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Reading Group Gold

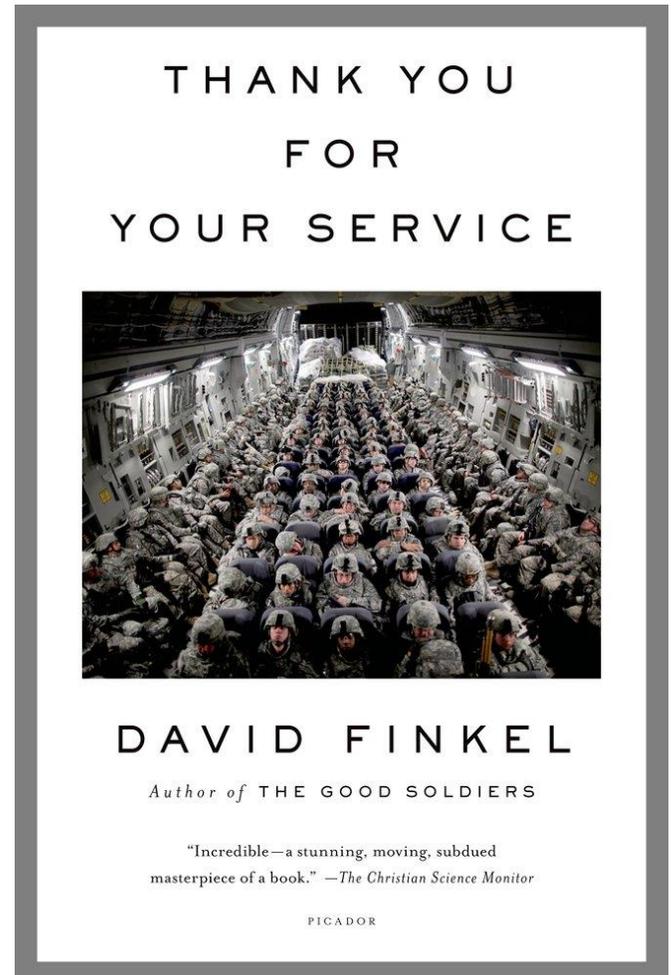
Thank You for Your Service

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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Reading group guide written by Amy Clements