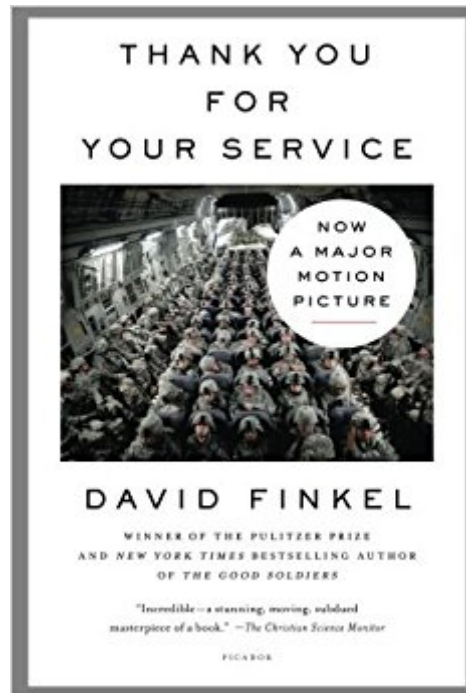




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Thank You For Your Service



Synopsis

Winner of the Carla Furstenberg Cohen Literary Prize in Nonfiction, Finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, and the New York Public Library Helen Bernstein Award for Excellence in Journalism One of Ten Favorite Books of 2013 by Michiko Kakutani (The New York Times), a Washington Post Top Ten Book of the Year, and a New York Times Book Review Notable Book of the Year Named a Best Book of the Year by The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today, The Economist, The Seattle Times, and Minneapolis Star Tribune No journalist has reckoned with the psychology of war as intimately as David Finkel. In *The Good Soldiers*, his bestselling account from the front lines of Baghdad, Finkel embedded with the men of the 2-16 Infantry Battalion as they carried out the infamous “surge,” a grueling fifteen-month tour that changed them all forever. In *Thank You for Your Service*, Finkel follows many of those same men as they return home and struggle to reintegrate both into their family lives and into American society at large. 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. *Thank You for Your Service* is an act of understanding, and it offers a more complete picture than we have ever had of 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?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Q&A for Thank You For Your Service. Chris Schluep, Editor at , interviews David Finkel, author of Thank You For Your Service. Some books just sneak up on you and you're never the same after. I'd heard very little about David Finkel's Thank You For Your Service before reading it, and I hadn't read his previous book, The Good Soldiers, so my expectations were muted going into it. That changed quickly. This book is so personal, so moving, that I devoured it. Although the subject matter is difficult, you grow with the book as you read. One might even expect it to be a little dry and boring—it is not. David Finkel's nonfiction account of soldiers returning from combat is one of the best books I've read in a long time. I'll leave you with this blurb from author Katherine Boo, who couldn't have summarized my reading of the book (and hopefully yours) any better:

“I'm urging everyone I know to give Thank You For Your Service just a few pages, a few minutes out of their busy lives. The families honored in this urgent, important book will take it from there.” - Katherine Boo, National Book Award-winning author of Behind the Beautiful Forevers. Read on for an interview with David Finkel • Chris Schluep: Describe your research. How much time did you spend with the returned soldiers in the book? David Finkel: The short answer is a year and a half, but the more accurate answer is ever since early 2007. I say that because my research really started when I embedded with the 2-16 infantry battalion during its fifteen-month deployment to eastern Baghdad during the Iraq War “surge” of 2007-2008. The story of what happened to those soldiers became my first book, The Good Soldiers and The Good Soldiers is what allowed and informed Thank You For Your Service, which is the second volume of the story. In Iraq, I was with Adam Schumann on the day he so guiltily left the war, and Tausolo Aieti on the day he was blown up and his dreams began. I met Nic DeNinno there and was there on the day that James Doster died. After The Good Soldiers was published in 2009, it became clear that the story was only partly told. So many of the soldiers, home now, and so many of their families, were tipping over so many edges. Their war had become an after-war, and so I began traveling to Kansas, where the 2-16 is based, to see what I might be able to write. That brings me back to the short answer of eighteen months, which was how long I spent with the Schumanns, the Aietis, the DeNinnos, the surviving family of James Doster, and the rest of the people documented in Thank You For Your Service. That's how long it took for me to feel confident that the story I'd be writing would feel true to a reader and true to them as well. CS: When did you decide that Thank You For Your Service should be the title? Was it always the working title? What were your thoughts behind naming it that? DF: I had a different title in mind when I was writing the book. Let's just say it had the phrase “suicide room”

in it, and when I mentioned it to someone at the publishing house, the reaction was:

