

# DISPATCHES

MILITARY  
WRITERS  
SOCIETY OF  
AMERICA

Rescuing History One Story at a Time  
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FALL 2020

*A VIRTUAL CORNUCOPIA  
OF READABLES  
FROM COVER  
TO COVER*

*2020 MWSA  
BOOK AWARDS  
Pg 4*

*2021-22 BOARD  
ELECTION RESULTS  
Pg 53*





## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Sandra Miller Linhart

IT'S BEEN A YEAR, FOR SURE. I don't know where the time went. It's almost Halloween.

Trick-or-treating may be canceled but have no fear—this issue of your *Dispatches* is chock-full of goodies for your reading pleasure. Not only have we listed the winners of our 2020 season (pg 4), we have a preview of the 2021-22 MWSA Election results (pg 53).

Our readership picked up the baton this summer and took off with it. We were inundated with amazing stories, essays, poems, and excerpts. We do our best to fit them all in, but I have to ask—please don't send me a 50,000 word novel. There's no way for me to add it. Pick out your favorite 500-900 word excerpt. We'll do our best to include it between these covers.

A lot has changed since last Halloween...for some, more than others. It's been a period of readjustment, re-evaluating, and taking stock in what's important in life. To me, that's family and friends. We've said good-bye to too many of both over the years. It never gets easy. Whether through deployment, TDYs, relocations, separation of service, death, by circumstance or by choice—our intimate circle is in constant flux.

2021 will be on us before the next issue is printed, so I wish you all a wonderful Holiday season and a Happy New Year. Here's hoping 2021 brings us less fear, more courage, abundant health, and a lot more love and laughter. We're in this together.

Enjoy & In Joy!

## DISPATCHES REGULARS

EDITOR/L&D ~ SANDRA MILLER LINHART

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FEATURE WRITER ~ EVART ERICKSON

FEATURE WRITER ~ NANCY YOCKEY BONAR

FEATURE WRITER ~ JIM ENDERLE

FEATURE WRITER ~ KEITH NIGHTINGALE

FEATURE WRITER ~ STEVEN J. CRAIG

PHOTOGRAPHER ~ PAT McGRATH-AVERY

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## **MWSA Leadership**

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### **Finance**

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John Cathcart

Betsy Beard

### **Awards**

Betsy Beard

John Cathcart

Rob Ballister

Barb Evenson

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Betsy Beard



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*Bob Doerr*

**I**T'S OCTOBER WHICH MEANS QUITE a few things. Only two months until Christmas, we're in our book submission hiatus, and we've just finished our annual conference. Oops, not this year for that last one. But we did have our annual membership meeting, we just couldn't do it live. Next year we plan to hold our conference in September in New London, CT—much like we planned to do this year. Please mark it on your calendars.

Over the past several months, most of us have become proficient with Zoom and other video conferencing tools. Having to learn this technology turned out to be beneficial, as it has expanded our thinking (and ability) on how we present classes and briefings to our membership. In fact, we've already held one online class and have planned more writing classes that will be offered free to our membership.

We announced at our membership meeting the results of our biannual elections. Further on in this newsletter, you can find the list of new Board officers for 2021-22 Board. I'm looking forward to working with the new Board and thank all those who are serving in the current Board for their contributions to MWSA.

This issue contains a list of all our 2020 book award winners. Take some time and peruse through the list. If you're looking for a good read, you can find several among these winners.

I hope all of you are staying safe and healthy out there. Use your common sense and try not to become a victim of this deadly coronavirus. Thanks, and have a great holiday season.

~ Bob Doerr, President







## Special Recognition Awards





Silver Medal  
One Small Spark by Jackie Minniti



Gold Medal  
Full Mag by August Uhl, et al

Silver Medal  
Katusha by Wayne Vansant





Gold Medal



*The Birdhouse Man*  
Rick DeStefanis



*When Heroes Flew*  
Buzz Bernard

Silver Medal



*A Lion's Share*  
Brad Graft



*Going Home*  
Carole Brungar



*The Jossing Affair*  
J.L. Oakley

*Angie's War*  
Gary DeRigne



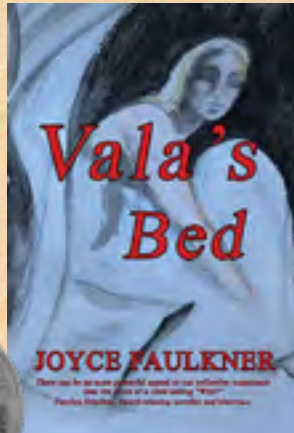




*The Pound*  
David Brown



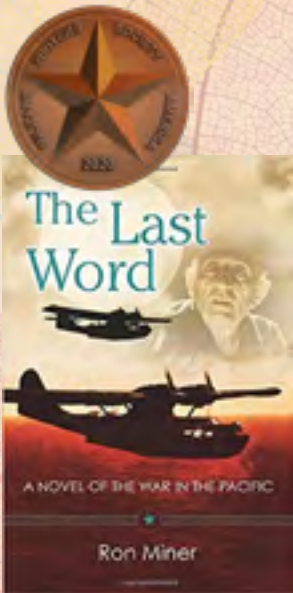
*Vala's Bed*  
Joyce Faulkner



Bronze Medal



*Youth in Asia*  
Allen Tiffany



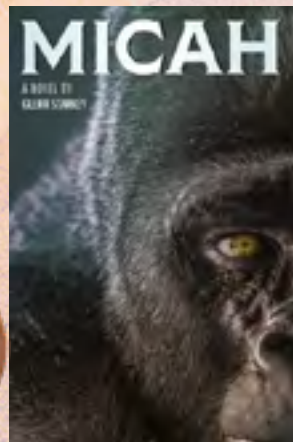
*The Last Word*  
Ron Miner



*The Hidden Sphinx*  
Zita Steele



*Micah*  
Glenn Starkey



*Cobra Talon*  
Patrick Sydor





Gold Medal  
*Winds, Waves & Warriors* by Thomas M Mitchell

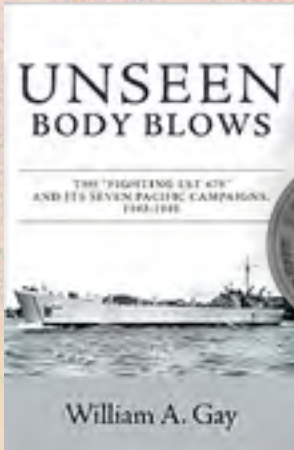


Silver Medal

*Unseen Body Blows*  
William A Gay

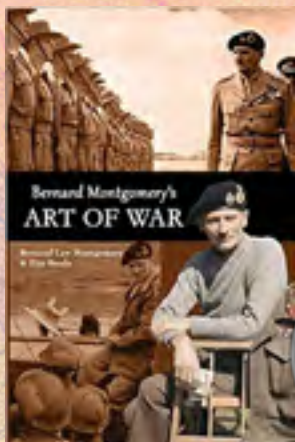
*Brownsville Texas Incident*  
LTC (Ret) William Baker

*Student Sailor Skipper Survivor*  
Julia Gimbel



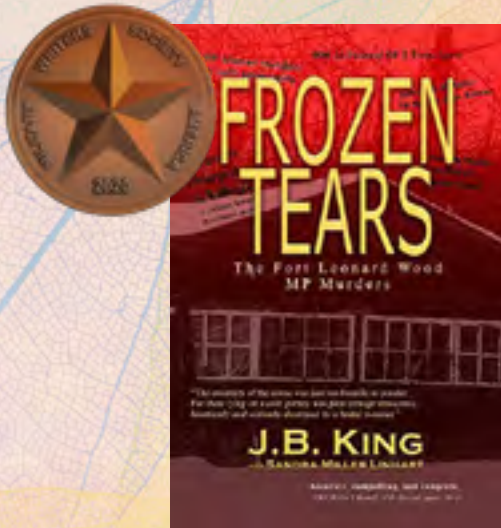
*B Montgomery's Art of War*  
Zita Steele

*All Present & Accounted for*  
Steven Craig





Bronze Medal  
[Frozen Tears](#) by JB King



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Bronze Medal

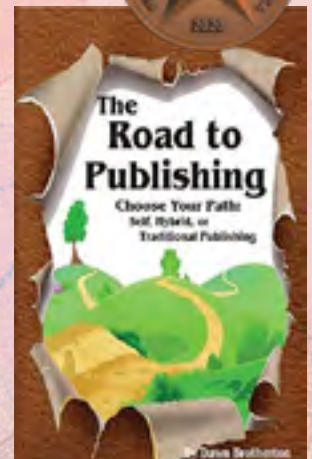
Gold Medal

[Deliberate Discomfort](#)

by Jason B.A. VanCamp with Andy Symonds

[Combat to College](#)

John Davis



[Road to Publishing](#)

Dawn Brotherton





Silver Medal

Gold Medal  
*Alone in the Light* by Benjamin W Bass



*Seven Wings to Glory*  
Kathleen M Rodgers



*Still Come Home*  
Katey Schultz

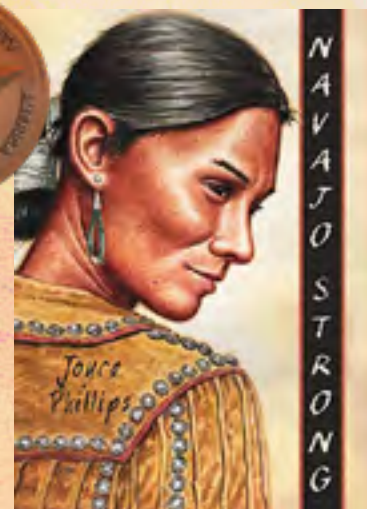


*The Big Buddha Bicycle Race*  
Terence A Harkin



Bronze Medal

*Navajo Strong* by Joyce Phillips





Gold Medal



*Under Fire*  
Bob Worthington



*There it is...*  
Charles Hensler



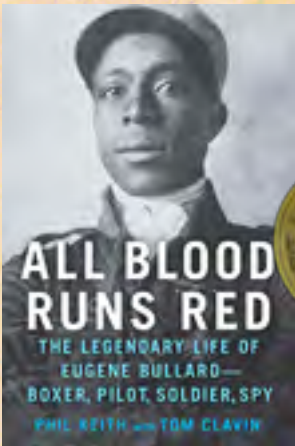
Bronze Medal



*Point*  
Jamie Thompson



*Sirens*  
Laura Colbert



*All Blood Runs Red*  
Phil Keith & Tom Clavin



*Mayhem 337*  
Chad Rickard

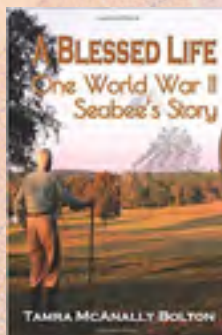


*Plans That Made God Laugh*  
James Allen



Silver Medal

*Crusader* by Mike Guardia



*A Blessed Life*  
Tamra McAnally Bolton







Silver Medal

Gold Medal

*Perisan Blood* by M G Haynes



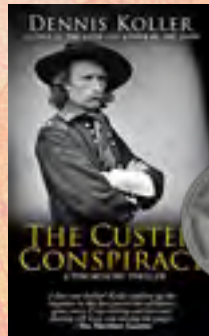
*Trust But Verify*  
Karna Small Bodman



*Rigged*  
J Rosone & M Watson



*The Custer Conspiracy*  
Dennis Koller



*Dark Angel*  
Joseph Badal



Bronze Medal

*Obsessed*  
Joseph Badal



*At Daddy's Hands*  
Jacob Paul Patchen



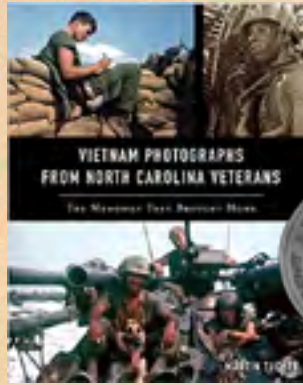
*Bangkok File*  
Dale A Dye

*Force No One*  
Daniel Charles Ross

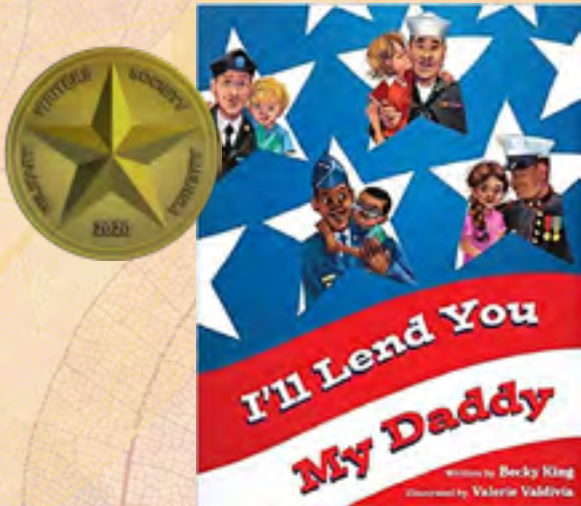




Silver Medal  
*Vietnam Photographs* by Martin Tucker



Gold Medal



*I'll Lend You My Daddy*  
Becky King



Bronze Medal  
*You Are Always With Me* by Daniel Berry  
Illustrated by Brian Azhar

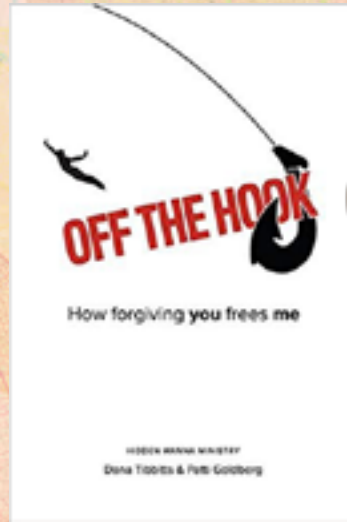
*Grandman Dean Goes Big Shopping*  
Warren Martin & Star Huddleston







Bronze Medal  
*Off The Hook* by Dana Tibbitts & Patti Goldberg



Silver Medal  
*I Am Jack* by Dennis Jones





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# A MAN WHO LOST HIS WIFE

Bob Stockton

Excerpt from *The Blue-Collar Blues and Other Stories*  
by Bob Stockton (c)2020

A MAN APPROACHED THE TABLE and asked whether the seat next to mine was taken. He smelled like he had spent the afternoon drinking somewhere. I could not fault him for that as I had enjoyed a couple myself before the dinner was scheduled to be served.

