

DISPATCHES

MILITARY
WRITERS
SOCIETY OF
AMERICA

Rescuing History One Story at a Time
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FALL 2021

MEET JACK
WOODVILLE
LONDON
Pg 26

MWSA 2021
BOOK AWARDS
Pg 30



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Sandra Miller Linhart

HELLO. AND I HOPE THIS edition finds you all well.

Kudos to all members who took home a medal and to all our other participants who sent their work(s) in for a review, or were nominated for an award. It takes guts to put your heart out there. Impressed with you, I am.

There are other awardees not mentioned as time did not allow. Mike Guardia was awarded the MWSA Mike Mullins Memorial Writer of the Year for 2021. His article will be in the Winter 2022 edition. Congrats, Mike. We look forward to your submission.

Additionally, the Founder's Award went to Donald J. "DJ" Humphrey II for *8 Miraculous Months in the Malayan Jungle*. The President's Award was awarded to Dawn Brotherton. Congrats to both members. They, too, will be honored in January's issue.

Happy Fall, Y'all.

DISPATCHES REGULARS

- COLUMNIST/PRESIDENT ~ BOB DOERR
- FEATURE WRITER ~ DWIGHT J ZIMMERMAN
- FEATURE WRITER ~ A.T. ROBERTS
- FEATURE WRITER ~ NANCY PANKO
- FEATURE WRITER ~ RONA SIMMONS
- FEATURE WRITER ~ JORGE TORRENTE
- PHOTOGRAPHER ~ PAT McGRATH-AVERY
- EDITOR/L&D ~ SANDRA LINHART



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HELLO

Autumn





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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Bob Doerr

I WAS SO IMPRESSED LISTENING to the announcement of all the award winners last month. We really have a lot of talented writers in the Society! You'll find more about them in this newsletter.

I also thank all of you who tuned in for the online membership meeting. I know a lot of us are approaching "online fatigue". Hopefully, next year we will finally be able to meet in person.

In this issue you'll find an article about Jack London a long term, key player with MWSA. I plan on writing a few more articles on other members who have been with the society for a long time and have put in literally thousands of volunteer hours. I think it's important all of you learn about these key MWSA members.

Our anthology, *Untold Stories*, is hot off the presses and it looks to be a good one. We had some thirty members contribute to it making it one of our longest anthologies ever. It's available on Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1943267871>

With the holidays coming, I want to wish you all a very happy holiday season. Be safe, stay healthy, and enjoy!



TWICE LUCKY, Pt II

Jorge Torrente

Excerpt from the historical novel **The Uprising** by Jorge Torrente.

This article has been edited for content and length due to its sexually graphic nature. To read this entry in its entirety, please contact the author.

Zapata Swamps, next day, April 18, 1961

A SHARP, PAINFULLY SHRILL SOUND stabbed Néstor awake. He blinked several times trying to focus on something. *Is there something to focus on? Is he dead?*

The shrill sound came again, and again, and each time his headache threatened to blow up his skull. His mouth was so dry, and bitter, so bitter. The sound came again.

Oh, it's a child crying.

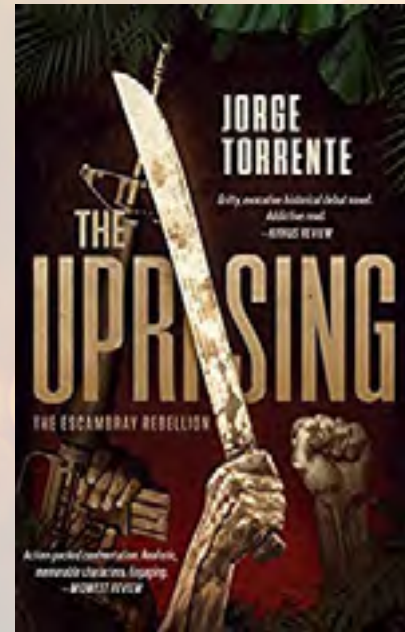
Where am I? He touched his face. He didn't have his glasses on. *Oh, man, did I lose them?*

He patted himself down and found them perched on his chest. He swore inwardly, and smiled. With his glasses on, he saw the inside of a thatched roof ten feet above his face.

Where am I? What happened?

Looking around, he realized he was inside a small shack made of planks from palm trees. All around him sacks of charcoal were stacked up high in neat rows. He had his camouflaged uniform on and his boots on his feet. There were no light bulbs. The scarce light was filtering through what seemed like a million little holes in the walls of the flimsy structure. Every time he moved his head, the cot he was on swayed.

Outside, women's voices were engaged in lively conversation, one of them occasionally



breaking away from the chatter to reprimand a child who was somehow misbehaving. In the background he heard continuous thundering.

A storm is coming, he thought.

But then he remembered and tried jumping out of bed. His head swam, his body screamed with pain and his legs buckled. As he went down, his flailing arms hit a small wooden stool. A tin jug went flying, spilling water all over and bouncing off the cement floor several times with a metallic sound. The cot couldn't withstand the fall and collapsed. His head hit the hard floor with a thud.

"Ahh!" He couldn't help it. The headache pulsed. The racket outside stopped.

"Are you all right?"

Néstor looked up.

A brown-skinned woman stood ten feet away, staring down at him, a side door open behind her. Néstor thought of getting up, but he couldn't. He was too weak.

“You must be very hungry. It’s been almost a day-and-a-half.” She spoke with the strongest back-country accent he’d ever heard.

“That’s how long I’ve been here?” He felt guilty.

From his position on the floor he saw she was barely five feet tall and bosomy, jet-black hair tied behind her neck and big black eyes with long eyelashes. *Early twenties? Maybe just twenty.* She had a straight nose, and her lips were full and fleshy. Pearls of perspiration slid down her forehead, adding a shine to her natural cinnamon-colored skin. She wore a loose and sleeveless multicolored dress with a wide skirt that hung just below her knees. She had nice legs, worn-out sneakers, and no socks.

The racket outside had begun again, but was mellower—probably the women were

trying to listen in to their conversation. The thundering in the background continued.

“I’m thirsty,” he said, his eyes glued on her. “Where am I? What happened?”

“A bomb exploded close by and knocked you out. You don’t remember? You ran to the house carrying the boy. You saved his life.”

The woman... this woman?

Néstor nodded as the fog in his mind dissipated. He felt lost and she must have noticed it because she smiled warmly, revealing two rows of teeth that, in contrast to her dark complexion, looked whiter than they probably were.

He tried to stand up but couldn’t quite make it. His head was fuzzy and he felt sapped of all strength.

The woman approached and offered her hands. They were rough and strong.

Néstor stood.

“Hold on,” she said, walking a few steps away to retrieve the small stool. “Sit here.” It was more an order than a request. “You’re very weak. I’m going to bring you something to eat. I won’t be long.” She walked toward the door, looked back at him, and stopped. “Thank God you’re up. We didn’t know what to do.”

Her sentences came rapid fire—one after the other. He had to pay close attention to catch everything she said. Yes, he would sit there. At the moment he couldn’t do anything else.

She was gone.

The activity outside was business as usual. For Néstor, sitting on the stool, things finally came together. He had to find out what was going on with the brigade. When he ran his

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fingers through his hair, they got caught in a hardened mat. *Dried blood.* He straightened out his clothes the best he could.

“Here it is.”

The young woman was back, holding with both hands a cheap china bowl full of soup. She smiled at him as she came closer. Behind her came in a taller young man with a darker complexion and curly black hair. In his huge hands he carried something wrapped in a white cloth and another tin jug full of water.

“Chicken soup,” she said. “Ah, this is my brother, the father of the little boy.”

“We are very grateful for what you did, señor. We prayed hard to the Virgin for your recovery. My name is Concepción,” the young man said, offering his hand. After they shook, he gave Néstor what was wrapped in the cloth. It was a chunk of homemade white cheese that Néstor eagerly accepted.

“And my name is Asela,” the woman said with a twinkle in her eyes.

Néstor wondered if she looked at all the men she met with such intensity.

As Néstor started to eat, a young girl not more than fifteen came into the shack. She carried a teary-eyed little boy in her arms and a brown paper bag in one hand. They, too, had dark complexions and curly black hair.

“This is my wife,” Concepción told Néstor.

“Nice to meet you,” said Néstor and, looking at Asela, added, “This soup is very good.”

“Maybe it’s just that you’re very hungry,” responded Asela.

The girl settled the boy down and, handing the brown bag to Néstor, said, “These are salt

crackers that go very well with the soup.” The little boy was already walking unsteadily toward Néstor, and as soon as he came close, he got a hold of the baggy camouflage pants and started pulling. Clearly he was excited by the funny patterns.

