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# Rule Number Two: Lessons I Learned In A Combat Hospital



## Synopsis

When Lieutenant Commander Heidi Kraft's twin son and daughter were fifteen months old, she was deployed to Iraq. A clinical psychologist in the US Navy, Kraft's job was to uncover the wounds of war that a surgeon would never see. She put away thoughts of her children back home, acclimated to the sound of incoming rockets, and learned how to listen to the most traumatic stories a war zone has to offer. One of the toughest lessons of her deployment was perfectly articulated by the TV show *M\*A\*S\*H*: "There are two rules of war. Rule number one is that young men die. Rule number two is that doctors can't change rule number one." Some Marines, Kraft realized, and even some of their doctors, would be damaged by war in ways she could not repair. And sometimes, people were repaired in ways she never expected. *RULE NUMBER TWO* is a powerful firsthand account of providing comfort amidst the chaos of war, and of what it takes to endure.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Dr. Kraft has written a fresh, emotionally bruising record of what it is to be a care giver not just to those who obviously need it, but to those whose experiences lash them from the inside. This is the

book for anyone who ever wanted a concise version of the direct and indirect mental cost of combat. The wrenching depictions of comrades in arms openly weeping for those who used to sit and laugh beside them, of leaders expressing love and care for those for whom they are responsible, of the small things and large which provide relief and anchors for those caught up in chaos all leave a reader wondering how it is anyone can truly survive combat unscathed. Intervention after intervention trod upon each's heels; from the schizophrenic Marine who argues with his combat knife, to the weathered veteran who wants hypnosis so he can stop his two-pack a day smoking habit, to talking down a Marine with a rifle muzzle to her head, weeping as she apologizes for what she is about to do, even when the interventionalists themselves find themselves on the receiving end of an ad hoc group session held by a commander of a neighboring unit who happens to be a practicing psychiatrist, even addressing the stress of being one of the new "untouchables" - graves registration Marines. "We did the best we could" is the strong underlying theme throughout this memoir. This is a powerful rendering of what we ask others to do, and suffer, in our name.

Rule number three: Rule number one and two compel us to provide our armed forces with the compassionate combat stress care of doctors like Lieutenant Commander Heidi Squier Kraft. Rule number one and two refer to a particular episode of M\*A\*S\*H. Use the search inside feature for more about this. I met Alan Alda once. Having followed his career, I noticed he gives medical commencements. His advice after a near death surgical crisis is, "Treat me like a human being". That is exactly what Dr Kraft describes in her memoir as a Navy flight psychologist, marine pilot's wife, submariners daughter, colleague friend and confidant. She is one of the Marines "Alpha" female care givers at the Combat Hospital in Anbar Province, Iraq. I recall reading the news story of Marine Corporal Dunham's heroism and subsequent Medal of Honor. It is comforting to know he was treated with such dignity and compassion by Dr. Kraft and her team at Alpha Surgical. This book is a compelling read and allays some of my fears about how our military addresses combat stress. You will meet members of our military requiring the assistance of Heidi Kraft. Many looking for someone to talk with, at Alpha Surgical Hospital, so they can rejoin their units. Some would not make it. I was also pleased to see 10% of Dr. Kraft's royalties are donated to the Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund. As if she hasn't already given enough. Ma'am, thank you!

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and within the first chapter found that I had a hard time putting it down. Kraft gives a real-life perspective of the experiences and impressions of a modern day war.

She provides a realistic view on the emotions and every day details that haven't been captured by the media. And after reading this, I feel closer to the war in Iraq and the individuals who give their time, hearts and minds to fighting.

I could not put this book down. The author gives us a view into the war we don't see readily from home. We are privileged to experience the heart and soul of a soldier -- in particular the loyalty each has for one another. I was awestruck by the amazing strength of a mother away from her children to serve her country. It made me proud to be an American. It made me proud to be a mom. Finally, I appreciated the insight into the human mind-- how we as humans process emotionally difficult and heavy situations-- and that with some work and effort, we can ultimately get through them.

I have been deployed overseas 5 times as a nurse in the Reserves and this book was recommended to me by someone who has no military experience - she said that it helped her to understand what veterans deal with when they returned home from Iraq and/or Afghanistan. As I read this book there was a portion of each chapter where I found myself saying "spot on" as I recognized my own reactions in her words. It's a great book for military medical people to read to help understand that you are not the only person that has trouble adjusting when you get home, and it's also a great book for those with no military or deployment experience to understand our adjustment difficulties we may experience when we get home.

The stories are astonishing. Honestly, I'm still processing them. She may not have been out there fighting, but she was doing her work at the point of conflict, running on adrenaline, compassion, determination, and nothing resembling normal sleep. Plenty of others here have discussed one or another tragic, traumatic, challenging situation, so I won't do that here (though so much of what she wrote is unforgettable). I think this is a great book for anybody who wishes to help vets in a sophisticated way. We'll NEVER be able to understand what our troops go through during war, though this book paints an extraordinarily poignant picture. With her stories, the author clues us into a world of well-meaning attitudes and strategies -- some that she found were helpful and some that decidedly were not. I bought this book out of sheer interest (the esteemed alum gave a talk to SDSU while I was teaching there; she used to work at the VA hospital in La Jolla), and out of my own desire to be a better therapist for vets. I think the book will help therapists better understand their clients' experiences in combat. Moreover, it shares the rare perspective of a deployed psychologist. Kraft had all the standard cognitive-behavioral training and experience, but found that the

research-based, textbook approach didn't give her what she needed to do her best amidst the chaos. Her "case load" was huge and cut deeply into her psyche. If nothing else, this book will help one understand the "traumatic transference" that therapists can experience. The mere exposure (albeit second or third hand) is part of what makes this book a gem. (This paragraph is such an understatement...) Highly recommended. Another book that I'm finding helpful with vets is "Strategies for Managing Stress After War: Veteran's Workbook and Guide to Wellness" by Whealin, DeCarvalho and Vega. (It is an educational text for vets, not a collection of stories...)

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