“No,” I replied. “Have a seat and join us for dinner.”

I had recently flown to a city in the southwest to attend the annual conference of a charitable association of retired servicemen. The dinner was the President’s Reception Dinner, a catered welcoming affair in which the association president greeted the attendees and their wives and laid out the schedule of events for the four-day conference.

“Thanks. Hey, the bar is still open. Join me in a cocktail before dinner?”

I thought about it for a moment.

“What the hell, don’t mind if I do. Vodka and tonic for me.”

“Vodka tonic. Got it. Be right back.”

The man turned and walked unsteadily to the hotel bar, ordered the drinks, and returned to the table. I was impressed with the man’s

dexterity once he had the drinks in hand. He did not spill a drop on his return trip.

“Here ya go, vodka and tonic for you and a double Jack for me, one for each leg. Don’t want to wobble when I walk.”

I nodded. “Words to live by. Thanks for the drink. Here’s to health.”

“Thanks and back at ya. Name’s Harry. Ya sure I’m not taking your wife’s seat?”

I indicated to Harry that I was attending the conference alone. “Stay where you are Harry, I’m here by myself.”

“Ah, well, okay then. Leave the wife home did ya? Or don’t she like these meetings? I like ‘em myself. Get together with old friends every year. Have a good time, ya know?”

I nodded and gave Harry a friendly smile. “No. I’m divorced. I’m usually traveling solo for these affairs.”

It was as if Harry had not heard my reply. He continued his monologue in a loud voice.

“And did ya see the set on that bartender? Is she hot stuff or what? Man, oh man, what a honey!”

I was beginning to second guess my decision to invite Harry to join me at the table. He was





obviously drunk and his crude remark was loud enough for the dinner guests several tables away to hear his every word.

The small talk between the other couples at the tables nearest ours ceased and all eyes were focused on Harry...and me! Icy stares would be a more accurate description of the attention that the two of us were getting from the married guests at those tables.

I turned to Harry and made a downward moderating gesture with both hands. "Harry, everyone heard your last remark. This probably isn't the ideal place for talk like that."

"Oh geez! Was I talkin' that loud? Damn. I sure am sorry. Didn't know that everybody could hear me. Not used to comin' to these things by myself. My wife would always tell me when I was gettin' too loud and all but she ain't with me no more. Lost her two years back."

I was not exactly certain what Harry meant by "lost her" and was fairly sure that I did not want to hear Harry's explanation. I decided to take the conversation along a different tack.

"Harry, have you signed up for any of the scheduled tours?"

"What? Oh, the tours. Yep, signed up for two of 'em. The Alamo and that canal boat tour that goes right through downtown. They ought ta both be pretty good. Ya know, once I see the Alamo, I can say that I been to where ol' Davy Crockett was born and where he died. He was born near Johnson City, Tennessee, ya know. They got his ma and pa's dirt floor cabin all preserved over there. Not much to it either."

"That is something, isn't it? I don't think that I've ever met anyone who has been to both places."

"Uh huh. Got a whole state park there with RV hookups and all. Real nice the way they fixed it up.

"Gonna take that downtown barge tour too, goes right through the city, past restaurants and shops and all. She woulda really liked that one, ya know."

Harry paused, obviously trying to control his emotions. His eyes filled with tears. He took a deep breath, pulled out a handkerchief, and blew his nose. It was obvious to me that when Harry had spoken of losing his wife that she had died and fate had dictated today I was to be the guy who was to hear Harry's story. I decided to be a good listener. We were, after all, brothers in military background.

"I'm sorry. It must be hard to lose someone that close to you."

"Had a modular home built just below Las Cruces after I retired from the Army. Real close to Holloman and Fort Bliss. We'd go to the commissary over there at Bliss once a week and over to the base hospital to get our prescriptions filled. Sometimes we'd do all that on a Tuesday 'cause the NCO club had Bingo on Tuesday nights and she was just about as lucky as you could get at that damn game. That's what they called her over there ya know, Lucky. Kind of like her nickname, it was."

Harry's voice had been reduced to a near whisper. He blew his nose again and continued.

"We got back from our Tuesday Bingo, she'd won a couple of small jackpot, ya know, and we was both kind of tired and went right to bed. Come one-thirty in the next morning she wakes me up and says, 'I can't breathe good.'

*Continued on page 18*



*Continued from page 17*

“Well, ya know, she had heart problems and I asked her did she take her heart medicine that day and she said that yes she had.”

The retelling of the events surrounding his wife’s death had helped Harry regain control of his emotional state.

“Well, I said get dressed and we’ll hustle up to the hospital in Las Cruces and see what’s the problem. She said okay and we got into the pickup and headed over to the hospital.

“We got there and I let her off at the emergency room door and went to park the truck. Found a spot and I come back into the emergency room and I don’t see her. I go up to the nurse at the desk and tell her who I am and ask, ‘Where is my wife?’

“Well, the nurse says that they took her in back and to wait around and the doctor will be out in a little while to talk to me. I ask if I can go back there with her and she says not just yet they are pretty busy back there. She says it won’t be long and the doctor will be out to talk to me.

“Well I’m not real happy ‘bout all that but I figure that my pissin’ and moanin’ about all of it ain’t gonna help anything so I go over and sit down to wait for the doc to come out tell me what the scoop is.”

I was a bit ashamed for having tried to manipulate the conversation earlier for my own

selfish reasons. After two years had passed Harry was obviously still unable to cope with the loss of his wife.

“Harry, I’m empty and it’s my turn. How about a refill?”

“Well, yeah, just a beer this time, Coors if they got it. I’m about topped off on the Jack.”

“Done.”

I walked over to the hotel bar, purchased two bottles of Coors, returned to the table, and sat one down in front of Harry.

“So Harry, was it very long before the ER doctor came out to talk to you?”

Harry gently touched my bottle of Coors with his bottle.

“Thanks, good health and cheers. Took the doc ‘bout half an hour before he comes out and says that she’s having a bad time with her heart failure and was she on some kind of medicine pill called furside or somethin’ like that? I showed him a list of the medicines that she took and he nodded and said yeah it was on the list. Then he said that they was gonna admit her and try to get some of the water out of her.

“She had been tellin’ me of late how her ankles and everything was swellin’ up and that it was gettin’ hard for her to walk. Said the next time we was over to Bliss that she wanted to make an appointment with a doc over there to see what they could do.”





“So they admitted your wife to the hospital?”

“Yep. Doc said that they wasn’t any reason to be worried, that I should head home and get some sleep, and by the time I got back to the hospital the next day she’d be ready to go home, prob’ly with some new medicines that would help her heart more.

“I wasn’t real hot on leavin’ but the doc said that they’d be busy with her for a while and I couldn’t go back there while they was workin’ on her and the best thing I could do was get some rest in my own bed.

“Said they’d call me if anything was to happen.”

“So you went home to get some shut-eye, yes?”

“Went home but didn’t get much shuteye. Phone rang about an hour after I got home. Caller ID showed it was the hospital. I answered it and some nurse from the intensive care unit called, said I was to come back to the hospital. That the doctor wanted to talk to me. I asked her what was goin’ on and she said the doctor would talk to me when I got there.

“I figured that maybe they needed some more information about the Medicare or the Tricare so I got up and went back over to the hospital to give them whatever they needed to have and to get my wife to take her home.”

Harry paused, drained the bottle of beer, and wiped his eyes with his handkerchief.

“Got over there and they take me into an office where some chief doctor of somethin’ is and they tell me that my dear wife has died. I said, 'How can that be?'

“They said they couldn’t get the water out of her lungs fast enough. That her heart wasn’t

workin’ good enough to get the water out.”

Harry paused again to get control of his emotions.

“She drowned in her own water. We’d been married thirty-seven years.”

Harry looked down at his dinner which had been served while we were talking.

“Ya know, I don’t feel real hungry right now, I’m gonna head up to my room. You goin’ on the Alamo tour tomorrow?”

I nodded. “Sure am, Harry. Ought to be pretty interesting bit of Texas history.”

“Well, maybe we can get together and take the tour together seein’ as we’re both flyin’ solo.”

I nodded again and smiled. “Who could pass up the opportunity to tour with a guy who has seen where Davy Crockett was born?”





## DESERT . . . NEW YORKERS ?

MILITARY TRAVEL AND ITS CROSS-CULTURAL OUTCOME

A. T. Roberts

ENTERING MY GRANDFATHER'S OFFICE IN his Long Island, NY home was always a vexing experience for me. He was a thoroughbred New Yorker, but had his workspace adorned with all-things western. How could a guy born in Manhattan, raised in Brooklyn, and eventually settled on Long Island be so into cowboy stuff? With the exception of a four-month extreme camping trip on the battlefields of Europe in 1945, I thought he'd spent all his life in the concrete jungle of the city; that is until a simple photograph was noticed when I was about thirteen years old.

Although the photo is long gone, I remember it well. It was a picture of my grandfather, much younger, standing in front of a rather menacing looking missile. It was incredibly faded, hung above a drafter's lamp on his garage workbench. I never noticed it and abruptly asked him, "Where's that from?"

"Oh, that's from the desert," he replied modestly; as if it explained anything.

"The desert?"

"Yeah, my job sent us out there for three years to test that missile."

*Desert? Missile? Job?* My grandfather had been retired my whole life. I knew he fought

in WWII, but never really thought about what he did for a living after that. Apparently he'd been pretty busy.

The post-war world came to represent a neo-frontier for the American West. So eloquently described in Tom Wolfe's *The Right Stuff*, the desert is where things happened. Atomic bombs ignited, sound barriers were broken, and maybe even a few interactions with extraterrestrials (if you believe that sort of thing) all occurred on the grounds and in the skies of the American desert.

However, none of these accomplishments would have ever occurred had it not been for the legions of hard-working, think-outside-the-box American working men and their families—one of which was my grandfather.

Like so many war veterans, he took advantage of the G.I. Bill, attained an education, and put it to good use in the new and booming defense industry.

Back in New York after the war and having all the shrapnel finally taken out of his leg, my grandfather found work at W.L. Maxson, made famous during the war for their "Maxson meat-grinder," a quad-mount for .50 caliber machine guns capable of shooting down planes, or, as the name suggests, drove of enemy troops.

The company expanded its output throughout the Cold War, culminating in missile launchers for the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps; the one my grandfather was standing in front of in the photo.







*Terrier missile launcher (U.S. Navy public image).*

“Uh, how long d’you live out in the desert?” I asked.

“Three years in the early 50s, mostly at China Lake.”

Then it clicked. That explained all the cowboy memorabilia in his office. And I just thought he really liked westerns.

My grandfather was never much of a talker, unless you got him going about something he was really passionate about—which just so happened to be the American desert. I heard all kinds of stories, most of which would seem outright crazy to anyone by 21st-century standards.

He never really explained where the information came from, but apparently they would receive notice before atomic bomb testing just across the Nevada border.

“Me and your grandmother would go up on the roof of our house in Ridgecrest to watch the mushroom cloud.”

“What?!” I exclaimed. “You could see it from that far away?”

“Of course, it was a freaking atom bomb, whaddy think?” He continued, “Your grandmother hated that house. After a windstorm

you needed a shovel to get all of the sand outta the house.”

“A shovel!” my grandmother reiterated from the next room over.

He went on, “I loved it out there. Us veterans were allowed to do pretty much whatever we wanted.”

“Like what?” I inquired.

“Me and a buddy who served in the Pacific used to go check out a jeep from the motor pool and some rifles from the armory—they’d just give you a pail of ammo with it—and go out on the test range and go hunting.”

For anyone familiar with modern armed workforces, whether it be military or police, they don’t just let people with VA cards take vehicles and weapons for fun.

“We shot jack rabbits mostly, but one time we almost got attacked by a mountain lion out there.”

My grandparents were Italian, so I also found it rather laughable that they didn’t let their relative geographic isolation—specifically from all-things Italian—get in the way of attaining what they desired. My grandmother used to have her mother go to Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn and give personnel boarding Navy planes a care package to take out to my grandparents if they were flying to China Lake. Apparently she paid them in food. Again, for anyone familiar with civil or military aviation, it’s certainly a bygone era for little old immigrant women to hitchhike pasta and cake across the country with people they did not know personally.

Regardless of missing friends, family, and a few New York specifics like fresh-made

*Continued on page 22*



*Continued from page 21*

pasta, my grandparents fell in love with the desert.

My grandfather began collecting artifacts found in abandoned mine shafts on the test range, and eventually became a full-blown rock hound after discovering a few geodes. My grandmother got along nicely with all the other contractor families that lived in Ridgecrest, and looked forward to weekend trips to Yosemite, Death Valley, and Los Angeles; all, to say the least, quite different from her native New York landscape.