“And this little guy is my son,” Concepción said, picking up the boy. “Well, we better leave for the time being and let you eat in peace.” He walked toward the door with the boy in his arms and his wife following. Before going out, he shot a glance back at Asela, who



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Thank you.

he would never die, or at least not for a long time.

How different from Arsenio.

She had married the tall, muscular young man who had been the heartthrob of almost all the marriageable daughters in the region. It was as if Arsenio were chiseled out of a block of hardwood, but it had done him and her no good. From a simple cut on one foot he had died so soon, so horribly. She would never forget how, on the last day of his agony, his back was arched to such an extent that he just had his heels and the back of his head touching the bed. It was an awful sight. Arsenio died just a few months after the wedding. He didn't have time to make her pregnant.

showed no intention of following him.

"I'm going to fix the cot for him," she said.

Néstor started wolfing down the soup. He threw into the bowl small chunks of cheese and crackers. The food tasted heavenly, but his eyes were fixed on Asela. She was trying to fix the cot.

As she bent into the work, she surreptitiously glanced at Néstor and noticed how his eyes were slowly moving over her breasts and down her back to her buttocks, thighs and legs.

This man in the strange uniform was not the most handsome man she had ever seen, but he had made it clear that he had *cojones*. His very white skin, light brown wavy hair, and honey-colored eyes were like nothing she had ever seen before. She even liked the eyeglasses he wore on a loose cord around his neck. That reminded her of her first teacher at the rural school when she was still a child—her first crush. But this man had saved her nephew's life, running among bullets and explosions, as if he could not be harmed—as if he knew

Néstor ended his visual recognition of Asela when she finished fixing the portable bed and straightened up. Looking at her face, he saw the sparkle in her eyes and a sudden wave of shame ran over him. Had she noticed? *How could he? And in these circumstances?* But how could he not? She was very good looking.

The young couple re-entered the shack, this time bringing along an older man who carried the little boy in his arms. He was taller than Asela but shorter than Concepción, and their resemblance told Néstor he was the father of both.

"Your people have retreated to the coast," the older man said without introduction. "The government has brought in thousands of men and hundreds of tanks."

"So soon?" Néstor asked.

"Soon?" the man asked. "Since yesterday morning, after you were knocked out cold, the army hasn't stopped its offensive."

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“What about the Americans?” Néstor asked.

“Americans? What Americans? Haven’t seen one in years,” the old man said.

Néstor’s face turned hard.

“Look, Señor Néstor, I’m just repeating what I’ve heard from the soldiers’ mouths. Their orders are to push your people hard out to sea and wrap it up as soon as possible.

“That’s impossible,” Néstor said in a very low voice. He shook his head.

“Well...” the old man said. He, too, shook his head.

“No use arguing,” he finally said. “We’ll try to take you back to your people tonight. We are all very grateful, but if the army discovers you here... I don’t want to even think about it. Do you understand me? Now get some rest while you can. I’ll come back for you later.” The old man walked out of the room with the rest following, even Asela, her eyes cast down.

Néstor lay on the cot again and, with the warm soup in his stomach, fell asleep. He dreamed of bullets and breasts and women and death.

It was dark, hot, and muggy when he awoke. Outside, men shouted orders, metal clanked and diesel engines roared. Remembering his weapons, he looked around for them, but only found his empty holster. He cursed. *I can’t believe they thought I would harm them.* He stood up and peeked out the biggest hole in the wall he could find.

Fifty yards away, he saw Russian tanks, military trucks towing artillery and a continuous and never-ending flow of soldiers. *Am I dreaming?* Néstor’s stomach dropped. The brigade was

finished without the Americans.

The door opened and Néstor jumped sideways. It was Concepción holding a finger to his lips. “We can’t move tonight,” he whispered. “Soldiers everywhere. The battle is coming to an end,” he said, not daring to look at Néstor. “Your people have been pushed back all the way to Girón Beach, the last strip of land they hold.”

Néstor didn’t respond. Concepción left. Néstor remained standing, overwhelmed by a feeling of loss. He swore, reclining his head against the hut’s wall.

* * *

While Néstor had been unconscious, the 2506 Brigade had suffered two crushing blows that accelerated their defeat. Two of the merchant ships still holding precious war materials were sunk in the Bay of Pigs by the Cuban Air Force before they could be unloaded. The *Houston* went down full of weapons, anti-tank mines and communications equipment. When the *Rio Escondido* was hit by a rocket, it blew



up and burned 200 hundred barrels of aviation gasoline destined to refuel the brigade's B-26s on a small airstrip on the beach.

Losing the ability to refuel close to the battlefield, the invaders' planes had to fly back and forth between the theater of operations and a distant base in Nicaragua, leaving them with barely forty minutes of fuel time to spend giving air support to their troops on the field. All of the crews were happy to fly one sortie after the other, but more than half were eventually shot down over the battlefield. Some, badly damaged, crashed into the Caribbean Sea on the way back.

Only a handful of the brigade's small air force—made up of fifteen WWII B-26s—survived the grueling ordeal. More than half of the Cuban exiled airmen lost their lives.

On the last day, seeing how exhausted the surviving Cuban pilots were, eight American instructors from the Alabama Air National Guard in Birmingham volunteered to fly, although they weren't supposed to.

When things get tough...

After challenging fate several times that day, Riley Shamburger and Wade Gray's plane was shot down and crashed on the water. Their bodies were never recovered. On their fourth sortie, Pete Ray and Leo F. Baker's B-26 was shot down over land and both survived the crash, only to die in a fiery shootout with Cuban soldiers.

Courageous men forever.

* * *

Néstor was still reclining against the wall when Asela walked into the room, bringing him a bowl of food. She had taken a bath, changed clothes, and let down her hair.



“No one can live on soup only, Señor Néstor. Here you have white rice, black beans, and boiled yams. It'll do you good.”

“I'm not hungry.”

“Oh, and you can listen to this,” she said, placing the bowl on the wooden stool. She pulled a small transistor radio out of her pocket. “Music or news?”

“Thank you, Asela, very thoughtful of you.”

Gazing into his eyes, she took one of his hands, placed the radio in it, and held on a bit longer than necessary. Her hands were very warm. Without another word, she turned around, fanning him with her long hair and leaving a strong scent of cheap, flowery cologne in the air.

She closed the door behind her.

* * *

On the afternoon of April 19th, the Cuban army closed in for the kill. Almost one hundred thousand soldiers and militiamen were waiting for the artillery barrage to end

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so the final assault could begin.

What Néstor didn't know was that the Americans were very much aware of the situation.

"A huge concentration of enemy troops and artillery are surrounding the brigade's last position," one of the two U.S. Navy jet fighter pilots flying high above the combat zone in their A4D-2 Skyhawks reported back to his aircraft carrier, the USS *Essex*. Like all of his fellow pilots before him had done, he added, "Request permission to give the boys assistance." The officer at the other end of the transmission responded with no less frustration, "Permission denied. At mission's end, return home."

Soon after, it was all over. Dozens of invaders died. The rest of the brigade was taken prisoner.

* * *

The first few days after it all ended, Néstor saw soldiers going by and even some talking to Asela's relatives, but they never suspected he was there. All the houses in the small village were owned by members of the family, and even though Asela had told him some were Castro sympathizers, not one snitched on him. He was a good man who had saved their little boy's life, and that was stronger than any political affiliation. But yes, they were all eager for him to leave. Where to? They didn't know and really didn't care.

All of them, except Asela.

It was Asela who slowly pulled him out from the deep well of depression. She not only fed him, but came into the hut many times a day with one excuse or another. She had an

uncanny ability to read him, and know when to back off and when to come charging in again. Before long, he was eating everything Asela cooked for him and spending more and more time with her.

"Señor Néstor," Asela's father told him on the sixth day of his stay, "here are some civilian clothes for you to try on. Maybe tomorrow we'll be able to move you out of here. Asela will tailor everything to your measurements. It was a shame you arrived here in such difficult times."

And he left, leaving Néstor speechless.

He wasn't sure what the man had really meant.

As he stood in his briefs in the middle of the hut trying on the newer clothes, Asela walked in. Being half-naked, he held up in front of him the shirt he had yet to put on.

"My father went to Cienfuegos where his brother is a longshoreman in the port. He can get you on a merchant ship going to Canada. As a stowaway, of course. I'm going to miss you," she said, her voice breaking.



Néstor looked directly at Asela. She was teary-eyed.

He extended his hand to her. Eagerly, she clasped it in hers and stepped closer until she was leaning on him. With her breasts against his chest, Néstor embraced her and felt her warm tears on his neck.

