a MacArthur Fellow in 2012, David Finkel is a staff writer for *The Washington Post* and also leads the *Post's* national reporting team. He won the Pulitzer Prize for explanatory reporting in 2006 for a series of stories about U.S.-funded democracy efforts in Yemen. His previous book, *The Good Soldiers*, was named one of the best ten books of 2007 by *The New York Times Book Review*.



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The New York Times

Soldiers on the Home Front: David Finkel Talks About 'Thank You for Your Service'

By **John Williams** September 26, 2013 12:35 pm

In his book “The Good Soldiers,” David Finkel, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for The Washington Post, vividly recounted the experience of a United States Army battalion in Baghdad in 2007 and 2008. In The New York Times Book Review, Doug Stanton called it a “ferociously reported, darkly humorous and spellbinding book.” Now, in “Thank You for Your Service,” Mr. Finkel follows several of those same soldiers back home in the United States, where they struggle with their memories of the war and the transition back to domestic life. In a recent e-mail interview, Mr. Finkel discussed his reporting methods, the military’s suicide rate, how being so close to the suffering of soldiers has changed him and more. Below are edited excerpts from the conversation:

Q.

Did some of your subjects not want you to follow their progress or lack thereof? Was it difficult to convince the people who did agree to be involved with the new project?

A.

No, it wasn’t difficult, in large part because of the first book, which gave me some credibility with them. With the first book, it was difficult. Soldiers didn’t trust me. They didn’t know what a journalist does. There were a lot of false rumors about what I was up to. But the longer I stuck around, the better it got, and when bad things happened such as explosions, and I was present for those things, and instead

of becoming a problem I was the guy at the edge quietly watching and taking notes, that helped, too.

Q.

Did you know while reporting “The Good Soldiers” that you wanted to write this follow-up in this way?

A.

I didn't. The truth is I came back from my time in Baghdad a little rattled. When I finished writing “The Good Soldiers,” I thought I was done. But as I kept in touch with some of the soldiers, and so many of them told me how they were turning anxious and depressed and sometimes suicidal, I realized that a second volume could be done about their coming home. In hindsight, this seems like a pretty obvious thing, but it wasn't obvious to me in the beginning. What finally got me going was a conversation I was having one day with one of the soldiers, who said, “I was a normal guy who got sent to Iraq and became crazy, so they sent me back to America to become sane, and now it's America that's driving me crazy.” He said that, and I remember thinking, “Well, I don't know what that means, but I want to find out.” And off I went.

Q.

How has the suicide rate among the military changed in recent years? And historically has it risen a great deal over time?

A.

It's difficult to chart historically because serious efforts by the military to track suicides began in earnest only a decade ago. In that time, the number has risen steadily to last year's record level of nearly one suicide a day. Lots of journalists have written great stories about this, but let me cite the work of James Dao and Andrew Lehren, who wrote earlier this year in The New York Times: “Even with the withdrawal from Iraq and the pullback in Afghanistan, the rate of suicide within the military has continued to rise significantly faster than within the general population, where it is also rising. In 2002, the military's suicide rate was 10.3 per 100,000 troops, well below the comparable civilian rate. But today the rates are nearly the same, above 18 per 100,000 people.” They also had a fascinating piece about the difficulties of calculating the rate.

Q.

One key character in your book is Peter Chiarelli, who was the United States Army vice chief of staff at the time you were reporting. He's since retired. He said he needed to "change the culture" of the military. How much did he succeed in doing that? And are there people actively continuing his mission now?

A.

I think Chiarelli would agree that he did not change the culture of the military, but that he did have an effect on certain people in the military serving under him, who may have had an effect on people serving under them, who may have ... well, you get the point. How much did he succeed? It's impossible to know. Since he moved on, the suicide meetings he threw himself into obsessively have continued but over time have become more sporadic. To me, that suggests a once-active mission has become less so.

Q.

At this point, how much do you think the stigma soldiers feel about admitting they're in psychological pain is due to the shaming done by other people and how much is due to internalized ideas they have about what it means to be a strong soldier and a strong man?

A.

