



***The Good Captain: A Personal Memoir of America at War***

**By R.D. Hooker Jr.**

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Reviewed by BG (Retired) Mitchell M. Zais

Richard Hooker was an Infantry Soldier. When he retired out of the 82nd Airborne Division in Afghanistan, he had been deployed to more conflict zones than any other serving colonel of his day and was the senior paratrooper on active duty, having earned his jump wings 35 years earlier. Part memoir, part military history, and part policy and political studies, *The Good Captain* tells an amazing story of courage and personal sacrifice in a career that spanned over three decades and saw deployments to Grenada, Somalia, Zaire and Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Sinai, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Not only a combat and field Soldier on his journey from private to colonel, Hooker also served at the highest levels of military and defense policymaking. He had three tours on the White House National Security Council, served as aide de camp to the Secretary of the Army, and as speech writer for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. His story bears witness to the horrors of war from the Soldier's perspective and to the often tragic decision making at the highest levels of national security.

Hooker was born in the Army; his father was also a career Infantryman and paratrooper. Both his sons served as privates in combat, one with the 173rd Airborne Brigade and one with the 82nd Airborne Division, before being commissioned as Infantry officers. Like so many "Army brats," the author grew up with frequent moves and multiple family separations. His own family made similar sacrifices.

Enlisting straight out of high school, Hooker's first assignment was to the 82nd Airborne Division. After attending the West Point prep school and graduating from the academy, he returned to the 82nd. What ensued was an extraordinary 30-year career that took him around the world. Having led Soldiers in war and in peace as an airborne platoon leader, company commander, battalion commander, and brigade commander, his insights and anecdotes serve as a primer on leadership. The sacrifices required by the Soldiers and their families who bear the burden of our nation's conflicts are well documented.

Because it covers the military landscape from the halls of the Pentagon and White House to the killing fields of Africa and the Middle East, *The Good Captain* offers leadership lessons that are applicable from the squad level on the ground to the national level in Washington. Nor is Hooker reluctant to both praise and critique military leaders he served with, the defense bureaucracy, and national security policy.

Most of all, in pulling no punches, *The Good Captain* is exciting and interesting. I found it hard to put down.