At two o'clock that afternoon, Asela and Néstor sat in the cab of her father's rickety pickup, just starting the two-and-a-half hour drive from deep in the Zapata Swamps to the city of Cienfuegos. The truck carried a load of charcoal in case they needed an explanation as to why they were on the road. Several days had gone by since the government victory at the Bay of Pigs, but there were still road blocks and patrols checking for straggling invaders.

Néstor was wearing the clothes Asela had tailored for him at the last minute. The pants belonged to her father, the shirt to her brother and the shoes and socks to an uncle. The worn-out farmer's hat had been Arsenio's. Néstor had four pesos and change in his pocket and a couple of old IDs with no photos that had also belonged to the dead man. Ninety-nine percent of the soldiers still in the region were outsiders, so it was highly improbable any of them had ever met Arsenio.

Asela sat very close to Néstor, holding his left hand. As they came close to Cienfuegos, she fought back tears, trying in vain to be strong. She did not have the heart to leave her father and the rest of the family behind to go away with a man she barely knew, especially one involved in such risky activity, but she had considered it many times.

"Take care of yourself, Asela," Néstor whispered in her ear as they embraced for the

last time on the doorstep of Asela's uncle's modest house. He took off the gold chain and the Star of David pendant his mother had given him and clasped it around her neck. "There," he said trying to put his best smile on his face, "so you don't forget me."

"Oh, my love, how could I forget you? You've been a ray of sunshine in my life." Weeping, she took off the simple, cheap hair clip she always wore and gave it to Néstor.

"I'll come back some day, Asela, and I'll clip it back in your hair again."

"Oh, Néstor..."

"Goodbye, my sweet Asela," he said into the wind, watching the old pickup disappear down the road.

PART I FEATURED IN 2021 SUMMER ISSUE.

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 (1500 words or less, please) or have further questions, please email:

dispatches@mwsa.co

CUSHING 2.0, Pt II

Dwight J. Zimmerman



An illustration showing Lt. Hobson and his men escaping from the sinking Merrimac, taken from *The Sinking of the Merrimac*, Richmond Hobson's account of the mission, published in 1899. Author's collection

RICHMOND Hobson and the Sinking of the Merrimac

PART 2

During the Spanish American War on the night of June 3, 1898, Navy lieutenant Richmond Hobson led his crew on a mission to sink the collier USS Merrimac in the mouth of the channel of Santiago de Cuba harbor, and trap the Spanish fleet there. But before the Merrimac could reach her objective, the collier came under fire from Spanish forts and gunships.

MIRACULOUSLY, NONE OF THE CREW was seriously hurt by the cannon fire that included other. Part of the reason for that was attributed to a case of mistaken identity, and, ironically, the good luck of being caught in the middle of a crossfire. Spanish gunners on both

sides of the collier thought she was a larger warship and that the muzzle flashes they were seeing were coming from the Merrimac's guns when they were actually from their countrymen's. The result was Spanish crews inflicting friendly fire casualties on their compatriots.

The Merrimac's crew abandoned the slowly sinking vessel and swam to the catamaran which unfortunately had fallen into the channel upside down. Richmond Hobson and the crew clung to the catamaran, helplessly watching the burning Merrimac slowly sink ineffectually into a deeper part of the channel.



The Merrimac sunk in the channel, with only her smokestack and two masts sticking out of the water. Naval History and Heritage Command

When dawn broke, they saw a steam launch approach out of the morning mist. Hobson wrote, "I called out in a strong voice to know if there was not an officer in the boat; if so, an American officer wished to speak with him with a view to surrendering himself and seamen as prisoners of war." In fact, there

was a Spanish officer on board, none other than Rear Admiral Pascual Cervera y Topete, the commander of the fleet Hobson hoped to trap. Hobson and his men came on board. The admiral and his aides, after surveying them and the nearby masts and funnel of the *Merrimac* poking above the water, they exclaimed to the Americans, “*Valiente!*”



An illustration from Hobson's book showing Admiral Cervera rescuing Hobson and his crew. Author's collection

Hobson and his crew were taken to Morro Castle where they were treated with respect during their captivity. Admiral Cervera sent a launch under a flag of truce to the blockade fleet to inform Admiral Sampson that Hobson and his crew had survived. On July 6, 1898, all were paroled in a prisoner exchange.



Morro Castle, Santiago de Cuba, where Hobson and his men were held as prisoners of war. Library of Congress

In Hobson, Secretary Lord had his Cushing. And, even though the mission was a failure, true to his word, he made good on following through in honoring acts of heroism by junior officers. The press lionized Hobson and his men and they received a hero's welcome upon their return. In addition, all seven of the sailors on the mission received the Medal of Honor. As a Naval officer, Hobson was ineligible because at the time the decoration was reserved to enlisted personnel and Marines.

Hobson would resign from the Navy in 1903 after eighteen years of service. In 1906 he was elected to Congress and served as representative for Alabama's Sixth District for four terms. During his tenure he was instrumental in establishing the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations.

On March 3, 1915, Congress passed legislation making naval officers eligible for the Medal of Honor. On April 29, 1933, Hobson was invited to the White House where, by a special act of Congress, President Franklin D. Roosevelt awarded Hobson the Medal

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of Honor for his role leading the *Merrimac* operation. Additionally, Congress authorized his promotion to rear admiral in June 1934. Richmond Hobson died on May 17, 1937, aged sixty-six, and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.



*A portrait of Richmond Hobson in his rear admiral's uniform and wearing his Medal of Honor.
Naval History and Heritage Command*

In a footnote to the operation and its aftermath, six months after Hobson's mission, Mr. and Mrs. Hilton of Westville, South Carolina, had a baby boy that they named Richmond Hobson Hilton in honor of the hero from Alabama. An Army sergeant in World War I, he would receive the Medal of Honor for neutralizing a German machine gun nest on October 11, 1918. When Hobson received his Medal of

Honor in 1933, Richmond Hilton became the only known person named for a Medal of Honor recipient to be awarded one himself.

CITATIONS

HOBSON, RICHMOND PEARSON, Lieutenant, USN

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Lieutenant Richmond Pearson Hobson, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and uncommon valor in action in connection with the sinking of the U.S.S. *Merrimac* at the entrance to the fortified harbor of Santiago de Cuba, 3 June 1898. Despite persistent fire from the enemy fleet and fortifications on shore, Lieutenant Hobson distinguished himself by extraordinary courage and carried out this operation at the risk of his own personal safety.

Date of Birth August 17, 1870

Place: Greensboro, Alabama

Date of Death: March 16, 1937

Buried: Arlington National Cemetery,
Arlington, Virginia

CHARETTE, GEORGE, Gunner's Mate First Class

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Gunner's Mate First Class George Charette, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and uncommon valor in action in connection with the sinking of the U.S.S. *Merrimac* at the entrance to the harbor of Santiago de Cuba, 2 June 1898. Despite heavy fire from the

Spanish batteries, Gunner's Mate First Class Charette displayed extraordinary heroism throughout this operation.

Date of Birth: June 6, 1867
 Place: Lowell, Massachusetts
 Date of Death: February 7, 1938
 Buried: Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia

**CLAUSEN, CLAUS KRISTIAN
 RANDOLPH, Coxswain**

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Coxswain Claus Kristian Randolph Clausen, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and uncommon valor in action in connection with the sinking of the U.S.S. *Merrimac* at the entrance to the harbor of Santiago de Cuba, 2 June 1898. Despite heavy fire from the Spanish batteries, Coxswain Clausen displayed extraordinary heroism throughout this operation.

Date of Birth: December 9, 1869
 Place: St. Albans, New York
 Date of Death: December 23, 1958
 Place: U.S. Columbarium Cemetery, Middle Village, New York

**DEIGNAN, OSBORN
 WARREN, Coxswain**

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Coxswain Osborn Warren Deignan, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and uncommon valor in action in connection

with the sinking of the U.S.S. *Merrimac* at the entrance to the harbor of Santiago de Cuba, 2 June 1898. Despite heavy fire from the Spanish batteries, Coxswain Deignan displayed extraordinary heroism throughout this operation.

Date of Birth: February 24, 1877
 Place: Stuart, Iowa
 Date of Death: April 16, 1916
 Buried: Forest Lawn Memorial Park, Glendale, California

KELLY, FRANCIS, Watertender

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Watertender Francis Kelly, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and uncommon valor in action in connection with the sinking of the U.S.S. *Merrimac* at the entrance to the harbor of Santiago de Cuba, 2 June 1898. Despite heavy fire from the Spanish batteries, Watertender Kelly displayed extraordinary heroism throughout this operation.