*A helmet lantern discovered in an abandoned mineshaft on the Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake test range.*

It amazed me that two people I'd known my whole life as through-and-through New Yorkers had such a passion for the desert. Every so often they'd unearth their slide projector and screen and my extended family would sit in their den while my grandfather—when

he wasn't wrestling with the barely working slide carousel—would click through images of barren landscapes and narrate exactly where they were, when it was, and what they were doing in that particular moment; all like it was yesterday. He loved the desert that much.



*A few copies of my grandfather's subscription to Desert Magazine.*

Years after my grandfather's death, myself now in the military, I was preparing for a cross-country drive to my next duty station on the west coast. After informing my grandmother that I was going to make a few stops along the way—places like the Grand Canyon and Death Valley—she became introspective (which was rare for her) and remarked, "Me and your grandfather always loved it out there, I don't know what it was but there was something about it; I wish we would have stayed."







A photo my grandfather took of my grandmother and great aunt on a trip back to the desert in the mid-90s. Although they loved the desert, they never quite managed to look the part.



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# VESUVIUS OUT MY WINDOW; PT I

*Evarts Erickson*

THOUGH SOMETIMES IT WAS HARD to keep track of time, I think I was still nineteen when I was privileged to be a passenger on the very first hospital train (ex-Italian Army property) that ran from just behind the front—in late 1944, not yet halfway up the spine of that country—to Naples, where we were offloaded into ambulances and taken to a hospital within sight of Vesuvius. Then, in a somewhat gentle but prolonged convulsion that threw liquid fire high into the air at night and in daytime emitted a pillar of smoke that might remind anyone, like myself, of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

I make this last allusion most probably to establish that though I might have been a simple grunt, at least I was a well-read grunt for my years. Nothing would have tickled my adolescent fancy more than to have been a legitimate passenger on that hospital train to Naples. Preferably swathed in thick bandages, perhaps with a heavy gauze scarf around my head, or wearing an eye patch, a Hemingway or even a Tolstoy kind of hero. But instead I was...a counterfeit!

The raw truth was I woke one morning with my feet on fire, barely able to make it to where my sergeant—an old man of maybe thirty—was huddled over his wake-up coffee. Absorbed in his ritual, he jerked his head toward a muddy track, and grunted something about an aid station. So I set off, helmet, boots, olive drabs, slicker. I did not even carry my private-issue tommy gun. Even my single blanket was left behind.

It was raining; nothing new. It was muddy; nothing new. It was cold; nothing new. But something awful had happened to my feet. And since they were reluctant to support me, after a while I sat down in the rain and might have let the mud swallow me up if two contadini had not come along just then.

Between them, they carried me to a tent where a nurse took one look and shot me full of morphine, while an orderly actually cut off my boots with a surgical knife.

How my feet could ever have fit into them in the first place was a wonder. They were grotesquely blistered, ulcerated, and swollen. And seemed suddenly to have lost all feeling—a total reversal of sensation. Or maybe it was because I did not want to acknowledge any sensation, they felt so awful.

My memories of the tent are a little fuzzy, no doubt because of all the painkillers they fed me. Sometimes my eyes flicked open and I found myself staring at my feet in traction, way up above my head. I seem to remember they were blue-jay blue. Or maybe even bright cardinal red. I was surprised by how they could change color, and also by the fact they had not yet been amputated. I was convinced it would happen when those grunts





with war wounds were taken care of, and when I was too dopey to resist. But, I actually almost wanted them to be amputated. They hurt too much to stay attached.

If you asked me how many days or even hours I lived under that canvas, I could not tell you. All I know is that I saw everything with the cramped vision of the small child I had suddenly become. With my legs strapped up like that, I could not even perform the most basic bodily functions without assistance.

There were not many functions to perform, so I guess I had turned into pure spirit—an insubstantial wraith. *Would my feet turn gangrenous?* They almost looked leprous.

But on the brighter side, I was grateful to be warmer and drier than I had been in a long time, and that my back and head and butt were pressed against clean sheets. I was even vaguely conscious of the voices of the nurses and orderlies, who often seemed to talk in whispers, maybe so as not to wake us. As if we were deaf to the guns in the background that were hardly ever silent.

Some of these noisemakers were the 105mm howitzers of my own Battery B, 39th Field Artillery Battalion, Third Division. Though I personally was attached to a forward observation party that traveled with units of the 15th Infantry Regiment—a few days up, a few days down, spotting targets for our howitzers to fire on, and directing their fire since we were close support for the infantry.

That was how my feet had become infected, slogging around in cold mud without my being able to keep them dry. They might be acutely painful but they were definitely not a war wound. Nothing that would get me a

Purple Heart. So they might as well have been leprous.

In the Pacific at that time, a similar infection was called Jungle Rot. In World War I it was called Trench Foot. But that was too soft a term for what had crippled whole divisions when the opposing armies were hopelessly stalemated on the Western Front.

Years later, someone told me when Napoleon ordered his disastrous retreat from Moscow, many of his men were screaming with the pain of their infected feet, or allowing themselves to sink into the snow and freeze to death. But that was in 1812 and this was late 1943, and I had no idea I was in such distinguished company when I was placed aboard the hospital train for Naples.

I have no idea, either, how I got there from the aid station. When I woke, we were already underway. My feet were in another harness and I was sandwiched between a berth above me and another below. In the dim light of that airless wooden box, a few orderlies and a nurse or two patrolled the aisle. They occasionally did something with blankets or responded to emergencies outside my line of sight.

The car smelled of ether, or maybe it was chloroform., and the mostly unwashed bodies of any number of grunts and other ranks. But there was obviously no favoritism in the way we were all packed into whatever space was available. I assumed all of them had genuine war wound, but I was almost too happy to be going back to Naples to brood about it any more. And besides, like anyone who hoped someday to be a writer, I knew I must concentrate as much as I could on the details of the train ride, and how I might shape it into something worth telling.

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But the very thought of anything so strenuous put me back to sleep again and it wasn't until the ratcheting sound below me changed cadence that I sensed we had almost arrived in Naples. Then the doors slid open and all of a sudden, black faces hovered over us, assessing how best to move us from that crowded place to the ambulances waiting outside in the sunlight.

The sudden return to daylight hadn't deceived me: they were black faces. And if they had been our very own mothers, they couldn't have shown more caring kindness in the way they handled our stretchers and slid us onto the ambulance racks—even the stretchers where no one seemed to be moving that had their own ambulance.

The Fascist Party office building the Army had converted into a general hospital was on a hill and seemed more for show than any honest use—with echoing marble halls and wide marble steps that were evidently slippery, and long narrow rooms with high ceilings and large square marble-framed windows. One of those windows, though it was on the other side of the ward from where my bed was, gave me my view of Vesuvius.

Through those windows, too, we heard, soon after our arrival, the muffled sound of ammunition exploding from a dump down below us somewhere that had mysteriously ignited. For a while, it sparked talk of an evacuation, but since that would have been more dangerous than staying put, we stayed. But to the exploding ammo was added a howling sound from what I afterward learned was a grunt down the hall, a mental case, who had been laced into a straight jacket and given his own

private room. He was usually heavily sedated to keep him quiet.

So, it was a strange place, overall, with the occasionally howling grunt, and the intermittent exploding ammunition, and Vesuvius steadily doing its own thing, day and night, placed so I could see it on the other side of the room, across from my bed.

The next-to-worst thing about the hospital was that each morning at the crack of dawn, an orderly came into the room and shouted 'Ten-shun!'

The absolute worst thing was the Medical Corps major who came in afterwards, all decked out in his freshly pressed 'pinks' and shiny brass buttons. He insisted we lie there in our beds at rigid attention—though not everyone in the ward could easily assume that position—until he had looked in-turn at the tablet at the foot of each bed, exchanged a few remarks as possible, and moved on to the next bed. Everything about his attitude suggested he did not like us one bit, and the feeling was mutual.

I don't know what his problem was. Except for his uniform and the fact we spoke the same language, he might have been one of the Fascist Party bureaucrats the Army had chased out of the building to turn it into a hospital.

But I don't know why I'm carrying on about the major when this story is mostly about my next-bed neighbor.





I'd once heard him describe himself, to one of the nurses, as 'the grunt in the corner office,' but she had addressed him as 'Lieutenant'.

I was pretty sure he was infantry, since he had lost his left leg almost up to the groin. That suggested a grenade or maybe an incoming mortar round or heavy machine gun fire. Anything was possible. Even a mine, since I had nearly stepped on some of those myself, and would be exactly like him, if I hadn't been lucky.

They came to dress his stump several times a day, and sometimes, when they were careless about the screens, I had a chance to see what it looked like. But I refused to take advantage of something that was personal to him, since all his body language told me his missing limb was off limits to the curious.

All the same, I had decided if we ever got to know one another any better, I would ask him exactly how it happened...if he seemed willing to tell me.

\* \* \*

*[To Be Continued in next issue of Dispatches Magazine]*



### EVARTS ERICKSON BIOGRAPHY

*Evarts Erickson was born on October 3, 1924 in Brooklyn, New York. At the age of 17, he dropped out of Columbia University to enlist in the Army, where he served the entire war with the legendary Third Infantry Division, the "Rock of the Marne." Among the first American combat units to engage in offensive ground combat operations, the Third Division was the only U.S. Army one to fight the Axis on all European fronts. Overall, it saw combat in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, France, Germany and Austria for 531 consecutive days.*

*After basic training at Fort Bragg, Eric was shipped over to North Africa, landing in Algeria. He saw action in Tunis in 1942, then proceeded to Pozzuoli, north of Naples. He participated in the Anzio landing in January 1944, the battle of Monte Cassino, and other action in the Italian Theater, and was awarded a Bronze Star for his combat in the Anzio-Nettuno Operation on February 6, 1944 south of Cisterna, Italy. He also received the Legion of Honour, France's highest order of merit for military and civilian achievement, in recognition of his service in the liberation of France.*

*After the war, Evarts worked as a writer and public relations manager in Salem, MA; Oakland, CA; and Jubail, Saudi Arabia. He eventually settled in Wellfleet, MA, where he died in 2019, just a few days shy of his 95th birthday.*





# TO THE AFRICAN AMERICANS IN MY LIFE

*Frank Taylor*

**M**OST OF THE AFRICAN AMERICANS in my life have departed the mortal world for their just rewards. Some remain tied to earth's gravitational pull, but I have lost contact with them. If their heirs happen to read this letter, I will have accomplished my goal of sharing experiences that enriched my life from knowing their family member.

**Julia** came into my life when I became the oldest sibling of three at age five. Mother needed help caring for our household when baby sister arrived in 1947. Regrettably, I do not know Julia's last name, she deserves this recognition. Julia not only helped with household chores, she became a second mother to me. We walked together along the Tennessee River in Florence, Alabama. She always led the way on well-worn paths. I would have followed her anywhere. Julia remained a good and positive influence in my life until the age of ten when my family moved to Aiken, SC.

**Adeline**, of French origins meaning "nobility," came into my life when I dated Linda during my senior year of high school. Adeline lived next door to Linda. Well, almost next door. A vacant lot overgrown with vegetation blocked the view between Adeline's home and Linda's home. In Southern towns, whites and blacks did not usually live side by side. Linda's mother worked long hours catering and Adeline came over on occasion to clean floors. As Adeline aged and became less able to work, Linda took food to her house. When Adeline could no longer live on her own, Linda's Mom brought her into their home and gave her the care she needed. For me, Adeline

represented hard work and resilience.

Off to college and my first encounter with racial integration. **Harvey Gantt** enrolled in Clemson as an architect major. With the threat of expulsion, Clemson prohibited groups of three or more to gather. Harvey's room overlooked a large quadrangle three stories below used by ROTC students for formations. His room opened on the hall on the same level as the loggia located in central campus. One night as I walked across the quadrangle, I heard someone yell out, "Hey Harvey, there's a nigger in your room". I had heard the racial slur before, but it caught me off guard when I heard it that night. Harvey mingled with the other architect students and behaved as a model student. He did not deserve the indignation I heard that night. I would hear more bitterness and bigotry before the year came to an end. Harvey graduated and went on to have a successful career and became mayor of Charlotte, NC.

After college I worked with **Mackay Williams**. Mackay did not have the benefit of a higher education but he more than made up for it with his street smarts. Mackay could do anything and do it well. He called me "Mr. Frank.". Being his junior by perhaps fifteen or twenty years, I expected Mackay to call me





“Frank.” Occasionally Mackay and I worked together side-by-side in the snake-infested, briar-patched, wet forests of southern coastal Georgia. Mackay reported to Troy Campell. Mackay’s ability qualified him for Troy’s position, but African Americans worked for white bosses in the 1960s in South Georgia. One day, while measuring the heights of genetically improved slash pine seedlings planted on a research plot, I stepped forward while pushing heavy underbrush growing on the forest floor to the side. I looked down just in time to see my right foot almost step on a six-foot rattlesnake. Using my grounded left leg, I jumped three feet high and two feet backwards. I turned to Mackay and shouted, “RATTLESNAKE”. Mackay looked at me and said, “Mr. Frank, you are the whitest white man I have ever seen”. I miss Mackay and his wisdom.

