



News Release

September 23, 2010

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Author Relates Soldiers' Stories at Century

Most of the 800 soldiers in United States Army Battalion 2-16 (average age: 19) cheered mightily when they learned they were going to a vicious area of Baghdad in 2007 as part of the “surge,” David Finkel, a Pulitzer Prize-winning Washington Post reporter told Century College audiences on Sept. 21 and 22.

“They were itching and eager and full of patriotism. They wanted to shoot at something,” said Finkel, author of *The Good Soldiers*, the [Century College Common Book of 2010-2011](#). Their mission was to make the Iraqi population feel safer.

Fourteen months later, after living with the almost constant fear of explosive devices that maimed and killed many of their buddies, Finkel said the soldiers’ attitudes had deteriorated from invincible to confused to cynical.

Three years later, many of the soldiers still are not doing well. Some are fine with their record of service, but many more continue to wonder what they accomplished. In the end, the young soldiers were mostly

concerned about being there for their buddies. And if they felt guilt, it was about surviving when others didn't, or being too anguished to return to duty.

Finkel's spare, unvarnished account of the Iraq war has won accolades for being an authentic depiction of the soldiers' experience. The commander who gave Finkel full access to his battalion said it was not the book he would have written, but he respected Finkel's work as an honest piece of combat literature.

"This is not a policy book," Finkel told the audience. "I had no agenda. It is not a polemic. This is a piece of journalism."

Finkel is a master of detail as he relates the stories of individual soldiers such as Adam Schumann.

Schumann was one of the most respected members of the battalion who ended up with the gruesome task of hauling a badly wounded buddy, Michael Emory, down several flights of stairs following an attack. Because of the angle of how he was carrying him, Schumann wound up with Emory's blood running into his mouth. Six months after the incident, Schumann, suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, could still taste Emory's blood.

One day when they were back in this country, Schumann called Finkel and said he was celebrating the birth of his first child. The next day, he called and said he was driving around with a gun in his mouth. "How can I stop this war?" he said.

Finkel also tells the story of Duncan Crookston, a handsome young man who lost both legs and arms in an explosion and then lived an agonizing five months in a burn unit in San Antonio, Texas. Crookston was wounded on the same day – Sept. 4, 2007 – that President Bush told reporters in Australia that the United States was "kicking ass" in Iraq.

"There is a deep chasm between the policy strategists and the war fought by soldiers," said Finkel.

Good things did happen in Iraq, such as the time the soldiers of 2-16 were praised by General David Petraeus for their success in helping to drastically reduce the amount of time that Iraqis had to wait for gasoline at fuel stations. The new strategy was to assign platoons to the stations. However, the same day that Petraeus came to Iraq and met with the 2-16, an explosion occurred at one of the gas stations and a fine young soldier named Joshua Reeves was killed. It also was the same day that Reeves' first child was born.

Finkel recounted that while Reeves' badly shredded body was being worked on by the medical staff, a nurse kicked something on the floor.

"That's a toe," said a soldier.

The line – "That's a toe" – was the hardest line Finkel said he wrote in his book. "I wanted the reader to feel the experience, and not just relate information," said Finkel. But he worried that including the line was callous and would be hurtful to Reeves' family.

However, Finkel did receive an email from Reeves' father who said he appreciated Finkel's writing because he wanted to absorb all the details of his son's last hours of life.

Combat is over in Iraq, but the war is not over, Finkel said. "It has moved into American communities from coast to coast," he said. "One million have served. Most are fine, but a lot are not fine."

Because the military is not doing enough to help those who served with their mental health issues, Finkel is writing a second book, following several soldiers from his first book.

Speaking to student veterans on the second day of his visit at Century, Finkel listened to stories about how hard it is to return to normalcy after the craziness of war. One student said he thought he had dealt with the mental health issues, but the stress of going to school, making a living and supporting a young family brings it all back up.

“It helps to see a counselor who has chewed the same dirt,” said one student.

The veterans think it’s a good idea for people to read a book like *The Good Soldiers* because it explains the war in ways they are not able to. “How do you explain to your mom what it’s like to do some of the stuff we had to do?” said one student. “I couldn’t put the book down,” said another student.

“A lot of guys are angry,” Finkel said. “You have to be your own advocate with the mental health system, and that’s hard.”



Photo: David Finkel and student veteran at Century

Finkel’s appearance at Century was sponsored by the college’s Common Book project and the Century College Speaker Series, which has brought such national authors as Marjane Satrapi, Anne Fadiman, Steven Pinker, Sarah Vowell, Elizabeth Kolbert, Robert Sapolsky, Nikki Giovanni and Liz Murray.

Temple Grandin, the national expert on autism, and subject of an Emmy Award winning HBO movie **will be at Century on Wednesday, Oct. 20, at 7 p.m., on the East Campus Lincoln Mall.** Her appearance is free and open to the public.