Date of Birth: July 15, 1860
 Place: Boston, Massachusetts
 Date of Death: May 19, 1938
 Buried: Sandymount Cemetery, Glasgow, Scotland

**MONTAGUE, DANIEL,
 Chief Master At Arms**

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor

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to Chief Master At Arms Daniel Montague, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and uncommon valor in action in connection with the sinking of the U.S.S. *Merrimac* at the entrance to the harbor of Santiago de Cuba, 2 June 1898. Despite heavy fire from the Spanish batteries, Chief Master At Arms Montague displayed extraordinary heroism throughout this operation.

Date of Birth: October 22, 1867
 Place: Wicklow, Ireland
 Date of Death: February 4, 1912
 Buried: U.S. Naval Academy Cemetery, Annapolis, Maryland

**MURPHY, JOHN
 EDWARD, Coxswain**

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Coxswain John Edward Murphy, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and uncommon valor in action in connection with the sinking of the U.S.S. *Merrimac* at the entrance to the harbor of Santiago de Cuba, 2 June 1898. Despite heavy fire from the Spanish batteries, Coxswain Murphy displayed extraordinary heroism throughout this operation.

Date of Birth: May 3, 1869
 Place: Ireland
 Date of Death: April 9, 1941
 Buried: Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery, San Diego, California

**PHILLIPS GEORGE FREDERICK,
 Machinist First Class**

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Machinist First Class George Frederick Phillips, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism and uncommon valor in action in connection with the sinking of the U.S.S. *Merrimac* at the entrance to the harbor of Santiago de Cuba, 2 June 1898. Despite heavy fire from the Spanish batteries, Machinist First Class Phillips displayed extraordinary heroism throughout this operation.

Date of Birth: March 8, 1862
 Place: St. John, New Brunswick, Canada
 Date of Death: June 4, 1904

**DEADLINES FOR
 SUBMISSIONS**

- ✓ MWSA 2022 Winter *Dispatches* magazine releases on 15 January 2022. The deadline for submission is 1 January 2022.
- ✓ MWSA 2022 Spring *Dispatches* magazine releases on 15 April 2022. The deadline for submission is 1 April 2022.
- ✓ MWSA 2022 Fall *Dispatches* magazine releases on 15 October 2022. The deadline for submission is 1 October 2021.

Submit poetry, short stories, fiction, non-fiction—you name it! Although we do our best to accommodate you, please keep submissions around 1500 words.

If you have any questions regarding *Dispatches* magazine please contact *Dispatches* editorial team at:

Dispatches@mwsa.co

Buried: Fernhill Cemetery, St. John, New Brunswick, Canada



The crew of the Merrimac: Top: George Charette; 2nd row, left: Claus Clausen, right: John Murphy; center: Daniel Montague; 4th row, left: Osborn Deignan, right: George Phillips; bottom: Francis Kelly. Naval History and Heritage Command

PART I FEATURED IN 2021 SUMMER ISSUE.



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TOMORROW'S FLIGHT, Pt II

A.T. Roberts

PART I FEATURED IN 2021 SUMMER ISSUE.

ALTHOUGH HE WAS THE CO for only a few weeks, the crew started calling Commander Edward Escobar-Zacarias "Captain EZ," mostly because it was a simple way to truncate his hyphenated last name; but he also heard from the ship's CMC the crew enjoyed his easy-going demeanor and the nickname reflected that. Though he thought it was cheesy, he decided to keep it and was proud to have the admiration of the crew; something he would need if he was leading them to war.

Secretly, Captain EZ was excited about potentially engaging in combat. He always wanted to fight in a real war. Having been in the Navy for over twenty years, the only action he'd seen was as a young lieutenant junior grade, when his neo-frigate was ordered to shell a coastal encampment of Oregonian separatists.

The voyage from San Diego to Hawaii was uneventful, which provided the crew some much-needed time to train with each other as well as with the armada they were steaming with.

Anticipating a serious fight, Captain EZ made his way to CIC to make sure the *Spielberg's* defensive capabilities were ready to go.

"TAO, the PLAN has a robust offensive missile capability, I want to make sure KAGS is up and running to shoot down any incoming threats."

"KAGS, Sir?"

"Please don't tell me my TAO doesn't know his own armament."

The XO intervened, "Sorry, sir. It's not called KAGS anymore."

"What? Why?"

"They changed the name again, just last week. Killer-Awesome-Gun-System was deemed to be too aggressive and masculine. Now it's SCGS. If we refer to it as KAGS anymore we could be put under investigation."

The Skipper repressed the urge to roll his eyes and quickly searched his brain for the words to formulate a question he didn't even care to have answered. "What does SCGS stand for?"

"Super-Cool-Gun-System, sir. The Bureau of Acronyms has determined it to be inoffensive. Plus, studies show it's more appealing to youth who may be considering joining the Navy. Look, its interface is an XBOX 1080 controller."

"Fine. Who's our top fire controlperson?"

The TAO stepped back into the conversation. "That would be FC1 Reese, sir. She's the president of the First-Class Petty Officer Association *and* the Multicultural Committee."

"Fine. Where is she? I'd like to make sure she's up to speed."

"Uh, she's not here right now, sir. She's leading the Zumba class in the hangar bay."

"Well, once Zumba's finished, please send her up to the bridge."

“Copy, sir. Will do.”

“And before we cross into hostile territory, I want to op-check KAGS, um, I mean SCGS... sorry.”

“Will do, sir. But we’ll need your approval to use the backup login to activate weapons hot mode. You see, sir, the primary login method is via retina scan, and, as you know, sir, we’re a little short on extra microchips.”

Captain EZ thought of the blowtorched hole in the bulkhead where his stateroom door used to be. “Good thinking, what’s the backup login method?”

“It’s just a password, sir. As you can see, FC1 has it up on the board so no one forgets it.” The TAO pointed to a giant flat-screen monitor against the side bulkhead of CIC that displayed the password to fire the ship’s primary defensive weapon: **XxR.I.P.Juice-CashxX1234!??**

* * *

The ship was in hostile waters. Threats existed on, above, and below the surface. The crew was on high alert. General Quarters was called relentlessly, sparked by anything ranging from an innocuous blip on a radar screen to disinformation posted on *Worldbook*.

Being a lowly destroyer CO, Captain EZ only received small slivers of the grandiose war strategy. It was called war plan CRAYON. The Army and Air Force, augmented by the Navy, would focus their efforts on the Korean peninsula while the Navy and Marine Corps’ goal was to retake the occupied areas of the P.I., with strategic Air Force assistance. For the time being, Taiwan was a lost cause. The relative lack of service branch interoperability in the strategy made the war feel very

old-world—something Captain EZ had only heard rumors about since it was stricken from the history books, from the evil, “Era of American Totalitarianism.”

The *Spielberg*, call-sign HOLLYWOOD, was in a carrier strike group, acting as a picket ship miles in front to detect and take on any threats—undoubtedly gunning for carriers and vulnerable transport and supply ships.

Though *Hollywood* had neo-frigates and a few littoral warfare ships on their flanks, they were over the horizon, which gave the crew an eerie feeling of being on their own.

Furthermore, the USS *Steven Spielberg* was the only *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyer in the strike group, and every sailor knew they had the most capability and lethality—they would be relied on more than anyone. CRAYON dictated that the *Spielberg*’s strike group would situate itself east of the P.I., where it could commence offensive operations.

Somewhere between Wake Island and what was left of Guam, voices began to squawk on the radio.

“This is *Hulk*. We have air contacts northwest of our position closing in fast.”

“Who’s *Hulk*?” asked the JOOD.

“That’s the USS *The Avengers*,” replied the XO. “Sounds like they might be in trouble.”

Captain EZ, seated in his bridge chair, replied to *Hulk*’s radio chatter, “*Hulk*, this is *Hollywood*. What’s their distance?”

“*Hollywood*, *Hulk*. Contacts are one-two-zero for forty from bullseye bravo. Can you confirm?”

Spielberg’s CIC rep on the bridge quickly

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confirmed, “We got them on radar, sir. Intel says they’re hostile... Looks like the contact split in two, no, now three contacts. Two of them are headed this way!”

“Do we have air support?” asked the Captain. The CIC rep responded, “Negative, sir. The *Ford* is reporting EMALS is down again.”

“Fine,” replied the skipper, “We’ll take them ourselves.” He was actually starting to enjoy what was unfolding. “Tell the TAO I’m headed down to CIC. Make sure our surface-to-air missiles are primed and ready. Plus, have SCGS good-to-go in case they get through our missile screen.”

“Wilco, sir.”

As Captain EZ barged into CIC, the TAO stood by to provide him an update. “Sir, two contacts are coming in fast and low. Their flight profile suggests they’re ship killers. They’re entering our missile range now.”

“Fire away.”