Lieutenant **William B. Bronson** commanded the first platoon of B company, 5th Battalion, 7th Calvary, 1st Calvary Division Air-Mobile. Drafted into the Army in 1966, I joined Lt. Bronson’s platoon in Vietnam as one of the first replacements for soldiers no longer in combat. As Lt. Bronson’s Radio Telephone Operator (RTO), I carried a twenty-six pound radio. He relayed this to me, “Taylor, my goal is to get you home alive.” Perhaps his words of encouragement came from his training and spoken to all his men. As the platoon leader’s RTO, I slept close by Bronson. One morning helicopters picked us up and dropped us off to join our company. I followed Lt. Bronson as our platoon fanned out. By the time Lt Bronson reached the top of a small knoll, I was twenty feet behind at the base of the knoll. I saw Lt Bronson’s upper body as a loud explosion and a large cloud of explosive powder covered him. As the smoke cleared, I

heard Lt. Bronson cry out in pain. I called for a medevac. The last time I saw Lt. Bronson, he lay face-down on a blanket with shrapnel wounds on the back of his legs and upper body, inflicted by a booby-trapped grenade. Later, I learned he recovered and returned to duty. I would not hear “Taylor, my goal is to get you home alive” again for the remainder of my time in Vietnam.

I returned to Georgetown, SC after completing my military commitment. The woods crews assigned to help me manage 32,000 acres of forest land included **Rubin Davis**. More than twice my age, Rubin seemed more like a father than a subordinate. We all knew Rubin had been discriminated against when passed over for the warden’s position. By the late 60s, it became important African Americans be represented at all levels in the workforce. Rubin was promoted to warden, and along with two other white wardens, worked from the same location. Everyone knew three wardens in one location did not make sense. Rubin and I worked well together. Rubin was intelligent and he performed well.

**Jessie Brown** entered my life in the early 1980s. Jessie’s face wore a perpetual smile. A retired Army major, Jessie and I had military service in common, although I only rose to the rank of E-5. Jessie moved to Georgetown, SC. to become our company’s regional human resource manager that covered three states and included Jessie’s hometown, Wilmington, NC. Jessie and I traveled together to our offices in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. Once we attended a workplace diversity banquet dressed in tuxedos at the Shoreham Hotel in Washington, DC. I freely talked to Jessie as a peer in the workplace. He

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responded with stories about his life and experiences. At a young age Jessie remembered a bell ringing at 6 PM signaling all African Americans to be off the streets and in their homes. A jaw-dropping experience for me, I did not want to believe anyone could be treated that way. I believe I would carry some bitterness, but Jessie outwardly communicated, “it was what is was” and moved on.

When I served in Vietnam and saw African Americans in uniform, I wondered why did they signed up for military duty after facing discrimination in the States. Jessie told me about his trips home and being upset about his school buddies hanging out on street corners not making anything of themselves. He wanted to be an inspiration to others. On a trip to visit our offices in Winnsboro, SC, Jessie and I checked into a motel and discussed where we wanted to eat. I told him about a steak house I had heard about. We asked for directions and drove out of town as the sun set. Turning on a gravel road after dark, we proceeded to the end of the road where the steak house sat in isolation. A few pickup trucks and cars parked outside portrayed the steak house’s popularity. Jessie looked at me with a nervous grin and I turned and looked at him. Without either one saying anything, we knew this would not be a great place for us to eat. More than anything I worried about hurting Jessie’s feelings by turning back. He

deserved the finest steak the county had to offer. We returned to town and ate dinner. The next day after our meetings with employees, we returned to Georgetown with no further discussion about turning around at the dead end.

**George Young**, a man’s man in the literal sense. He worked for George Washington Vanderbilt III on Arcadia Plantation in Georgetown County SC. When Vanderbilt died, George Young became the manager of our company’s customer relation house located on the Black River near Georgetown. A two-story home built in the 1920s to look like an antebellum home, it came with a large front porch with white columns spaced across the front. Large wooden rocking chairs on the porch awaited our guest’s comfort.

George learned his craft well by entertaining society’s elite at Vanderbilt’s plantation. He made everyone feel welcome with a smile that resonated warmth. George treated everyone equally, from CEO’s, to million-dollar customers, to hourly employees working on the property. George welcomed guests to “his” home for entertainment. A long dining table sat twelve guests where they enjoyed southern cooking at its finest. George and his staff pampered those who visited. When the company closed the Black River House, George opened Yum Young BBQ Restaurant. George retired after succeeding in every aspect of life.







Possessing a quiet demeanor, **James Creer** grew up in Henderson—a small East Texas town, population 13,000. East Texas remained a hot bed of bigotry long after the battles for equality had been fought. James worked his way up from the bottom position to become manager of the local lumber mill. As the only African American plant manager of the seven lumber mills reporting to me, he stood out when we conferenced. He knew more than I did about managing a lumber mill. I soon became a student of James'. He sat on boards of organizations in Henderson and commanded respect. James came well-equipped for his role of managing 120 employees. James also successfully navigated the mixed-race communities in which he lived.

There is no evidence that I had an impact on these men and women's lives. However, there is no question they deeply enriched mine.

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*Thanks for playing.*

*A Second Chance to Live*

*A fox hole saved you in Vietnam  
on that miserably hot, humid night.  
You told us how your buddies  
opted to sleep above ground  
to escape the stifling heat in that bunker.*

*The mortar landed on top of them,  
but the depth of that fox hole saved you,  
the blast blowing you into the wall.  
You came home. They didn't.*

*Partly deaf from ruptured ear drums,  
and shrapnel peppered in your flesh.  
You were given a second chance,  
to marry, have children,  
become a husband and dad,*

*to be a news reporter,  
a public relations pro  
for an insurance company,  
and two paper companies.*

*It was a good second life  
with family, some skiing, sailing,  
a little camping thrown in.  
It would've been happily ever after*

*except for buried anger,  
your knotted silence, and  
those cancer cells,  
burning bright orange.*

*Annette Langlois Grunseth*

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## THE MEDICINE MAN'S FOUR QUESTIONS

*Jim Enderle*

IT HAD BEEN A LONG war. I'd been assigned a psychologist for my continued struggles in transitioning back home. Our deployment in Iraq was difficult, and the doctor asked me what had troubled me the most about the deployment. I explained the most troubling moment was that six months in country, I was unable to picture my wife Cindy's face without the aid of a picture. I could look at the picture, put it down, and the image became unclear, as if looking through a camera lens with Vaseline smeared on it, before the memory dissipated entirely. I was certain I had been guilty of something and wasn't deserving of her image.

The psychologist stated his aims for therapy and began with a story. Among Native American tribes, he said, if a person were ill or troubled, the medicine man would ask four questions and from the answers provided, he determined his course of treatment without focusing on symptoms or diagnoses. Here are the medicine man's questions:

One. When did you last feel such joy that you danced? Two. When was the last time you felt such inhibition that you sang aloud? Three. When was the last time you'd found comfort in the sweet territory of silence? And four. When did you cease being enchanted by

stories around you? He asked me to tell a story which spoke to any, or all, of those questions.

I'd been blessed with having attended a function very similar not long before our session. I went alone and wasn't sure what brought me there, sitting against back wall with a vantage point. The room filled and next to me sat a Vietnam veteran named Pete. I told the counselor his story:

When Pete was drafted right out of high school in Brooklyn, he knew nothing about Vietnam. He couldn't even find it on a map. By his second one-year hitch, Pete really hated Vietnam. Insects three times the size of anything he'd ever seen outside of a zoo. Mosquitoes swarming like an air force. Hotter than Hades. It rained sideways. He couldn't stomach the smell of the food, and couldn't bear the sounds and rhythms of the language. You get the point.

One day, he was tasked with a group to go out of the wire and speak with elders of a village tucked deep in the jungle, when one of the men fell ill. Grumbling, he climbed in the vehicle and off they went.

Walking alongside the First Lieutenant into the village, Pete looked around. It had been the first time he'd been closer than observing distance. From one of the tents, a young





woman about his age stepped out of one of the huts. Their eyes met for a moment and did that dance that young people do. Was that a slight smile? When he just looked away, did she glance back at him? He felt his posture straighten. She was beautiful.

Wouldn't you know it? Pete amazed his superiors, exchanging his cigarettes for a chance to go to the village. Since he'd heard her speak, Vietnamese suddenly sounded poetic and romantic. He tried to learn Vietnamese with his interpreter. Each time, they would exchange glances at a distance and she eventually smiled shyly.

Unable to communicate, Pete harvested lemongrass, ginger, cinnamon, and Thai basil leaves in whatever container he could find in the middle of the village with a note wishing her peace and happiness.

The counselor and I sat there in thought. I thought I'd learned everything possible from Pete's story. He asked me to recount a story I told him previously about one of our convoys to Baghdad. I resisted, but eventually relented.

In September, 2007, eight months into a twelve-month deployment, I was tired of Iraq. It was hotter than Hades. Even camel spiders and scorpions seemed miserable there. Our convoy was about to leave for Baghdad that night.

To clarify, our convoys transported men detained for a variety of infractions from misdemeanor theft to the killing of American forces. We brought one group to Baghdad for trial and leave the jet engines running like a getaway car. After turning over our group, we accepted a group of different men deemed dangerous to be held at Camp Bucca.

A string of detainees were bound at the ankles and wrists, then their wrists were locked to the belt loop of the man in front of him. They were also blindfolded and carried all their earthly belongings in a clear plastic sandwich-sized baggie.

My job in these missions was to match their prescriptions to the medications in the envelope. To my left was an interpreter named Sayyed who reviewed the envelope's contents for possible cryptic or coded messages to militants should they be released.

On that particular trip, we had about thirty men who, between their bindings and blindfolds and men screaming sometimes opposite orders simultaneously, were disoriented by plan. The majority of them refused to interact with us at all, until we got to the last man in line.

He was short, heavy-set, and balding. He had blinked his blindfold down, as we looked through all his earthly possessions, his prescriptions and a single, crinkled, picture of a girl of about six.

His prescriptions matched, but the interpreter hesitated with the picture and thought of confiscating it. We had moved the man's blindfold back up and by then he'd blinked it back down.

He looked at the interpreter, then at me, and said in broken English, "My daughter, sir."

The convoy's Sergeant barked we needed to move and I felt the nervousness within the unit. Few things are more vulnerable than a convoy sitting still too long.

Finally, Sayyed asked him what the numbers on the back of the picture were and the man

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burst into tears, begging us to allow him to keep the picture. He had four children and all he had left was this picture of his youngest daughter.

“You don’t know the date of your daughter’s birthday?” Sayyed asked. Through his tears, the man said he’d taken work on an oil pipeline days before her birthday.

Sayyed showed the picture to me and I wondered what the problem was. We had to finish this and start back to southern Iraq. With my flashlight I saw a young girl with a spotless white and yellow dress as if it had just been laundered. But behind her were the ruins of a residence. The girl seemed to force a smile. In the rubble over her left shoulder I saw what appeared to be a teapot. Over the other shoulder was a dress or pair of pajamas. Someone was living there when the building was flattened. I didn’t look at the back of the picture and when Sayyed asked if we should confiscate it. I said to let him keep the picture.

As the line of detainees walked up the steep ramp and into the back of a C-130 Hercules transport plane, I watched the man, only detained for stripping generators of metals to feed his family.

At the end of the line, he tried to regain his composure. Stepping into a lighted area, he white-knuckled the baggie. When a man in front of him lost his balance, he had a choice

of letting go of the picture and breaking his fall or holding that precious picture and landing face first on the rough surface of the ramp.

A second later, his forehead thudded on the ramp, a detainee falling on top of him. As much as he could, he held the picture aloft.

The counselor pressed me to say why I had allowed him to keep the picture.

“I felt sorry for him.” He asked again and I said what mattered was that “When I saw him fall with his precious picture, I felt I made the correct decision.”

He asked me to think about it and asked again why I made the decision to allow him to keep his picture and I again relied on something Pete had told me. I explained that Pete described war and conflict as a direct result of an unresolvable sense of otherness.

The beautiful young Vietnamese woman came to represent humanity which obliterated this otherness. In the middle of all the death, destruction, pain, and human suffering, she had risen above the worst circumstances we can imagine. Her memory remained to help in his transition home.

The counselor was quiet for a moment before he said I still hadn’t answered his question. The room fell silent. Finally, the words to something previously beyond expression struck me.

“Maybe he was a person who had done something unforgivable, so much so that he couldn’t picture his daughter without the aid of a picture. Maybe he was a guy like me, just trying to be worthy of his suffering, to see his way home.”

“Well, I believe you can see home from here, Doc.”





By Jamie C. Thompson III

**“W**ow! You were in Vietnam?” asked my friend’s 6-year-old son, Johnny.  
 “Sure,” I answered. “I’m a hero. Didn’t you know that?”  
 “Aw! Come on!” he taunted.  
 “I wouldn’t kid you, Johnny.”  
 “Did you shoot anybody?”  
 “I tried a few times. But the jungle was so thick I just can’t say for

# the question nobody asks

certain.”

This brief conversation, which took place in a rowboat between casts, is not unlike many others I’ve had in the six years since I returned from that crazy Asian war.

I’m often asked, “What was it really like in Vietnam?” . . . “How bad was the drug problem, anyway?” . . . “Could we have won if we’d really tried?” . . . “Were we right to be there?” . . . and most often, just as Johnny did, I’m asked, “Did you kill anybody?”

*The author was a sergeant in the 1st Cavalry (Airmobile) Division in Vietnam.*

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Most people who find out that I was an infantry sergeant in Vietnam are interested enough to pursue the subject. As a matter of fact, “interest” is too weak a word; “fascinated” is more accurate.

I don’t mind this curiosity and understand that most Americans have never had an experience anything like that of a combat soldier in Vietnam. But it is significant that, while I spent just two years in the Army and only half that long in Vietnam, I have never been asked, “What’s it like to be a Vietnam veteran?” After all, my tour as a “grunt” was merely the first frame in a long film about a veteran.

Perhaps it’s just as well I’ve never been asked the question. It is not an easy one. The answer will doubtless unfold itself more completely throughout my life but one thing is already clear.