They seem so entwined, those two things. But your question makes me think of a day in the war when Adam Schumann had to stay on base during a mission, and the guy who took his spot didn't see the hidden roadside bomb that exploded and killed a soldier, after which one of the surviving soldiers said to Adam, "None of this . . . would have happened if you were there." As I write in the book: "It was said as a soldier's compliment — Adam had the sharpest eyes, Adam always found the hidden bombs, everyone relied on Adam — but that wasn't how he heard it then or hears it now. It might as well have been shrapnel, the way those words cut him apart. It was his fault. It is his fault. The guilt runs so deep it defines him now." In other words, at the end of any day, there's no shame like your own shame.

Q.

How much psychological distress does someone have to exhibit in order to be sent home from war?

A.

It depends on the unit, the commander, the signals being sent down the line. Some seem more tuned in to psychological distress, some less so. The unit I was with seemed good on this, or maybe I should say pretty good. No one objected to Adam Schumann leaving the war because of severe PTSD. He was on his third deployment to Iraq. He had served a thousand days in combat. He was regarded as a great soldier, and there was unmitigated compassion for him when he broke.

But then there was the murkier case of another soldier, unproven in combat, who one day climbed onto the roof of an Iraqi police station, stripped, scrambled up a ladder to the top of a guard tower, and then in full view of the Iraqi neighborhood below him began hollering at the top of his lungs and groping himself. Afterward, there were several discussions about whether it was an act of mental instability or the calculated act of someone pretending to be unstable in order to be sent home. The unit commander couldn't get past the fact that the soldier had paused in the midst of his supposed meltdown to remove sixty pounds of gear and clothing before climbing the ladder. Ultimately to the commander, that suggested deliberateness to the soldier's thinking, and in the end, he was sent home not with a recommendation for treatment but for possible court martial.

Q.

You were deeply embedded in these people's domestic lives. How and when did you spend time with them? And over time, what balance did you feel between being a reporter on the scene and being an intimate part of their everyday?

A.

I've been in their company in one form or another — with them, thinking about them, writing about them — every day since the beginning of 2007. I was on the ground with them in Baghdad for the bulk of their fifteen-month deployment, and I was with them for a year and half after they came home, began to deteriorate, and set about trying to recover. Maybe you'll believe this, maybe not, but balance was never a problem for me. I've been doing this work for a long time. I made sure when I was with them that there was always some signal of our relationship — a notebook, a tape recorder — to remind them that yes I wanted to be present for whatever was happening to them, but that I was a journalist at work, not their confessor.

Q.

There are people who appear in the book who fought in Vietnam and World War II. Do you have a sense from meeting them that today's soldiers are damaged in a distinct way, or that the emotional scars inflicted by warfare have remained similar in nature over time?

A.

If one day can provide an answer, there was a day in my reporting that I talked to a guy who had fought in World War Two, a guy who had fought in the Korean War, guys who had fought in Vietnam, a guy who had removed bodies after the Jonestown Massacre in Guyana, guys who had fought in Iraq, and guys who had fought in Afghanistan. All were psychologically wounded by their individual experiences, but as they described what they had been through and were feeling now, they all could have been describing each other. I guess what I'm saying is whether the damage is due to a particular war, or to something other than war such as an assault of some type, there's a commonality in what people become when they are shaken to their bones.

Q.

I found the book deeply troubling and affecting, and I was left wondering how the prolonged proximity to all this suffering affected you on an emotional level.

A.

So this is a question I've done my best to avoid over the years, but I've been trying recently to take a swing at it. The fact that I'm nearly seven years older than when I started these books means these changes might have happened anyway, but I'm a little sadder than I used to be, more grateful, less funny, more private, more in need of doing things in a linear way, worse at typing, and happier than ever to end a day with a drink on my front porch. I think of war now not only intellectually but viscerally, and I dream about it, too, often, but not as much as I did a few years ago. I'm glad my friends now include soldiers, and that their friends now include someone like me.

Q.

Are you still in touch with any or all of the subjects in the book? Have they read it and reacted to it?

A.

I'm in touch with all of them, and I hope to remain in touch with them. I sent each a copy of the book a couple of weeks ago. One just wrote back to say he was on chapter one and was laughing and crying and feeling so messed up by what he was reading that he didn't know if he'd make it to chapter two. I'm waiting to hear more from him, and from the rest.

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