The TAO gave the order to fire, all eyes in CIC fixated on the launch camera screen. The missile bay doors opened and a brilliant flash of light temporarily illuminated the screen. Then came the missile. *Amazing*, thought the captain. A few sailors hooted. Then, the room’s elation suddenly came to an abrupt halt. The missile, no more than one-hundred yards above the ship, tipped over and plummeted into the water, splashing harmlessly in front of the *Spielberg*.

“What the hell was that?” asked the captain.

“I...I don’t know,” responded the TAO. “It must have been a dud!”

“A dud?!”

A radar operator chimed in, “Contacts still closing. They’re almost in weapons release range.”

“Fire another!” demanded Captain EZ.

“Fire number two,” ordered the TAO.

Again, all eyes went toward the screen. Everyone squinted at the flash of light and held their breath until the second shot made its way to where the first one failed.

“Looks like a good shot,” remarked the TAO. “Thank God for tha—”

The missile suddenly veered to the east, in the opposite direction from where the enemy contacts were coming.

“Where the hell’s that one going?!”

“Shit,” said the radar operator. “Looks like they fired missiles. Incoming fast!”

The TAO turned toward the SCGS console, “FC1 Reese, shoot those missiles down when they’re in range.”

“I see them, sir. We’re locked. Firing!”

...nothing happened.

“Sir, I don’t know what’s wrong!”

“Try again!”

FC1 Reese pulled the trigger on her XBOX 1080 controller once more. An error message appeared on the gun’s console:

YOUR PASSWORD EXPIRES AFTER THIRTY DAYS.
PLEASE ENTER YOUR CURRENT PASSWORD,
THEN ENTER A NEW PASSWORD. YOUR NEW
PASSWORD CANNOT BE ANY OF YOUR PREVIOUS
FIVE PASSWORDS AND MUST INCLUDE THE
FOLLOWING:

AT LEAST SIXTEEN CHARACTERS

AT LEAST ONE UPPERCASE CHARACTER

AT LEAST ONE NUMBER

AT LEAST ONE SPECIAL CHARACTER

“Type in a new password, now!” screamed the CO. But it was too late.

Missiles move faster than fire control people’s fingers. Two ship-killing missiles slammed into the side of the USS *Steven Spielberg*, almost breaking her in half. Within seconds it was obvious there was no use trying to save the ship. The abandon ship order was given.

Sailors tried to lower life rafts, others frantically donned life preservers. In a panic or to avoid the flames, others simply leaped overboard. The skipper, however, casually walked back to the bridge, in utter disbelief. There he found the XO still manning his post.

“XO, what are you still doing here?”

“Waiting for you, captain.”

“That’s very admirable of you. But please, get off while you still can.”

“Sir, before I do, I just want to say you were

the best of our last seven COs, and it was an honor serving with you.”

“Thank you. It was an honor serving with you, too. I just wish it could have been for longer.”

“Sir, before I go, we received one last message via *Worldbook* while you were down in CIC. I printed it out and was about to have someone bring it to you just before we were hit. It’s straight from Washington, so it must be important.”

Serene and calm after accepting the loss of his ship and his watery fate, the Skipper replied, “Well, let’s take a look at it.”

COMMANDER EDWARD ESCOBAR-ZACARIAS,

YOU HAVE FAILED TO LOG THE REQUIRED NUMBER OF MONDAY MORNING MEETING MINUTES ON NAVYNET. AN INVESTIGATOR HAS BEEN DISPATCHED TO YOUR SHIP TO LAUNCH A FORMAL INVESTIGATION FOR FAILURE TO LIVE UP TO THE NAVY’S CORE VALUES OF INCLUSION, TRANSPARENCY, AND TOLERANCE.

- COMMANDER, BUREAU OF MEETINGS

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Nancy Panko

This piece is an excerpt from GUIDING MISSAL: FIFTY YEARS. Three Generations of Military Men. One Spirited Prayer Book. The narrator of the novel is a small pocket military missal, a prayer book containing the order of the Catholic Mass. GUIDING MISSAL by Nancy Panko was a 2017 MWSA Silver Medal winner.

DECEMBER 9, 1944

TRUCKS, Train and the SS *Leopoldville*

THE MEN OF THE 289TH were itching to get into the fight. They were leaving the hills and rain of Wales after a month of intense training in the latest field artillery methods. Hundreds of infantry men sat in the back of troop transport trucks, some laughing and joking, others somber and pensive—all uncomfortable on hard wooden benches during the long bumpy ride.

The snaking convoy carrying these souls made its way over narrow country roads to the train station. One-by-one, the canopied trucks unloaded the young soldiers onto the platform.

Boarding the train in an orderly fashion, the men stowed their packs and settled down for the ride to the port of Southampton, England. This leg of their journey was a little more comfortable and certainly warmer than the last one...

As the countryside fell away, the monotonous click of the rails lulled the men of the 289th Cannon Company, 75th Division of the United States Army. Those who couldn't sleep blankly stared out the windows of the train, wondering about the dangers their troop

ship would face in the English Channel from German subs lurking below. It was the third year of World War II and none of these men had seen battle before. They had gone through grueling months of training and were afraid the fighting would end before they even got there.

Through the power of my God-given senses, I was being flooded with their thoughts. I knew they were going to be in the thick of some of the most intense fighting of the European war. I also knew who would not return home alive. It grieved me to have that knowledge, but I was sustained by knowing that our Heavenly Father held most of them in His hands.

I was continually intrigued by George, the man who carried me in his combat jacket pocket. I felt his body heat and had a good sense he was a soldier prepared for battle.

He'd always been rather quiet and also somewhat resentful for being taken away from his family. That resentment had been gradually replaced by an intense feeling of patriotism, partially fostered by being part of a military brotherhood.

George was a good man. I knew he would probably be overwhelmed to discover the extent of divine help he had at his fingertips, within my pages. My task was to act as a conduit for the Holy Spirit to keep him alive, strengthen his faith and safely bring him home.

We had been together since 1942. My pages were dog-eared, my cover worn. The Word of the Lord was a source of guidance and

encouragement for George even before the war. Now, I was very grateful the two of us were in this together.

Cannon Company disembarked the crowded train to board yet another mode of cramped transportation to Europe, the SS *Leopoldville*. The eager warriors had trained to become a tightly knit group, totally in-sync with each other. They were ready for battle. The sooner the war was over, the sooner they could go home.

When the converted luxury ship left Southampton, England to cross the English Channel bound for Le Havre, France, she was filled to capacity with fresh American soldiers ready to fill the thinning ranks of the 289th Cannon Company created by the men killed or wounded in action.

Due to rough seas, the ship was unable to

dock at the pier at Le Havre. Consequently, a decision was made to unload the troops onto landing craft (LC) and take them ashore, one boatload at a time.

Large swells tossed the two ships about as the men descended a rope network hanging on the side of the *Leopoldville*. A few made it onto the LC before some of the lines lashing the two craft together broke loose. In increasingly heavy seas, the flailing LC rose up on the waves, repeatedly crashing into the side of the larger ship.

George was the only man left hanging on the swinging ropes. He had been unable to scramble back up to safety. I was in his jacket pocket. We both instinctively sensed danger. The partly untethered LC pulled away as we dangled there.

Troops on the upper deck who were waiting to descend watched as the LC rose on a swell, poised to crash into the side of the *Leopoldville*.

They yelled in unison, "Look out!"

Desperately needing a miracle, George spotted an open deck and positioned himself on the edge of the ropes parallel to it. Watching the LC rise and move toward him in slow motion, he knew he had to act. There was no question he'd be crushed to death unless he could get himself onto the deck. Gathering all his strength, George swung himself free of the ropes. With seventy pounds of equipment on his back, he hurled himself into the opening as the LC smashed into the side of the ship. A loud cheer erupted from the soldiers watching from the deck above.

My God is an awesome God! Thank you, Lord, for this burst of agility.

Continued on page 24

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Continued from page 23

Because of George's narrow escape, Command curtailed further disembarkation until the seas were calm enough to dock at the pier. The Army was already short of combat-ready troops and the senior officers were not about to unnecessarily lose a single man.

Sprawled on the deck, George crossed himself. Oddly, he quoted his Irish mother-in-law as he prayed aloud, "Thank you, Lord, for savin' me sorry arse."

George looked up to get his bearings and saw his buddy Harold gripping the railing to steady himself. Harold offered him a hand.

"Jeez, George, that was somethin'! You must've had some divine help." Harold shook his head in amazement. "I ran down here when I saw the LC break loose. Got here in time to see what happened."