In our society, which gives no official titles, a Vietnam veteran wears a label. A news story concerning a bank robber may identify him first as a Vietnam veteran. References to a successful young politician might begin, “John Doe, a decorated veteran of the Vietnam conflict.” In such instances, it is almost always irrelevant that the individual involved happens to be a Vietnam veteran.

The point is not whether a disproportionately large number of Vietnam veterans have become criminals or politicians, but that, as indicated through its public pronouncements, society perceives us to be different and somehow separate from the norm. I do not share this view. We were nurtured by the same American society as the rest of our citizens. By chance, several million of us were eligible for military service during the Vietnam War period. Some of us were trained for and assigned to Vietnam. A still smaller number were actually involved in combat.

**V**ietnam veterans exist because American society believed at least for a time that it was right for the United States to “defend freedom” in Southeast Asia. This belief was translated into action by the U.S. government and among other things resulted in a legacy of many Vietnam veterans.

In other times, after other wars, our veterans have been welcomed home as heroes. Bands played Sousa marches as thousands of proud and grateful citizens threw kisses into blizzards of ticker tape. Millions more wept openly while watching the spectacle in newreels in smalltown theaters across the nation. What is differ-

ent now is not the veteran but society.

The Vietnam War was reported in greater depth than any other war in history. Its details were made known in word, picture and film to more people in more parts of the world than was ever before possible.

We all heard the American officer’s statement, “We had to destroy the village in order to save it.” We all saw the Saigon policeman shoot the helpless Viet Cong prisoner in the head. We all saw the pictures of nude, badly burned children running in terror from their napalmed village. We all know about My Lai. In a very real sense, especially in America, society itself became a Vietnam veteran.

The Civil War general, William Tecumseh Sherman, said “War is hell.” It is. It always has been. It always will be. Terrible, cruel and thoughtless acts are performed. Acts of self-sacrifice, daring and unbelievable bravery are performed. War is human behavior in all its extremes. It brings out the best and the worst in human beings. Unfortunately, we tend to remember the worst more vividly than the best because it shocks us.

Gradually public opinion turned against this war and we got out of Vietnam, but I think a collective sense of guilt remains in this country. Most Americans seem to remember only the horrors, scandals and mistakes of the war and try to avoid accepting any personal responsibility for them. The result is an almost unconscious feeling of, “I wouldn’t have done those terrible things! The guys who were there are to blame. Those Vietnam veterans are different from me.”

This is a patently unjust position. In any group of several million human beings, some sick people will be found. But the fact is that in Vietnam, as in all wars, the overwhelming majority of American troops conducted themselves admirably in the face of conditions which try bodies and souls to and sometimes beyond their limits.

I am a Vietnam veteran. I am no better and no worse than any other American. We are all members of the same society with the same rights, privileges, obligations and responsibilities. We are different only in our unique experiences. Every one of us, veteran and non-veteran alike, shares a common heritage and a common future.

I think the time has come for American society to stop denying that 3.5 million Vietnam veterans are a part of it. We aren’t a subculture. We’re just ordinary people, living ordinary lives in an extraordinary country. ■

V.F.W. MAGAZINE



## VIETNAM ~ MY OPINION

*Keith Nightingale*

I AM OCCASIONALLY ASKED TO describe my experience and opinions regarding my time in Vietnam.

Over time, I have developed distilled thoughts on both. My time was my service as it was for the almost three million other people that served there. Like most, I have very mixed feelings. I am proud of my two-tour service, sickened by the senior leadership that sent us and kept us going there in a knowingly lost cause-knowing to them, not to us. As hogs in the processing plant, we climbed the chartered aircraft and flew west to do the Nation's bidding.

But ultimately, I am proud and satisfied with my time spent. How many Vietnamese and American lives were lost to maintain our leader's deception?

I would designate a special place in hell for LBJ, Robert McNamara, and several of the Generals and admirals who knew we were throwing good lives against great lives—afraid to reveal the truth and unable to answer the basic moral call of ethical leadership. Westy and Depuy, who refused to recognize the war for what it was and insisted on throwing good soldiers and Marines toward their vision of the conflict that existed only in their

minds. To us who went, we saw the truth in our own microcosms of reality.

I know of few other instances where the leaders were so consistently unworthy of the led.

The people of Vietnam were and are a strong, resilient people with much of our values—their lives squandered by venal toadies and our disinterest in influencing quality rather than loyalty in positions of national responsibility.

Despite that, we went, generally positively initially, and later in resigned loyalty. Our lodestone was always the people we were with and the shared experiences.

Experience was different for each of us and yet much universally the same. Vietnam was highly personal for each of us and grossly impersonal for us all. It was a war.

Overall, I think Vietnam, writ large, was and is a highly personal experience and largely determined by the makeup and attitude of each of us who went there and came home, still retaining some form of cognitive processing capability.

Experience and perception—as reality depended upon the time, location and unit of assignment. Experience differed by mere days or physical location. Some generally rested in a year of boredom while others would be routinely torn asunder.

Life was truly luck and timing.

We arrived, were processed with studied practice, issued generally common equipment, and sent to our fates.





We learned the intricacies of reading 1:50,000 map with check points and impossible contour lines. Maps became our compass and sweat the fuel of our progress.

The company street became our resort living—clean fatigues, semi-shined boots, and mess hall chow. Hootch maids giggled over laundry tubs. Thoughts of home and those behind.

The firebase, piss tubes, incoming, outgoing, swarms of rats, antenna farms over con-  
ex containers, emplacing fougasse and clay-  
mores, the shit burners and tornadoes of dust  
kicked up by sling-loaded Chinooks and in-  
bound Hueys, shaking and vibrating to take  
us elsewhere.

The lifers with starched fatigues, shined boots, soft hats and soothing words...unless you were 3,000 feet below and not moving fast enough.

The calendar was our common denomina-  
tor—twelve months for Army and thirteen for  
Marines—unless wounded or killed sooner.

We saw and tasted our own dictated geo-  
graphical and situational environment as well  
as the deep green, open delta's and rugged  
green mountains and blasted hills of the land.

We saw the effect of our various technolo-  
gies in application and thanked God we were  
not on the other end. Occasionally, they had  
better.

We gained a great respect for the small, dirty,  
half-starved, and fully competent enemy we  
met-as worthy as we.

Some of us, operating with the indigenous  
population, uniformed and otherwise, saw  
the extent of human nature on the population,  
the venal, the sublime, and those most worthy

of our trust. It was an experience and expo-  
sure most sequestered in their camps would  
not see. For that, I am most grateful. I gained  
immense respect for those of a different col-  
or but with the same shared values. They be-  
came our refugees and greatly enhanced our  
population and national character.

Regardless of time and place, we, the Infan-  
try, the grunts, Marine and Army, generally  
rucked up with incredible loads, mounted  
the UH1H helicopter steed, shook and shud-  
dered our way to a place we did not know  
but would always remember. We experienced  
heat, thirst, cold, wet, hunger, and a myriad  
of uncivilized events and personal insults. We  
slogged and climbed and slid and saw all the  
green and none of the green. We just did it.

We explored the wonders and degradations of  
C rats and 20-year-old cigarettes. Warm beer  
made worse by the lowest procurement bid.

We learned to make do in a million different  
ways and eagerly learned the vet's tips on al-  
ternate uses for mosquito repellent, toilet pa-  
per, and peanut butter.

Swiss Miss and C rat coffee was our ambro-  
sia in the deep green, or the creosote reeking  
bunkers.

We felt the sudden cacophony of fire at the  
initial contact, the discordant explosions of  
both side's weaponry, and the deep fear and  
demands on self-control.

Boots under the ponchos, parts scattered in  
trees and craters and lumps of flesh, cotton,  
and swarming flies.

The immensely satisfying Crump of friendly  
artillery and the showers of leaves, bark, and  
mud. A warm blanket for the soul.

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The face, once seen for a nanosecond of combat time to be remembered forever from a deep long-retired sleep.

The knowledge that race, religion, and social standing is 100% irrelevant in the corpus of combat.

The *ville* with its exotic mysteries, *ao dais* flowing behind the vespa's, grasping hands from the recesses of thatch bars with booming music accented our time.

The smokey warm broth of *pho* in the early morning and the exotic accompaniments so foreign to the Western soul.

Picking out the baked in weevils from the morning *ben my* and enjoying the crunch of the crusty cover.

Cold 33 Beer served in a large glass with a chunk of ice—ambrosia.

The blue sick smell of rotting straw, fish parts, and the detritus of life on the edge greeted us at every rural *ville*.

Water buffalo—deadly to men, docile to children—ploughed dank, heated paddies.

Some heard the nurses' screams of help in staunching the flows of a dozen deep penetrations and to fight the deepening shadow of life within the eye of the teenager on the canvas.

Others saw the doctors point to the hall for some and the operating room for others—the Medevac takes all sorts.

We learned the sound of the small, red-bubble hiss of the sucking chest wound and the sudden clack of the claymore before it detonated.

We understood the time between the clunk of the VC mortar and the impact was less than the time it usually took to hit the ground.

We learned the Red Cross donut dollies and the AFVN weather girls were more rumor than confirmed fact. Ditto the USO shows.

R&R was a treasured seven days that seemed to take less than 24 hours. Usually, two of them would be on a plane—wishing and hoping.

We experienced both the exhilaration and the fear of contact and wondered in our deepest souls, *Will I fail them? Will I do my part?* Respect of the small band of brothers became the lodestone of our lives.

We felt exquisite loneliness in the crowded company of others.

Above all else, we learned to cope. Some did it with drugs and ill-discipline, liquor binges and disruption. Others turned inward and found solace in quality companions or contemplative outlets.

Drugs provided a momentary fog but with potential future consequences.





The war enshrouded all its participants with a potential future of bad dreams, bad behavior, and helpless management. Coping would be forever.

The human toll and emotions of the tour were not dependent upon the location—the enemy was the same everywhere. Only the numbers differed and the manner of encounter. Regardless, mortality was always a momentary thing and then it passed...for the moment.

The Delta was flat, wet, and incredibly hot with only the occasional snatch of village shade or deep, swamp canopy. The air reeked with primordial mud, hidden by chocolate grey waters enriched with a thousand years of organic deposit.

III Corps was a mix of heavily urbanized and the grossly primordial. Civilization coalesced with all its smells, colors, and exotica—so foreign to the western experience. The jungle was deep, obscure, and decidedly deadly with an arsenal of human, animal, and insect predation.

II Corps was rolling grass and tree covered hills and plains. Coastal villages reeking of *nouc mam* and salt air. Mountains in the west bordering the unpromising land and sanctuaries beyond. The Kraken's lurking in their caves occasionally to come forward and feast on our remains.

I Corps was the conventionalists paradise—unless you were there. Big units and big guns—mostly theirs and not ours. Not a fun place unless you were a senior with ice cream, air conditioning, and an office at three-thousand feet.

Universal to all was the red laterite dust and dense humid tendrils seeping from the

ground. The pounding rain of the monsoon and the incredibly dancing vermilion and gold of a sunset.

We all awaited the dawn—that meant life. And dreaded the coming dark—the color of potential death.

In sum, Vietnam was an experience and each participant held his or her own unique thoughts on the subject—often in simultaneous conflict.

Through the progress of time, I have reached some clarity in my ambivalence. I now detest those who sent us—shrouding their knowledge with the untruths of purpose foisted upon us.

I am immensely proud of those who served with me—from the dedicated professional to the unwilling dodge-less draftee. They gave 100% when they had to and understood each was a crucial part of their very small whole. For whatever was their future life, they served us well then.

I am equally proud of the service of the hundreds of Vietnamese troops who served with me as a junior officer. Through a disastrous event in the jungle to the grinding urban combat of Tet, they were consistently stellar soldiers and led by a man of amazing professional quality who became the model for my future service. Quality knows no ethnicity.

And I am forever grateful I had the experience of Service and performed reasonably well in a land that could have been much more honored by our presence than it was.

Most of all, and I believe speaking for most us, we did it for the children.



## HERO AT AGE 15

THE STORY OF RUBIN RAIFORD; WWII SUBMARINE HERO  
Nancy Yockey Bonar



*USS Tang* (SS 306), 2 December 1943, was in a painted gray and black camouflage to hide from Japanese ships as she sailed after her October commissioning at the Mare Island Navy Shipyard, Vallejo, California. She carried a complement of 78: skipper LTCDR Richard O’Kane, who received the Medal of Honor for his actions, seven other officers, and 70 enlisted. *Tang* arrived at NAVSUBBASE Pearl Harbor in early January 1944, for her first of five war patrols. Cook Rubin Raiford, age 15, came aboard 24 September for her fifth war patrol and 29 days later, 25 October, Rubin and 68 other submariners died. The last of the submarine’s torpedoes—launched at a Japanese ship—boomeranged and roared into *Tang*’s aft, causing flooding and fires. The nine men who lived were POWs in a Japanese prison camp and survived.

\* \* \*

*When I assumed command of the Pacific Fleet on 31 December 1941, our submarines were already operating against the enemy, the only units of the fleet that could come to grips with the Japanese for months to come. It was to the submarine force that I looked to carry the load. It is to the everlasting honor and glory of our submarine personnel that they never failed us in our days of great peril.” — ADM Chester Nimitz, Commander, U.S. Pacific*

**I**T WAS 1942, AND THE press, including black newspapers, screamed front-page headlines about WWII. All papers, but especially black publishers, and read by Negroes (as called

back then) in segregated neighborhoods like in Georgetown, South Carolina, reported the gallantry of the sailor, Doris “Dorie” Miller. He was a mess attendant on the *USS West Virginia* battleship during Japan’s air attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. He fired a gun at the airplanes and looked after the wounded. Miller received the Navy Cross for valor on 7 May 1942.