“That’s terrific. By the way, are you trying to put us out of business?” Or something like that. The reaction was better when I suggested Thank You For Your Service. Everyone liked it immediately – my editor, my agent, the folks in publicity -- except, for some time, me. I was concerned that people would think I was being sarcastic, or ironic, or bitter, or that I was expressing my own sugary gratitude. Instead of it being a title that would reflect the journalism inside the covers, I worried that it would instead be seen as reflecting an opinion of mine, and I’ve tried hard in Thank You For Your Service to keep any hint of my opinion out of the work. What finally turned it for me was coming up with an answer that, if I were asked about the title, would neatly explain my intentions: These are some of the people you’re thanking, and this is what you’re thanking them for. CS: Did your opinion of the war and the people in it change between writing The Good Soldiers and writing this book? DF: Well, I try hard to keep my opinions out of my work, and I’m reluctant to bring opinion into the mix now. To me, the emphasis should be on the soldiers and their families because they were and are the ones in the midst of it. Can I recast the question to: Have their opinions changed between coming home from the war in 2008 and now? The answer: absolutely, although I can only speak anecdotally, based on the people I’ve spent time with. It’s worth emphasizing that they are among the wounded ones and that most of the people deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan are unwounded and presumably doing fine. Among the subset of the mentally wounded, though, which has been estimated at between 20 and 30 percent of the two million U.S. troops who have been deployed into the two wars, which works out to roughly 500,000 or so people, one of the profound changes in them is reflected in this line from the book: “while the truth of war is that it’s always about loving the guy next to you, the truth of the after-war is that you’re on your own.” In other words, in addition to the grief and guilt so many of these people carry, there’s also a widening sense of isolation and lonesomeness, which has led to an ever-deepening wondering of what their war was all about. Their initial sense of mission is largely gone, replaced by in some cases anger and in many cases a churning feeling of bewilderment. CS: How did writing this book change you? DF: Since I’m now nearly seven years older than when I began these books, maybe these changes would have happened anyway, but I’m probably a little sadder than I used to be, and also more grateful than I used to be. What else? I like ending a day with wine on my front porch more than I used to. I like shenanigans less than I used to. I grew up in a house where the threat of suicide was present for several years, so it’s been interesting to revisit that. I think of war now not only intellectually but

viscerally. I dream about it sometimes, but not as much as I did. I'm glad my friends now include soldiers, and that their friends now include someone like me. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

An Best Book of the Month, October 2013: How do you make war personal? It's not easy, especially when writing about a war that the public has basically given up on (or was never that interested in to begin with). Descriptions of violence that most of us will never see can lose their potency and trail off toward the abstract; it happens in even the best novels and nonfiction. But what David Finkel has done is to follow the troops home from Iraq to cover their "after-war." Their struggles and suffering back in the States are easier for us to relate to, and Thank You For Your Service is an absolutely mesmerizing account of the pain and hope that they carry from day-to-day. This is an important book, and there are great truths inside, none more powerful than when Finkel writes: "while the truth of war is that it's always about loving the guy next to you, the truth of the after-war is that you're on your own." --Chris Schluep --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Commenting on this book should start with the elegiac cover image of nameless soldiers packed into a transport plane - small, faceless and an honest visual portrayal. That's what soldiers looked like, going overseas or coming home: tired and small and grinding out another day. As this easily five-star book explains, that grind continues long after the plane ride ends. In interviews, author David Finkel has made clear he did not use the title ironically - as he said, when one says 'thank you' this book describes what those words are thanking a soldier or their families for. This book follows soldiers and family members first chronicled in Finkel's *The Good Soldiers*, which told the story of an Iraq deployment in 2007-8. The years since have given Finkel the time and space to tell a post-war story with honest perspective. Finkel scrupulously avoids the first-person narration so self-indulgently common in many wartime stories and memoirs. He does not pass judgement, or editorialize. He witnesses and chronicles events and conversations, but only rarely can a reader say with confidence what Finkel actually thought. That's a compliment - the narrative becomes the subject's story, whether it's Sgt. Adam Schumann, dealing with crippling PTSD, or Amanda Doster, who lost her husband, or others. With this objective focus, I rarely felt manipulated or emotionally distracted by a writer's demand that I feel something - the descriptions do that without needing any artificial help. The book should make a reader angry and frustrated, first at the system that makes it so difficult for soldiers to get the clear-cut help they need - mostly because that help doesn't yet