Slipping out of his pack, George stretched his legs out then reached for Harold's hand to pull himself up. Using the railing to steady himself, he nodded. "Harold, you're right about divine help. I swear I felt the hand of God on me. I'm in good shape but couldn't have made that jump on my own."

A large wave thoroughly doused the two men at the railing.

"Let's get inside," George hollered to Harold. He grabbed his pack and the two of them lurched the short distance for the door leading to an interior hallway.

Sheltered inside the ship, Harold wiped the salt water out of his eyes and dried his hands on his combat jacket across his well-muscled torso. "Nothin' gets a guy in shape like the Army."

"This is true. But, playin' ball got me in shape even before I was drafted." George also wiped his face with his hands. The sea spray burned his eyes.

Harold led the way to the stairwell. "Let's sit and catch our breath. What kind of ball did you play, George?" The men braced themselves as the ship pitched and rolled.

"Baseball. Ten years in American Legion ball 'til I was seventeen." He looked sideways at Harold before delivering the grand slam. "Then I had a chance to try out for the Boston Red Sox farm team."

Harold's eyebrows lifted in surprise. "What position?"

"Shortstop or third base."

"Did you make it?"

"Yes I did—"

Harold interrupted. "Holy mackerel, George! How long did you play on the farm team?"

"I was with the Sox for three years. I was in great shape, my batting was consistent, and I was a fast runner. They wanted me to move up."

"What?" shrieked Harold. "Move up? To the majors? For the Red Sox? Did you?"

"Nah, my mom wouldn't let me." George wiped his wet face again.



“Whaddya mean, she wouldn’t let you?” Harold was beside himself. The ship rolled again and so did his stomach.

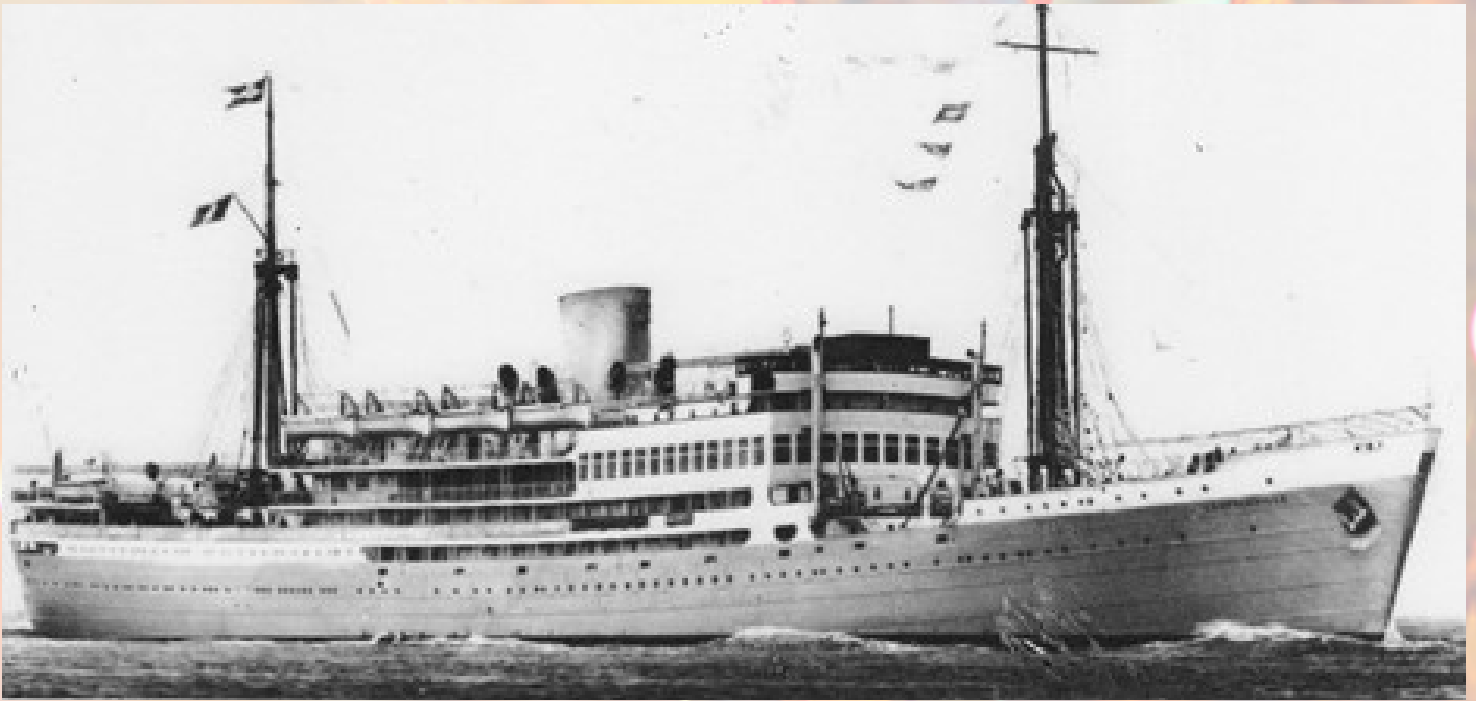
“When your Russian mother says, ‘Nyet!’ you listen.” Another wave hit the ship and knocked them both against the bulkhead. “We gotta get to the upper deck, Harold. While we’re here, I’ve got some great *kolache* I smuggled in my pack.”

“What the heck is kolache?”

“It’s good stuff, that’s what it is.” George fished the sweet flaky contraband wrapped in

waxed paper out of a hiding place in his pack. They continued talking baseball and munching on the pastries. It certainly took their minds off the disembarkation attempt and the war they’d be fighting in the months ahead.

Twelve days after the Cannon Company disembarked from the SS *Leopoldville*, she was sunk in the English Channel by a German torpedo, with a loss of over eight hundred men from the 66th Infantry Division.



MEET JACK WOODVILLE LONDON

Bob Doerr

I CONTINUE TO BE IMPRESSED with the writing talents of our MWSA members, and this year's award presentations only strengthened my high regard for the quality of their written works. In addition to their writing, we fortunately have a fair number of members who step forward and volunteer to help MWSA in a variety of ways. While we do have the President's Award to highlight the volunteer efforts of one member each year, over time we sometimes forget the small cadre of members who have given so much of their time for many, many years.

Over the next year or so, I intend to highlight a few of these very important, long term MWSA members. My goal is to allow our membership to know more about these MWSA contributors, or all-stars. Two or three come to mind right away, but the person I would like to highlight in this article is our very own Jack Woodville London. Many of you know him as the mastermind behind our education efforts and the online zoom sessions he has spearheaded throughout the past year.

I joined MWSA in 2010, and Jack was already a key contributor back then—deeply involved with our early WRITE YOUR STORY classes, presenting at conferences, mentoring, and even volunteering to be on the MWSA Board. Per a request from MWSA, Jack wrote *A Novel Approach*, a “how to write” book we still use as a handout at our WRITE YOUR STORY classes.

In 2018, Jack volunteered to represent MWSA at no cost to us at the Memorial Service for the 100th Anniversary of the Armistice of WWI



at the Meuse Argonne cemetery in France.

So, by now you should get the point. For well over a decade, Jack's been deeply involved in helping MWSA become a better organization for its members, but who is he? Well, I dug around online and was able to pick up a few things I'd like to share:

A graduate of the University of Texas Law School and a former captain in the US Army Quartermaster Corps, Jack and his wife, Alice live in Austin. His publishing credits date back to 1970, when he was elected managing editor of the University of Texas International Law Journal. Since then, he has authored a long list of technical articles and papers on evidence, trial and courtroom procedure, aviation law, and product liability law. He has spoken at legal programs throughout the United States and in England, Scotland, Mexico, and Canada.

The novelist within him, delayed while he rose

in the legal profession and until his children were grown, was always restless.

In the summer of 2003, Jack put aside legal writing to enroll in the prestigious writing school of St. Céré, France. He graduated in the class that included acclaimed Canadian playwright Leeann Minogue and Germaine Stafford, winner of the Debut Dagger Award.

His *French Letters* series of novels are praised for their meticulous historical research and ability to capture the language, attitudes, and moral culture of their setting in prose described by reviewers as, ‘beautiful, but not pretentious.’

French Letters: Virginia’s War, the first of three novels in the series, was released to uncommon critical acclaim in 2009. It was a finalist for “Best Novel of the South,” an award given by the Anderson Foundation in honor of Willie Morris, the author and teacher who was John Grisham’s Mentor.

The second novel in the series, *French Letters: Engaged in War*, released September

14, 2010 won Jack the MWSA Author of the Year Award. Jack was also a winner of the “Indie Excellence Award” in 2013.