Was it Miller who inspired Rubin Raiford, age 13, and on 13 October 1942, to enlist at the Naval Reserve Recruitment Station in





Georgetown, South Carolina? Either he or parents, Lucius and Maggie, lied about his age, or the recruiter, needing men for the war, turned a blind eye to Rubin's adolescence. In his photograph—taken in late 1942 or early 1943 in Pearl Harbor—he has a well-built physique and looks older than his age.

Was Rubin motivated to enlist by his father, a blacksmith, who told stories about having been on a ship of some type? Perhaps Rubin was enthused to join the Navy as older brother Arthur was an Army soldier. Maybe he wanted to move up a step from the South's profound segregation. Possibly, Rubin believed he was a man who could easily fill the Navy's crackerjack uniform.



*Seaman Rubin Raiford is the only known boy to die in combat in the U.S. Navy Silent Service.*

For whatever the reason, Rubin was off to a segregated Navy Boot Camp, where there were special classes to help blacks better learn. Not known is if he received additional training in the Messman's Branch, such as

for being a mess attendant, cook, and steward. These three enlisted rates were for African Americans and Filipinos, and not Caucasian males. In February 1944, the name of the branch changed to Steward's Branch, and "mess attendant" became "steward's mate."

Seaman Rubin's late 1942 voyage to NAVSUBASE Pearl Harbor, ended with his assignment as a Mess Attendant to serve food, be a busboy, on the destroyer, *USS Litchfield* (DD 336). Its mission was to protect our submarines knifing the Pacific in and out of the harbor. This might have been the reason why Rubin volunteered to join the Silent Service and, after a battery of psychological tests and learning damage control, was accepted. He went on to serve on four fast attack submarines; the last boat, *USS Tang* (SS 306), and Rubin would struggle to escape Davy Jone's locker.

Rubin's first sub in the war campaign against Japan, was *USS Saury* (SS 189) on which he was a Mess Attendant 3<sup>rd</sup> Class. His service was only from March to May 1943. There weren't any covert attacks on the enemy's ships.

On his third boat and as a Cook 3<sup>rd</sup> Class, was *USS Tilefish* (SS 306). This was in August 1944, and just for a month or so. Being on two boats for a short time wasn't unusual as there was a man shortage, and submariners were shifted around.\**Note: not included in Rubin's service history are his ashore posts and dates.*

Clandestine war patrols to take down Japanese ships began for Rubin in late 1943 when, at age 14, he went aboard *USS Spearfish* (SS 190), and his rates became Stewards Mate 1st

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Class and then, Cook 3<sup>rd</sup> Class. There were four treacherous war patrols, highlighted by sinking Japanese ships in waters near Japan and Formosa, and in the East China Sea. During this nearly one year of combat, Rubin became a warrior.



The galleys on the subs Rubin cooked in were about the size of a walk-in closet. Meals, the best in the military, were prepared for about 80 officers and enlisted. Mostly due to having such hazard duty, food was the submariners' greatest morale boosters. (WWII USS Pampanito (SS 383) memorial submarine, San Francisco.)

Before going into combat, Rubin would have hustled with other cooks and stewards to make for the crew sandwiches, bundled homemade cookies and sticky cinnamon buns, and strapped or fenced the small galley's dishes, pots and pans, deep fryer, and large coffee urns to keep them falling when Spearfish surfaced or dived on deep angles. Surely, Rubin was elated when the sub was victorious and

then terrorized when a Japanese ship dropped depth charges that exploded around Spearfish. The horrific vibrations around the hull would have had Rubin holding onto whatever he could as his bones rattled. No doubt he thought he'd die—go down to Davy Jone's locker.



It was probably on *Spearfish* that Rubin qualified for the coveted Dolphins insignia by being tested about his knowledge about all systems on a boat, including those for fighting fires and flooding. He also would have won the submariner's warfare pin, Purple Heart, Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal, World War II Victory Medal, and combat action ribbon.

Rubin was on *USS Tang* (SS 306) 24 September 1944 for her and its final patrol. By now, he would have realized that he, like other submariners, was a bit insane for riding submerged in a windowless steel sewer pipe for weeks at a time. They told off-color jokes, called shipmates by such pet names as Rat, L'l Abner, and Shifty; embellished no shxter stories, and waged which hanging onion or potato sack would first have shoots.

*Tang* was about the length of a football field, but within the hull, only 16' wide. In this





constricted space, Rubin and 77 other men worked, ate, and slept on narrow racks or bunks. Temperature could get to 100 degrees and above, and air conditioning was used sparingly to control humidity that could damage electrical and electronic equipment.



*Sleeping racks above unarmed torpedoes. (WWII submarine, USS Pampanito (SS 383) memorial submarine. San Francisco.)*

The men wore t-shirts—or went bare-chested—shorts or dungarees, and sandals. The clothing was penetrated with sweat, odors from food and cigarettes, acidity from electric batteries, and fumes from the diesel fuel that ran the engines when The *Tang* was on the surface (the fuel also charged the below electrical batteries used to run silently, particularly when hiding from Japanese convoys.)

Rubin, now a Cook 2<sup>nd</sup> Class, probably slept in a bunk or rack above unarmed torpedoes in the forward torpedo room as did some of

*Tang's* torpedo men. Rubin and these other men were combatants, and their usual duties, secondary. Rubin might have—when the call came to man battle stations—helped load torpedoes or been a phone talker to quietly broadcast to the battle stations commander O'Kane's orders, for instances



*USS Tang's* battle flag went down with her. In the replica, a black panther tears through the rising sun in the Japanese Navy's flag. The small boxes represent the 31 Japanese ships sunk by *Tang* and the three damaged, for a total of 231,900 tons.

This achievement was in just four combat patrols, and a record unmatched by any American submarine. *Tang's* skipper, LTCDR O'Kane, received the Medal of Honor, the highest decoration awarded to U.S. military personnel for acts of valor.





## HOW FAR DO YOU WANT TO TAKE YOUR BOOK?

*Nancy D. Butler, CFP®, CDFA®, CLTC®*

**H**OW SUCCESSFUL YOUR BOOK WILL be has a lot to do with the time, money, and effort you are willing to put in to “getting it out there”.

The place to start is to determine your definition of success regarding your book.

For you, is success how many books you sell? Is it how much money you make? Is it to get your book in the hands of as many people as possible regardless of what you make? Or are you doing this for fun?

Some people need the sales from their book to live on. Others are doing it for fun. And still others feel they have an important message and want as many people as possible to receive it.

Knowing what is important to you and what your goals are for your book will help guide you toward what you need to do to have the success you’re looking for.

Unless you’re doing this for fun, you’ll need a written business plan outlining exactly what you will do, when you will do it, and the money required to implement your plan. Your business plan is your guide and “road map” for how you will achieve the success you’re looking for.

Your plan should cover at least the next five years. It must be specific and have a timeline for when each part of the plan will be completed.

Here is a brief outline of the information you’ll need to include in your plan.

### **Your definition of success**

Articulate what you want to accomplish with your book, what the end result needs to be for you to achieve your definition of success, as noted above.

### **What product(s) or services do you offer**

Do you have one book to sell? Do you have multiple books on this topic? Are you available as a speaker on the topic of your book? What else do you offer?

Try to think out of the box. For example, if your book is about a rescue animal, do you sell or include a stuffed animal that looks like that animal?

### **Description of your target market**

The more specific you are, the better. Who is your book best suited for? Who will be most apt to buy your book? Where will you find these people, companies, or organizations?





### Your short-term and long-term marketing plan

Include the following:

- ★ How much time will you need to commit each week to the successful marketing of your book?
- ★ What is your plan for how you will reach your target market?
- ★ Will you use social media? If so, how?
- ★ What have you done so far that has worked? What have you done so far that has not worked?
- ★ Who or what is your competition?
- ★ What marketing options do you need help with?
- ★ Will you obtain the training and do the work yourself?
- ★ Will you hire someone to do the work for you?
- ★ What will training or assistance cost?

#### Financial plan / Budget

- ★ How are you determining the proper pricing of your book?
- ★ How much money will you need to get started?
- ★ How much money will you need to commit to marketing each year thereafter?
- ★ List specifically how much is needed and what the money will be spent on.

This is only a very brief overview. There is a lot more to include in a successful business plan. Start here and you will be on your way to greater success.



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# ALL PRESENT AND ACCOUNTED FOR

AN EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK BY  
CPT Steven J. Craig (Ret)

THE BIRTH OF THE COAST GUARD Cutter *Jarvis* began in the shipyards at Avondale Shipyard in New Orleans, LA, on September 9, 1970. Constructed of top-quality materials, the *Jarvis* was built in sections that were later welded together. At 378 feet, the ship would be one of the largest cutters in the Coast Guard fleet. The high-endurance cutters of the *Jarvis* class were able to carry enough food, water, fuel, and men for extended periods at sea. With the missions assigned, the capabilities were particularly important when carrying out lengthy fishery patrols in the north Pacific waters.



The *Jarvis* was one of twelve of the High Endurance class eventually built with the first commissioned in 1967. The High Endurance class of cutters missions would include long-range search and rescue, law enforcement, defense support and operations, and oceanographic research. Before the wide-spread

commercial use of satellites, the *Jarvis* would also assist aircraft and ships with navigational and weather information. Late in the 1980s, the '378s' were significantly updated and remodeled to enhance their mission performance capabilities. One of the more notable physical changes was the strengthening of the flight deck to accommodate the newer, more massive Coast Guard helicopter. While the previous version of the ship would show six rectangular portholes on the side, the new would show five. This material change is one of the more apparent distinctions when viewing pictures of this class of ship to determine the original era of the vessel.

With two large Fairbanks-Morse diesel, 7,000 HP engines, the *Jarvis* could operate at a cruising speed of twenty knots. Operating at this cruising speed, the ship would have the capability of traveling ten-thousand nautical miles. Additionally, two Pratt and Whitney gas turbine 36,000 HP engines, similar to those used on Boeing 707 airplanes, could also power the *Jarvis*. Operation of the gas turbine engines would be for special rescue missions where a faster response time would be required. The diesel and gas turbine engines could not be used together.

On April 24, 1971, the Coast Guard's newest ship, the Coast Guard Cutter *Jarvis*, was officially launched from the shipyard in New Orleans. Not yet complete, the ship was then towed within the shipyard where she was to be dressed and outfitted before her first sailing later in December.



Later, on August 4, 1972, the *Jarvis* crewmen spent the early afternoon shining their shoes, squaring away their white uniforms, and lastly, donning their flat hats (also referred to as ‘Donald Duck’ hats) for the official ceremony. Petty Officers Loftin and Berry ascended to the flying bridge, where they proceeded to hoist the Coast Guard ensign (flag). The halyard line bounded the ensign; Petty Officer Loftin pulled the line, and the Coast Guard ensign unfurled. As Loftin recalls, “There I was in a historic moment and thrilled to pull on that halyard.”

At 4:30 p.m., Coast Guard Cutter *Jarvis* became the first Coast Guard vessel to be commissioned in Hawaii.

Toward the end of August, a new assignment was passed to the *CGC Jarvis: Alaska Patrol*. Here she would provide for law enforcement, fisheries treaty enforcement, and ocean study along the Aleutians and the Bering Sea. For the next couple of months, routine patrols would take place with an occasional SAR case. It was toward the end of this period, that word came down that a visit to Alaska’s largest city would take place, the city of Anchorage.

Loftin and Sanders, along with Petty Officers Tom Looney, Raymond Beaver, and ‘NOLA’ Eaton, immediately went to work on the details. Scaling up the masts, the men attached flags and pennants and snapped them to the cables in proper order. Strapped high up in the relatively calm, but freezing breeze, the temperature felt like thirty below to the men as they worked feverishly to complete the difficult work. Despite the conditions though, all was completed by the time *Jarvis* set the ‘special sea detail’ for anchoring.

The ship made its grand entrance to Anchorage, much to the delight of the local population.

As Loftin would later state: “The willingness of these shipmates to take on and complete a tough job is a testament to the character of the *Jarvis* crew.” With the ship tied to the wharf, the next few days were spent entertaining special VIP guests and hosting an open house for the community to assist with local Coast Guard recruiting efforts in the area.

On November 6, *Jarvis* departed Anchorage to resume fishery patrols. Shortly after that, the ship stopped in Dutch Harbor for shelter from an approaching storm. It was here that *Jarvis*’s troubles began.

Approaching Dutch Harbor, the ship was soon struck by severe weather. Working conditions outside were extreme; wind gusts up to seventy miles per hour, freezing rain and snow, even lightning. Combined with the severe sea swells, walking on the icy deck surface was slippery and hazardous. BMC Stanczyk, in charge of the anchor detail, was having difficulties outside trying to observe the anchor chain and communicate on the phone with his crewman, BM3 Larson. The roar of the sea, combined with the howling wind and rain, was deafening. The chief could not adequately determine if the anchor was dragging; the chain was covered in mud, disguising the markings.

The Commanding Officer commenced backing with a two-thirds astern on both shafts as soon as he observed the anchor was in sight, intending to steer the ship away from its forward anchor chain. It was during this maneuvering that a particularly strong wind gust of seventy mph struck the port side of the *Jarvis*, driving her dangerously close to the reef. Sonar Technician Third Class Mike Large was on the outside deck when he observed how close the ship was to the coastline and

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immediately ran to press the General Alarm. Before he reached the alarm, however, General Quarters sounded.

The *Jarvis* had run aground.