exist in simple terms. Everyone's trying - the book describes ample programs and functions and meetings and therapies, all of which try to find the common thread that can solve the problem. But they're learning on the fly, and it's not there yet. Second, a reader's aggravation is often directed at the soldiers - in one scene, it doesn't make sense why Schumann and his wife Saskia would get into a drag-out fight over a car radio station. Why can't he just relax? Why is he so keyed-up over nonsense? But that's the point - it doesn't make sense. And there doesn't seem to be an answer, which explains Schumann's honest and bitter frustration, which is more than matched by his wife's. While the couple remains together at the end of the book, it doesn't seem very hopeful. Amanda Doster represents the hundreds of wives and mothers (and husbands) who lost their loved ones. She's fine financially, with a house paid for, and her kids apparently well taken care of. But all her future plans and expectations are over, and nothing has yet replaced them. It's heartbreaking, because like with Schumann, there is no switch to solve the problem. "Thank you" doesn't do it. The book's success is that it provides the long-term context lacking in most wartime narratives. By following these men and women in years after the war, we're presented a much more honest account based on earned experience, not hope or theories. While "The Good Soldiers" is a wartime classic, it's very much rooted in a past time. "Thank You" provides a more lasting and meaningful - and ultimately, American - story. One valid criticism of the book could be that it reinforces the "broken soldier" narrative, as though every veteran of the war is equally damaged and unable to function. I'll admit that more than once I thought to myself 'why can't they just get it together?' which misses the point that they certainly would if they could. Hundreds of thousands of veterans came home fine, but thousands didn't. For those who complain this book reinforces a negative stereotype of a "few" damaged soldiers, my question would be what's the right number before it would be okay to focus on them, to make sure we don't forget their side to the story? Two? 200? 20,000? 200,000? If the system struggles to support the after-war needs of ANY of our veterans, I would say we need a close look at that. That's part of the deal. They don't just get paid to fight; they get paid to serve - and this after-war is part of that. I'm an Iraq veteran myself (in 1991), and like Finkel, I embedded as a journalist in Iraq different times from 2007-09 (including part of the time Finkel describes in "The Good Soldiers"). One of the soldiers I met in '07, and again in '09, was injured in an IED attack that killed the guy sitting next to him; later, a friend of his was shot during their squad's patrol, "the second time I looked in somebody's eyes, who was dying," he said. I don't keep in touch much, but I know he's still on active duty today, an Army recruiter and senior NCO, as good humored and funny as he was back then. I'm glad that most of the soldiers I met seemed to have come home okay, heading on to college, jobs, or still on active duty - but of all those men, I'm sure some didn't and I

just don't know. I read a complimentary advance review copy from the publisher.

Perhaps the most painful book I have ever read but one of the most important ones. As the mother of an Iraq and Afghanistan vet I will never fully comprehend the pain and miseries those wars brought to those who fought them but it helps me realize how deep and lasting that pain and misery is. This is a book that every congressman or woman, every cabinet member and every president should read and remember before they ever open their mouths to speak about a war they did not fight or veterans they likely will never know. I thank David Finkel for both the good soldier as well as this book.

War does not end when the troops fly home. In some sense, the conflict is written in the brain circuitry of every soldier; ordinary events have altered meanings as former warriors return to their families and civilian jobs. For those with traumatic brain injuries or severe PTSD, normal life never resumes. *Thank You For Your Service* tells the post-conflict stories of soldiers who came home with problems severe enough to wreak havoc in their lives. This is not the type of book I generally read. My taste runs more toward politics and science. But I'm glad I read it because it gave me a deeper sense of the cost of war. When a nation goes to war, the national treasury is drained to pay for war materiel and it consigns its soldiers to battlefields from which many of them will never return, some physically and others psychologically. The book made me wonder about how many of my father's quirks were a result of his service in World War II. As children, we knew his hearing loss was the result of ordnance exploding too close to his left ear and the pain he experienced when he walked in the ocean in New England dated back to frozen feet in the icy winter in Europe. I can't help but wonder whether his temper and heavy drinking were also remnants of war and trauma. In the end, the war comes home to us in ways this book helped me to understand in a deeper way. It is well worth reading. For those with war veterans in their lives, it is essential reading.

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