The third novel in the series, *French Letters: Children of a Good War*, published in November 2018, won the Foreword Review Gold Medal for best novel of the year and was featured in Kirkus Reviews Best Indie Fiction of 2018,

From his days as a U.S. Army quartermaster officer to the lectures he now gives, London has spent much of his life exploring a deep interest in World War II and its effects on the home front—particularly small towns. Born out of that deep interest is THE LETTER PROJECT, a nationwide project to collect, dust off, and showcase letters to and from veterans of all wars.

Jack is indeed a top-notch writer and a key player on MWSA’s team.



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.

A CASUALTY OF THE SPIRIT

Rona Simmons

A CASUALTY OF THE SPIRIT: PTSD IN HISTORY IN LITERATURE AND IN ALL OF US
SEPTEMBER 20, 2021



IN THE WAKE OF THE United States military's withdrawal from Afghanistan, mainstream and social media were all consumed with the news. A suicide bombing that resulted in the deaths of thirteen of our soldiers and marines. Reports of our abandonment of citizens and allies. Images of terrorists celebrating America's defeat.

The result, for untold numbers of those who served in the Afghanistan War, as well as the wars in Iraq and Vietnam, reportedly ripped the scab from barely healed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) wounds. But this time, Americans everywhere, even war-weary civilians who were ready for the difficult and win-less twenty-year war to end, were casualties. They suffered alongside those who served. Their malady? A casualty of the spirit—as PTSD was once known.

Accounts of the disorder have peppered literature throughout history, although referred to as shell shock, combat stress, battle fatigue, or war neurosis, until the psychological wounds were given the name

“post-traumatic stress disorder” in the 1980s during the post-Vietnam War era.

There are references in the Bible (DEUTERONOMY 20:1—20:8 of the King James version) that address the fearful and faint-hearted soldiers, acknowledging the need to remove them from battle.

When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God is with thee...

And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart.

Shakespeare addressed the affliction in multiple works. One of the more explicit is found in *Henry IV* when Lady Percy speaks to her husband Hotspur about his mental state as he plans to go (back) to war.

Tell me, sweet lord, what is't that takes from thee? Thy stomach, pleasure and thy golden sleep? Why dost thou bend thine eyes upon the earth? And start so often when thou sit'st alone? Why hast thou lost the fresh blood in thy cheeks? And given my treasures and my rights of thee to thick-eyed musing and curst melancholy?

But it would take the tales of the horrors of trench warfare and of soldiers being gassed during World War I to bring combat stress to the fore.

In Eric Maria Remarque's semi auto-biographical novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Paul Bäumer—a German soldier—described the destruction he witnessed in the war and its effects on him and the men around him. Remarque writes,

This book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped shells, were destroyed by the war.

And soon the children and grandchildren of the Great War found themselves victims of the same debilitating stress. During World War II, depending on the theater of operation, from twenty to forty percent of the casualties were attributed to battle fatigue—the higher percentages most often found in the Pacific theater. Those who slogged through the damp jungles and razor-edged, hip-high grass of Guadalcanal and climbed the mountainous terrain of Okinawa recount horrific tales of incidents of PTSD. Suicides among the soldiers were not uncommon.

Some of the division grew so hardened to comrades committing suicide that they used the grimmest of black humor as a defensive mechanism...

Bill Sloan wrote in *Brotherhood of Heroes: The Marines at Peleliu, 1944*.

It's getting so they won't even let a guy out of here that way without a pass.

“Flak happy” was another term for PTSD. The word FLAK was an acronym derived from the long and unpronounceable German *fliegerabwehrkanone*, the anti-aircraft guns used in the field of battle.

In Europe, hundreds of army air force fighter and bomber crews suffered combat fatigue from flying daily through skies filled with the deadly bursting shells of anti-aircraft fire or into the face of oncoming German fighter aircraft of the *Luftwaffe*. Many removed themselves from combat or were removed from flying status.

The actual number is hard, if not impossible, to find as flight surgeons were known to record the airman's status as transferred or “returned to the zone of the interior” without further elaboration. One of those airmen is the subject of my upcoming work, *A Gathering of Men* (to be released in 2022); and the book's appendix contains brief histories of airmen with “RFS” designations. Some withdrew before departing the United States. The mere thought of the terror they would face became insurmountable. Others were grounded after their first flight, or their tenth, or their twentieth. PTSD is as individual as the individual themselves.

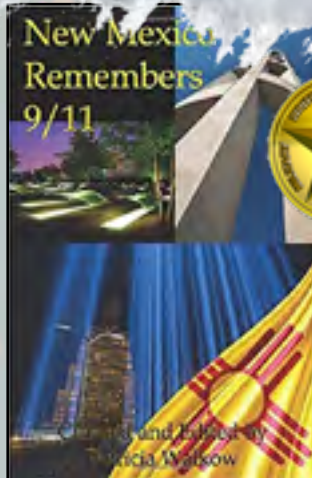
Today the condition is recognized. Treatments are available that have had more success than those in the past. Our young men and women have selflessly served in combat and faced what were unfathomable horrors. We can offer our condolences to the families of the fallen and share our disappointment at the failure of our nation in this war. And we can hope time will help us come to terms with the legacy of our years in Afghanistan and heal the wounds of our veterans.

Rona Simmons is a freelance writer and author of WWII fiction and nonfiction. Her book, *The Other Veterans of World War II* was awarded a Gold Medal (History) by the MWSA for the 2021 Season. Her latest work, *A Gathering of Men* will be released in February 2022.

2021 MWSA BOOK AWARDS

Awards Committee

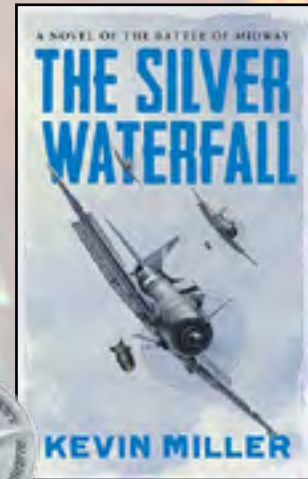
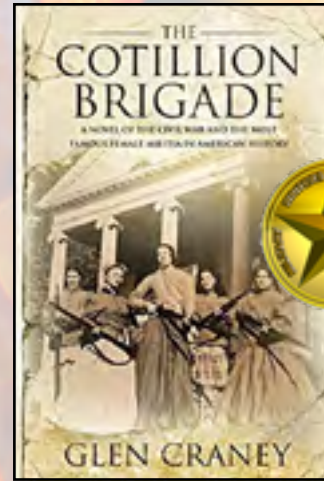
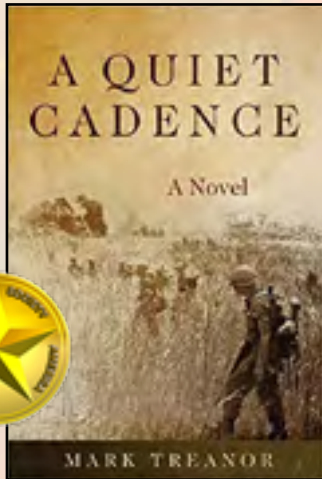
ANTHOLOGY



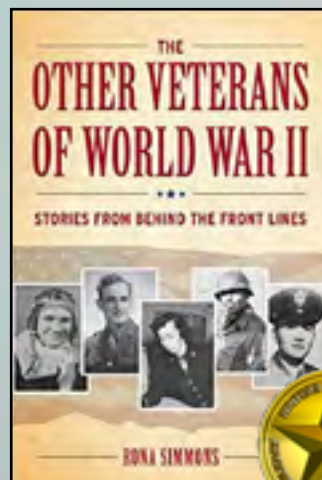
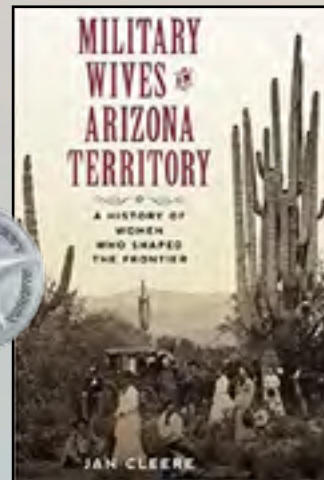
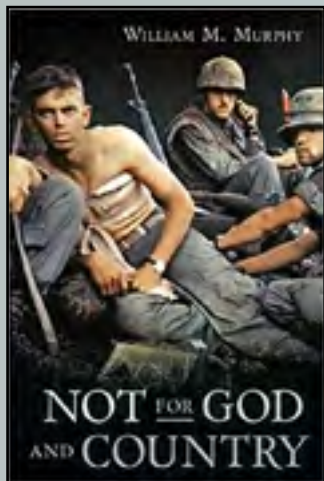
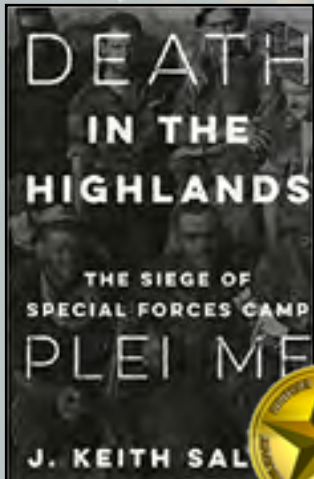
GRAPHIC NOVEL