*Excerpt from "All Present and Accounted For," by Captain Steven Craig, USCGR (Retired). For more information visit his website at [www.stevenjcraigbooks.com](http://www.stevenjcraigbooks.com)*



MWSA *DISPATCHES* IS LOOKING FOR MEMBER SUBMISSIONS.

WE HAVE OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE FOR you as a member in good standing, from *Author Interviews* to Poetry submissions, to Book Profiles (three books, first come-first served, will be showcased in the *Dispatches* every quarter). We offer this opportunity to be published in a national magazine exclusively to our membership.

If you'd like to write a feature article (900 words or less, please) or have further questions, please email:

[dispatches@mwsa.co](mailto:dispatches@mwsa.co)

THANKS.





***Ship's Gallery, USNA Museum***

*What masterpieces of art  
and patience each plank  
and pulley  
of these ships of bone  
carved by prisoners of war  
from meal rations—*

*And this pair of dice,  
molded from the bread  
and ashes of a more  
recent war—  
what eloquence  
of suffering mastered.*

*~ Nancy Arbuthnot*

***Tripoli Monument***

*Midshipmen marching by  
this eighteenth century marble allegory—  
Angel of Fame, robed History,  
book in hand,  
a brave young America leading a child  
into the new land—*

*memorize the names of those who fell  
off Tripoli—  
Somers, Caldwell, Dorsey,  
Decatur, Wadsworth, Israel—  
and yearn to emulate that love of glory.*

*Others of us, older, saddened  
with the passing of those who've just begun  
their lives, stirred, sometimes,  
ask, Stone spirits, teach us  
to be young.*

*Nancy Arbuthnot contributed six poems about  
the monuments at the US Naval Academy.*

**THINGS YOU NEVER KNEW YOU NEVER KNEW**

**...about the MWSA Website.**

★ We list the types of correspondence members can anticipate receiving from MWSA here:

<http://www.mwsadispatches.com/membership>

(3rd bullet under "New Members" section)

★ Archived, electronic copy of past email blasts (back to Nov 2017) can be found on our website here:

<http://www.mwsadispatches.com/mwsa-news>

★ MWSA Blasts can be found here:

<http://www.mwsadispatches.com/mwsa-news?tag=Blast>

*If you have any questions about navigating the MWSA website, please reach out to MWSA and we'll answer as best we can. Thank you.*



# VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL ~ THEN & NOW

*Thomas Keating*

**M**Y VIETNAM WAR WAS A mix of crushing heat and tremendous rain, long days working, and rocket and sapper attacks at our base. I worked as an administrative clerk for the 47<sup>th</sup> Military History Detachment, and later for the general staff at USARV HQ in Long Binh Post north of Saigon from September 1969 until September 1970.

When I came home, I readjusted to civilian life to forget the Army and Vietnam. Never talked about it, except to family. Didn't join any veterans group, didn't put it on my resume after hiring managers balked at hiring me when they saw I was a Vietnam veteran.

So, when I heard they were dedicating the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, District of Columbia in 1982, I was surprised at my desire to be there for the dedication of a memorial to the war I never talked about.

At the time, I was free-lancing as a news writer and producer for a local cable outlet. I obtained a press pass for the Dedication events.

I flew down from Boston on November 10, 1982 and after I picked up the press credentials. I walked over to the 2.8-acre Memorial site that was located on the Mall, between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial off Constitution Avenue. People were wandering all around and on top of the black granite walls because the memorial was below street level.

Many rubbed paper and crayon over a loved one's name on the granite. The haunting movie theme from "Chariots of Fire" gently played from large speakers. People left photos, teddy

bears, rosaries, and other mementos on the pathway at the base of the Memorial. Crowds milled around the granite wall, touching it, looking for names. I walked over among the groups of veterans, hundreds of them, many dressed in fatigues, who were gathered around the monument grounds.



I was taking photos and interviewing veterans from Massachusetts when I noticed a veteran on crutches, standing away from the wall, back near some trees. His right foot was in a cast and he wore camo jungle fatigues and a faded boonie hat. He wore a Hawaii State Flag shoulder patch on his left sleeve.





I walked over and asked him why he had come. His name was Jay and he told me that he came because he wanted to see his buddies' names on the Memorial, but he could not bring himself to get any closer to the black granite wall.



“Too much hurt,” he said. He lumbered back toward the trees.

A woman in faded jungle fatigues and boonie hat walked toward me as I walked around the crowd in front of the Wall. I asked her why she came, and she replied that she was a former Army nurse, stationed near my unit in Long Binh Post north of Saigon. She worked at the 24<sup>th</sup> EVAC hospital. She said she came to see the names of the nurses killed (there were eight nurses killed during the war). She told me she left nursing after her tour. “So many broken young men,” she said.

I went over to one of the volunteers and asked her for help to find my friend Mark's name on the wall. He and I were in Fort Benning Infantry Officers Candidate School together. We became friends. Mark, like me, did not finish OCS. We both got orders for Vietnam after we left the officer course. Mark was killed there in October, 1969.

The volunteer looked up Mark's name from a large phone book like book. “He is on Panel

17, line 107,” she said and showed me where to look on the granite wall. I thanked her and stood for a few minutes at the panel, staring at Mark's name.

The highlight of the week, aside from the dedication ceremony, was the reception for General Westmoreland at the Sheraton Hotel ballroom. Cheers and applause for “Westy” rang through the hotel lobby and ballroom. “Westy is here!” men shouted. Veterans in faded jungle fatigues saluted him sharply as he walked past them. It was electric to see their affection for a man who had sent them to terrible places like the Ia Drang Valley, Khe Sanh, and Hue.

The parade on Sunday, November 13, was remarkable. People cheered us Vietnam Veterans as we marched down Constitution Avenue. It felt good.

I left Washington with a new sense of pride in my service, no longer ashamed of being a Vietnam veteran. I put my military service back on my resume as I searched for work. Over the next few years, whenever I was in Washington on business, I made it a point to visit the Memorial.

Thirty-four years passed, and one day I received an email from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) looking for volunteers to read the names on the black granite for the upcoming thirty-fifth anniversary of the Memorial's dedication. I signed up right away.

My wife and I flew down to Washington that November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017. We took a cab to the Memorial from our hotel where I reported in at the Reading of The Names office tent. Volunteers from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial

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Fund (VVMF) handed me the list of names and an events schedule.

On Wednesday, November 8, 2017, I joined the line of readers of the names. The weather that day was cold. Steady rain came and went, but the large crowd did not move while the names were read. I checked my list one more time, then a volunteer motioned me to go. It was my turn. I went to the podium and began to read my twenty-five names—"Paul Glenn Forbes, Jr.", "Jay Edward Forsberg", with a healthy pause between each name.



As the readings continued, I joined my wife and we walked over to the statue of the "three soldiers" for more photos. Memories of Jay and the Army nurse came back to me. Gray-haired men, some wearing leather vests covered with military patches and Vietnam medals were there taking photos. They saw my Vietnam medals and came over and said, "Welcome home, brother" and shook my hand. It was 1982 again. I noticed that there were a lot of grandpa groups—families who came with the grandpa or grandma who was a Vietnam vet. The families honored their grandparents' service so many years ago.



Then a group of Vietnamese tourists came to take pictures of the statue. I stepped away from the statue, but they shook their heads—they wanted me in their photos when they saw my medals. A man in the group who was about my age asked if I was there. I said, "Yes."

He said, "Me, too. Other side" and smiled.

We shook hands. He was not the first former enemy veteran I had met in my life after the war, but I thought how appropriate it was to greet him there.

Thirty-five years had passed since my first visit to the wonderful monument to our fallen brothers and sisters, and where I found my pride at serving in the Vietnam War. We left as the rain returned with a vengeance.

I am looking forward to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022.





# **MWSA OFFICERS & DIRECTORS FOR 2021-22**

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**CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL.**

THE MWSA WINTER 2021 DISPATCHES MAGAZINE (JANUARY 2021) WILL FEATURE MORE ABOUT YOUR NEW ELECTED OFFICIALS, INCLUDING BIOS, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND CONTACT INFORMATION. THANK YOU TO ALL WHO PARTICIPATED.





## LEAVING HEART MOUNTAIN; PART II

David Andrew Westwood

A STRANGE TRANSFORMATION TOOK PLACE on the Union Pacific train. The hundreds of families, on whom the camp's isolation had imposed a common intimacy, began to withdraw from each other now that they were free of its confines. The railroad cars were, for the most part, silent of conversation as they clattered westward across the plains. A somber mood settled over the passengers, made up partly of the enormity of what had been done to them compared to the people they passed.

Her mother was asleep with her mouth open, showing a dark tooth that would need attention soon. There was a small savings account at Seattle First National Bank under her name, if the government hadn't confiscated it, but it would not last long. Natsuko fingered the key to their Bainbridge Island house. *Would it still work in the lock? Had the house been sold? Would strangers open the door?*

Natsuko drowsed, too, and then awoke as the train pulled into Pocatello. She bought some overpriced watermelon from a girl on the platform and shared it with her mother.

They had been happy once, she and her family. Meeting her father when he returned home from work on the ferry, her mother gardening as the mist rolled in off the Sound. But then came December 7th, 1941, and from then on all eyes were suddenly on them. At the store, it was no longer "Morning, Miss Harada." It was cold and resentful stares and mutterings as she left, like "traitor," and "Goddamn Nip spies in our midst." The newspapers had wound the populace into a frenzy until every non-Caucasian was a spy, air raids were

expected every night, and enemy submarines were constantly reported off the coast. Rumors spread with astonishing speed—Hawaii had been invaded, Southern California shelled. The government was leaving D.C. to hide in the Midwest. Japanese Americans were all in the pay of Tojo and Hirohito.

They sat, she and her mother, looking out at the greening landscape around Caldwell. In a way, it had been a relief when armed soldiers showed up in March of '42, confiscating her father's prized Samurai sword and escorting them to Eagledale Dock. Executive Order 9066 had decreed that Enemy Aliens be locked away for the duration. Soon they were sitting on their suitcases at the station surrounded by most of the Japanese Americans in Seattle, watched by a curious crowd that had collected on the Marion Street overpass.

After that, life had stalled. First at Manzanar in California, then at Minidoka in Idaho, and then, because someone thought her father's skills would be useful to grow apples there, in Wyoming. All barren badlands. Without sufficient irrigation, though they tried their best, the apple crop failed.

They were thrown together with strangers as if their similar features meant they were similarly inclined. That, in a way, was the worst part of prejudice: the assumption that all others were of the same ilk, imbued with the same character.

At Portland, the car became filled with the scent of the mountains, and Keiko awoke and smiled. Here they had to transfer to a Northern Pacific train that waited on another platform,



and from there they headed north, paralleling the coast.

“Not long now,” Natsuko told her mother.

Tacoma. They were almost at their destination. She remembered asking her father, once, what would happen when they went home again.

“Home,” her father had replied in his broken English, “is not just word. It mean ‘welcoming place.’ I not sure Seattle will be welcoming place, Daughter.”

America might be magnanimously removing the barbed wire from around its Japanese Americans, but could it also remove the barriers from around the hearts of its other citizens? No, it would take more than an Executive Order to accomplish that. It would take a generation, or two.

Natsuko visited the old car’s cramped toilet. Inside, she looked at herself in the mirror. She stood, swaying, fingers against the skin of her cheeks. *Am I really yellow? Is my skin color so ... wrong?*

The double wheels clattered over the rail joints as they entered the outskirts of Seattle. *Dontwantyouback*, they were saying. *Dontwantyouback*.

\* \* \*

Natsuko made tea for her mother, and then settled her in a chair overlooking the back yard and a rare view of Mt. Rainier—pink in the afternoon light. Bainbridge Island was sunny, with a brisk edge to the air that said summer was definitely over.

She felt like a double exposure—half in Washington, half in Wyoming. The whole experience had been tainting, disorienting. Just as the teenage Natsuko was

getting a glimpse of who she was becoming ... the war, and Heart Mountain.

On her notepad she wrote,

*Summer’s finery  
exchanged by fall’s handmaiden  
for winter’s nightgown.*

No. It was not good. The poetry-writing that had held her interest so much in the internment camp no longer had any meaning. She tore off the page and crumpled it.

She should put on the rice for dinner—after dealing with the tree. A six-foot Yoshino cherry tree stood inside the back gate, delivered earlier from the reopened Japanese nursery down the hill. Retrieving a shovel from the shed, she dug a hole in the soft loam in a place she had already picked, below the bedroom window.

She dragged the tree over to the hole, peeled the burlap from its carefully wrapped roots, and lowered it into the ground. She scooped some of the soil back in around the bole and tamped it down with her boot.

“There!” she said to her mother, “When it blooms in the spring we shall think of father.”

Keiko, who talked rarely these days, nodded and quoted, “The cherry is the first among flowers as the warrior is the first among men.”

Soon she was asleep again, looking as small as a child in her chair. The sea lions barked from a buoy below. They, at least, had never been evicted.

— END —

*“Leaving Heart Mountain” is adapted from Westwood’s novel, “Onishivan, 1945.”*



## THE EVICTION

Jorge Torrente

THE UPRISING WAS SPONTANEOUS AND furious. The majority were farmers and small-town dwellers from a proud mountainous region steeped in libertarian traditions. They all knew what had happened in Russia after Lenin's October Revolution and in Eastern Europe after WWII. Many felt it was better to die fighting than to live under a political and social storm they didn't understand nor cared about. Like-minded people from all over the island also joined the rebellion: whites, blacks, Catholics, Jewish, Santeros, the usual smattering of adventurers and misfits—the sum total representing the human fabric of the nation. It was called the Sierra del Escambray Uprising and it turned into a protracted and bitter fight that lasted for more than five years.

And fight they did. Men, women, and whole families, shoulder to shoulder, oftentimes to the death.

\* \* \*

Ministry of Defense,  
Plaza de la Revolución,  
La Habana, Cuba,  
November, 1963

“¿Quién dijo eso? De la Huerta?—Who said that? De la Huerta? Well, he's right. We have to wipe out those motherfuckers once and for all!”

Fidel Castro retorted. “Rebels? Hell no! They're not rebels, they're *bandidos*, that's what they are. We were rebels fighting Batista,

fighting the good fight.” He lorded over the small group of high-ranking officers gathered in his brother Raúl's swank office on the top floor of the building. He sat in his brother Raúl's chair at the big table and Raúl sat someplace else.

“El Escambray, it's always the goddamned Escambray! I'm sick and tired of it. It's been more than three years now. Longer than what it took us to kick Batista out, damn it!”

The smaller ranges in the north and central areas of Las Villas Province were pacified, but the Sierra del Escambray was a different story. Not a day went by without a report of an attack on an army patrol, or sugarcane fields put to the torch, or bridges dynamited.

“And now, a whole army company wiped out? A whole army company?” He looked at the men one-by-one. “So, what do you think?”

No one responded. Eyes shifted. Nobody dared break the spell conjured by the Prime Minister, *Comandante en Jefe*, and Maximum Leader.

“Who the fuck these *bandidos* think they are? What? They think they're gonna lick us at our own game?”

He could no longer afford to keep on playing cat-and-mouse with the *Escambray bandidos*. Word of mouth spread so fast and far, every person in the country with a grudge against



the Revolution would run to the nearest mountains and start their own fucking insurrection.

“This is exactly what the Russians are worried about. How the hell are they going to install the heavy-duty hardware on the island with all this going on?”

Yes, De la Huerta was right. Of course, the uprising was being stoked by the civilian population of the Escambray, and the last massive attack on his troops had made it even more blatant. The locals were not just helping with food and shelter, they were now also fighting as they saw fit.

“Shit!”

The silos were almost finished, and the rockets were on their way. Khrushchev was doing exactly as he had promised, but it had been him, Fidel Castro, who had presented the Russian with a previously unthinkable opportunity of equalizing all the motherfucking American rockets aimed at the Soviet Union from all over Europe and Asia.

Ah, how sweet life could be! Who would have told the *hijosdeputas Yankis* a couple of years ago that a guy from an island down south was going to sock it to them? And while it was true the new toys belonged to the Soviets, they were going to be sitting on *his* island.

His. Island.

The *Americanos* were about to get an unpleasant surprise. Just the thought of it made him smile. Nothing, least of all those punks in the mountains, was going to stand between him and all that power.

“It’s like gangrene, and we have to cut it all out, even the good tissue around it. It’s called radical surgery.” Castro stood. “I want those mountains clean of *guajiros* and *bandidos* by year’s end.” He walked toward the door but paused and turned around. “No more excuses, you hear me? It all stops now!”

Silence

He was gone.

One month later, a census of everyone living in the Sierra del Escambray was completed. Everyone was given a short grace period to voluntarily move away from the mountains, but they were required to inform the army of their destination, and once there, notify the local authorities of their arrival. They were already classified as counterrevolutionaries, and they were kept on a tight leash anywhere they went.

Thousands descended from the heights, bringing along everything they could carry from their modest homes. All the women wore black, declaring the loss of their husbands, sons, and brothers in the fight or, if none of these applied, of their livelihoods and dreams. They were all widows of the land.

Many families forced out had relatives living elsewhere and a few had money to start anew, but others had neither. They chose to stay and rough it out, come what may. No one really wanted to abandon the property where they had been born, where many ancestors were buried—the land that fed them; the modest dwellings that housed them. They hoped with so few remaining, the army would cease to see them as threats.

When the grace period ended, the soldiers arrived early in the morning at the house of

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Gerónimo Valiente. Like many others, the Valientes lived in a small valley tucked inside the sierra. The soldiers rode on three Russian ZIL trucks that meandered through patches of green forest, following the often-disappearing trails etched into the pasture lands by mule-drawn carts and the occasional tractor.

The house was a sturdy wooden construction painted light yellow, built with local timber by Gerónimo's grandfather, who had handed it down to Gerónimo upon the untimely death of his father.

Gerónimo had married and raised his children in that house. Four generations of Valientes had lived there, toiling on this piece of property that Don Tomás Estrada Palma, Cuba's first elected president after the American intervention, had granted his grandfather in recognition of his service during the independence wars. The Valientes were simple and uneducated people, proud of their heritage and of their attachment to the land.

State Security kept the Valientes under surveillance after their oldest son was positively identified in a photo taken in Trinidad the day the city was taken by the insurgents. He was dressed in full guerrilla attire, standing like a big shot as he talked with a young lady at the entrance of the Palacio Brunet. This information had determined the number of troops sent to Gerónimo Valiente's house. Three platoons of crack troops were dispatched to evict the family.

"Gerónimo! Time to go!" the lieutenant in charge shouted as soon as he jumped off the truck. The man walked toward the house with the swagger of someone backed by overwhelming power. He carried his AK-47

loosely in one hand with the carefree attitude of a B-movie gunslinger in a cheap Western flick. Born and raised in Havana's tough *barrio de Atarés*, he was a fully developed bully. For him, it was just another day and the people were that day's assholes. It was early dawn. The only noise was that of the soldiers' boots hitting the ground after jumping off the trucks.

"*Geronimito*, wake up!" The man shouted again, a sly grin on his lips and eyes.

The house's front door slowly opened and Gerónimo stood in the threshold, a strong, medium-height farmer in his mid-forties with a no-nonsense attitude.

"*Mister Gerónimo Valiente* to you." He didn't shout it but made his words perfectly clear to all present.

The lieutenant stopped walking. He looked into Gerónimo's stern eyes. The grin disappeared and his eyes focused. He couldn't believe anyone in his right mind would want to question his authority, much less challenge it.

"Valiente is what the bitches in town call my—"

Gerónimo pulled a .45 from the small of his back and fired several times, hitting the lieutenant squarely in the chest.

As the officer's body jerked back with each impact, his rifle fell to the ground.

After a second or two, the soldiers fired back at Gerónimo, who was shooting at them. Gerónimo hit another soldier before going down in a hail of lead. A woman's scream came from inside the house, but it was drowned out by the clattering of two automatic weapons firing on the soldiers from both ends of the house.



\* \* \*

Gerónimo's daughter, son, and wife had begged him to let it go, to pack up and move like everybody else.

"Papá, it's better to leave," the daughter had said. "Don't be proud and selfish. Not now. We'll come back some day."

"Selfish? Proud? They've taken my land. Shot my brother. Banned our religion. Now the family house? The house we grew up in? What kind of a man have I become? I've never been a coward. No Valiente has ever been one. And I'm beginning to feel like a coward. I should have joined the insurgents when your brother did."

"Papá, no one thinks you're a coward, and we love you."

"I love you too. All of you." Gerónimo looked at them, one at a time, forcing a smile on his lips.

"Gerónimo—" his wife said, but he cut her short.

"Keep the children with you at all times," he ordered. "I'll handle the situation when the soldiers come. And you two," he sternly told his children, "you stay with your mother, stick to her, protect her, obey her. Yes, some day, maybe, we'll come back."

"Papá," the daughter said, looking into his eyes, "we all leave together or we all die together."

The mother wept. "You really scare me when you talk like that, Rosaura. You sound like Grandpa."

At seventeen, Rosaura was already a Valiente through and through, and had inherited her great-grandfather's smarts and boldness. She was as tall as her father and big-boned, had hazel eyes and dark brown hair she usually wore in a ponytail. Tomboyish and not pretty, she nevertheless had a certain aura about her.

Her brother Mario was fourteen, still baby-faced, and saw life through his big sister's eyes.

The conversation had taken place the day before. Later that night, while their parents made love, they sneaked out of the house, pulled the FAL rifles from the hiding place, and cleaned and oiled them well, even the bullets, one round at a time. The two weapons were the family's war trophies, scavenged from the battle at Las Ceibas, and they knew damn well how to use them.

"Maybe Mother will change his mind," Rosaura had said, looking at the rifles, "but I won't stand by and watch how my father gets shot."

Mario looked at her and nodded.

\* \* \*

Gerónimo's teenagers sprayed death on their adversaries, changing magazines twice, but they were no match for three platoons of professional soldiers. Ten minutes after the trucks arrived, the lieutenant, eight of his soldiers, and three Valientes lay dead on the ground.

Three soldiers rushed inside the house. The stocky woman with the salt-and-pepper hair tied in a loose bun saw them come in—their angry faces twisted with satisfaction

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when they spotted her. She stood behind the wooden kitchen table thirty feet away from them, pale, trembling from head to toe, tears streamed down her cheeks. Her lips quavered as she mumbled a quick prayer. In her right hand she held a butcher's knife that glinted in the morning sunlight filtering through the window slats.

When they saw the knife, the soldiers momentarily stopped, but then continued toward her. Their eyes darted from the knife to her face, to her ample bosom and hips. She saw them coming, their stained and missing teeth showing as they cracked lewd remarks.

"I have a better knife here for you, bitch," snarled one of them, fondling his crotch.

With great deliberation, the woman raised her right hand and, helping herself with her left, placed the sharp tip of the knife against her left breast. She turned to stare at them with glazed eyes before dropping herself forward against the table, driving the blade deep into her chest. The soldiers swore.

Before leaving the site, the soldiers dragged the Valientes' corpses into the kitchen next to the woman's and poured diesel fuel over them. As the trucks winded away from the house, a column of thick, black smoke slowly rose above the green fronds of the royal palm trees and into the welcoming blue sky.

## PAST DUE

Tom Crowley

**I**N MY VIETNAM MEMOIR, SHRAPNEL WOUNDS, I mentioned a machine gunner in my platoon who I referred to as 'Rambo before his time.'

We lost track of each other when I was medevaced and when we returned to the states and tried to pull our lives together.

As he put it, 'The army trained us for combat, not for coming home from combat.'

That soldier, Bill Cline, and I were able to reunite five years back and only then did I learn that the army had failed to provide any recognition to Bill for his heroic actions in combat and a full year on the line and in the mud.

With his permission, and two witness statements, I was able to encourage the army to address this failure. This past week Congressman Wittman of Virginia awarded Bill the Bronze Star with V device for his heroism in combat on Nov. 11th, 1966. It was recognition 54 years past due.

I was able to attend the ceremony at VFW post 9808 in Mechanicsville, Virginia, as Bill was presented the medal.

One of the witnesses who couldn't attend, Nat 'Tumbleweed' Miller, a Texas cowboy and our constant point man, sent a text to Bill during the ceremony saying, "I'm walking point for you."

Well done soldiers.







*DISTANT TRAVELER*

by **Steven Cornelius**

Genre(s): Historical Fiction

Format(s): Kindle

ISBN/ASIN: ASIN: B08DL6KRHQ

*Distant Traveler* is a gritty, highly descriptive account of aircrew life in sub-tropical Asia and the incredible stress endured while flying combat missions over the dangerous and unforgiving Himalayas. During airlift operations from 1942-45, more than a third of aircraft flying these missions were lost to enemy action, weather or unexplained circumstances.



**WELCOME TO THE MWSA ~ WHO WE ARE**

*John Cathcart*

**WE** ARE A NATIONWIDE ASSOCIATION of authors, poets, and artists, drawn together by the common bond of military service. Most of our members are active duty military, retirees, or military veterans. A few are lifelong civilians who have chosen to honor our military through their writings or their art. Others have only a tangential relationship to the military. Our only core principle is a love of the men and women who defend this nation, and a deeply personal understanding of their sacrifice and dedication.

Our skills are varied. Some of us are world class writers, with many successful books. Others write only for the eyes of their friends and families. But each of us has a tale to tell. Each of us is a part of the fabric of Freedom. These are our stories...

For more details, [click here](#) to read more about us on our website. Feel free to browse our site and get to know our organization, our members and their works.

Thanks very much for being a part of your MWSA organization.

**SAVING HISTORY ONE STORY AT A TIME**



## NEW MEMBER BENEFIT: BETA READER FORUM

*John Cathcart*

**A**S A NEWER SERVICE TO our members, MWSA reminds you of our Beta Reader Forum. The idea is to easily expand our authors' pool of potential beta readers—an important part of our creative process for books nearing completion.

As with our review swap program, MWSA is only providing a venue to get authors and beta readers together. Once there, you might also agree to swap reviews once the book is published.

The page is available to members only (username and password required).

Here are the details (which are also posted at the top of the forum page):

### PURPOSE

- ★ Use this forum to line up beta readers for your book.
- ★ This is a member-to-member program, MWSA will not monitor any individual agreements made via this system.

### SUGGESTIONS

- ★ Provide a short paragraph describing your book.
- ★ Include title, author, genre, expected publication date.
- ★ Keep your initial posting short—you can always share more details once another MWSA member responds to your request.
- ★ What format(s) you'll provide your beta readers.

- \* Paper copy: manuscript, proof, etc.
- \* Digital format: Word document, PDF, eBook format (.mobi, .epub).
- ★ How you'll collect feedback—i.e. via paper questionnaire, online form, email responses.
- ★ When you'll collect feedback—i.e. your expectation on how long beta readers have to read and provide feedback.
- ★ Whether or not you'll be posting beta reader names into your book's acknowledgment section.

MWSA recommends authors acknowledge beta readers... and that authors allow the readers to opt in or out!



**MWSA Beta Reader Program**

<https://www.mwsadispatches.com/mwsa-news/2019/4/new-member-benefit-beta-reader-forum>