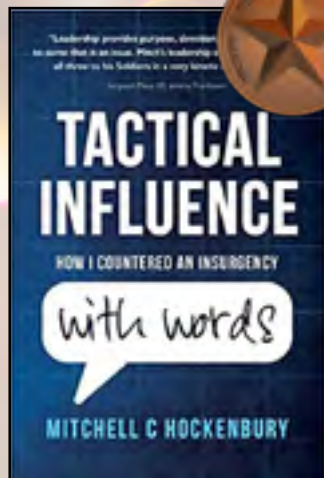
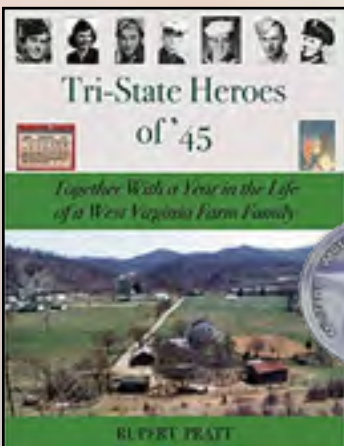
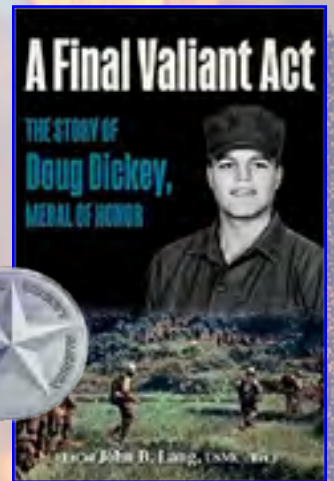
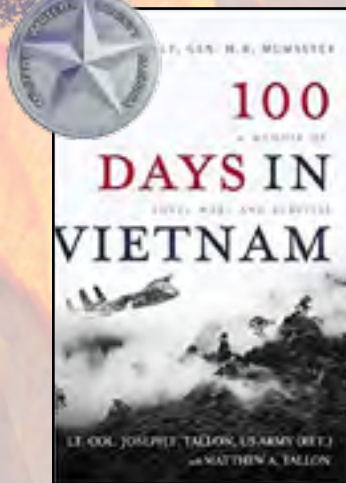
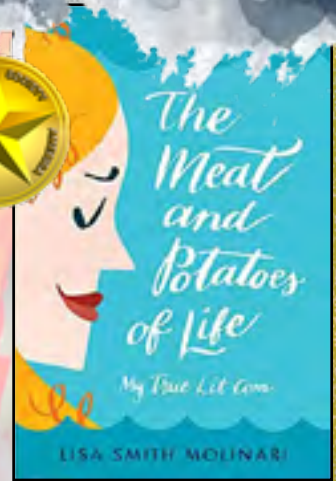
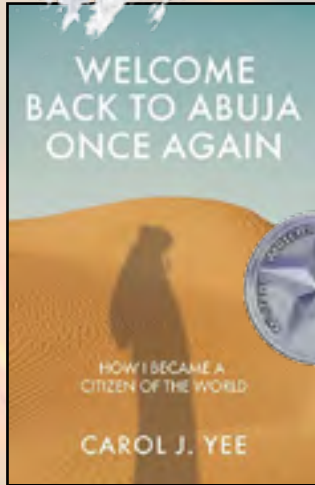
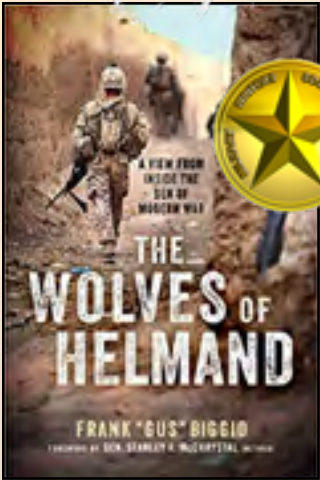
HISTORICAL FICTION



HISTORY



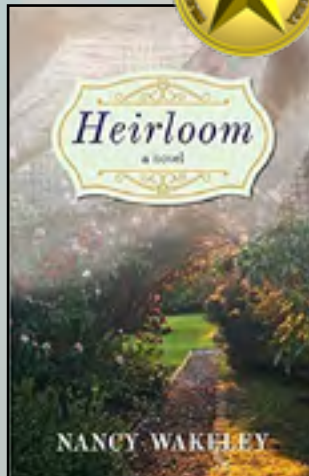
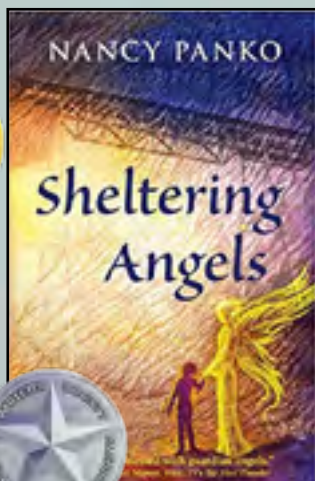
MEMOIR/BIOGRAPHY



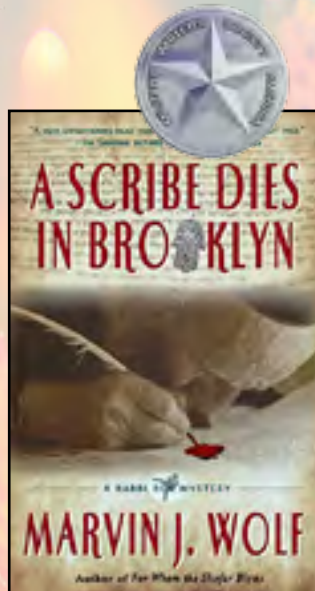
HOW TO/BUSINESS/ SELF HELP



LITERARY FICTION



MYSTERY/THRILLER



PICTURE BOOK



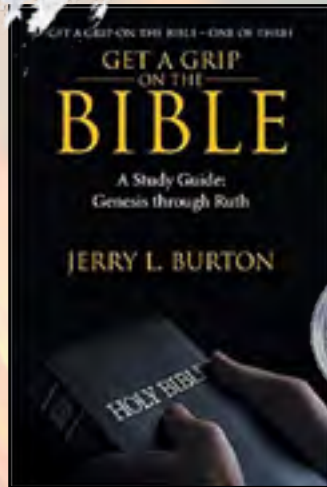
YOUNG ADULT



POETRY BOOK



RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL



ROMANCE



MWSA SCHOLARSHIP

Bob Doerr

Important Announcement

THE WILLIAM “REV. BILL” MCDONALD STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP

The Military Writers Society of America is proud to introduce a new program in support of our mission and to provide yet one more benefit to our members.

This new Scholarship Program begins this month, October 2021.

Who is eligible? The William “Rev. Bill” McDonald Scholarship is open to high school 11th and 12th graders of Active/Retired Military personnel who are sponsored by an active member of MWSA in good standing.

All MWSA members are requested to consider sponsoring an 11th or 12th grade student whose intention is to continue their education. Any active member in good standing may sponsor a student. The application process is simple:

✓ Step one: provide the student’s name, the name of the high school that they are attending, and the goal the sponsored student wishes to pursue, if known/selected.

✓ Step two: The student must write a paper of a minimum of 500 and maximum of 1,000 words on the subject announced by MWSA. The sponsor will inform the student of the requirements, and it is the sponsor who will forward the student’s work to Jim Greenwald, MWSA Scholarship Chair. All work must be the sole work of the student. A member may only sponsor one student each year.

A panel of three judges will score each submission and forward the result to the Scholarship Chair. Scores will be compiled and a decision made as to the winner by the Chair and three judges.

The theme/title of the paper will change each year. For 2022 it will be, “The Impact the Afghanistan War Has Had on My Family and Me”.

Dates to remember: Applications provided to MWSA by the student’s sponsor must arrive by email to Jim Greenwald jimwritespoetry@gmail.com no later than November 15th to be eligible. Entries will be accepted from November 15 until January 31, and the winner will be announced no later than April 1, 2022.



MWSA MEMBER BENEFIT: BETA READER FORUM

John Cathcart

AS 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!





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



