

# DISPATCHES

MILITARY  
WRITERS  
SOCIETY OF  
AMERICA

Rescuing History One Story at a Time  
[www.MWSADispatches.com](http://www.MWSADispatches.com)

SPRING 2022



REGISTER NOW  
MWSA 2022  
CONFERENCE  
Pg 25



## FROM THE EDITOR

*Sandra Miller Linhart*

**C**AN YOU FEEL IT? SPRING is in the air! Well, maybe not where I am currently standing this mid-April day. It's windy and 18F outside. My... *nose* is freezing off, to put it nicely.

I need something from you. Yes, *you*.

I need your input. Not a review or comment on how well/unwell you think I'm doing, although that might be fun. An original article/story, a scan of your original artwork, an original poem or two, or an original photograph...or six.

I know our MWSA community is chock-full of talent just waiting to be shared.

Talents come in all forms. I would really love to put your stories/thoughts (1500 words or less), your poetry, your images—any and all of it—between these pages for every member to enjoy.

We want to celebrate **YOU**. And your healing (if that applies). Rev Bill started MWSA as a tool for healing through art. Art doesn't have to be "perfect"—what is that, anyway? No such thing. It just has to be made available to me before the 1st of July—which is the deadline for the 2022 Summer *Dispatches* magazine.

So, get to it. You've no excuse.

In Joy & Enjoy!

## DISPATCHES REGULARS

COLUMNIST/PRESIDENT ~ BOB DOERR

FEATURE WRITER ~ GARY ZELINSKI

FEATURE WRITER ~ RONA SIMMONS

FEATURE WRITER ~ JOHN CATHCART

FEATURE WRITER ~ JORGE TORRENTE

EDITOR/L&D ~ SANDRA LINHART



## CONTENTS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE ~ DOERR, 3

UNTOLD STORIES ~ SIMMONS, 4

VETERANS WORKSHOP ~ MWSA, 6

RECOMMENDED READING LIST ~ DOERR, 7

LEARNING TO LEAD ~ ZELINSKI, 8

MEET VALERIE ORMOND ~ DOERR, 12

FIGHT, FLIGHT, OR FREEZE ~ ENDERLE, 13

A CONVO w/ROBIN ROBERTS ~ MWSA, 14

TARD ~ STAECKER, 16

MWSA FACEBOOK PAGE ~ MWSA, 17

WAR STORY #12 ~ ZELINSKI, 18

A CONVO w/BILL HAMILTON ~ MWSA, 22

MWSA ANNUAL CONFERENCE ~ MWSA, 25

A CONVO w/JOHN STOEFFLER ~ MWSA, 26

SWIFT, SILENT, COLD, & LETHAL ~ TORRENTE, 28

MWSA MARCH NEWS BLAST ~ DOERR, 31



### MWSA LEADERSHIP

Founder ~ William McDonald  
 President ~ Bob Doerr  
 Vice President ~ jim greenwald  
 Secretary ~ Ruth Crocker (Interim)  
 Treasurer ~ Hugh Simpson

### DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE

Joseph Badal  
 Zita Ballinger Fletcher  
 Jack Woodville London  
 Joan Ramirez

### COMMITTEES

#### FINANCE

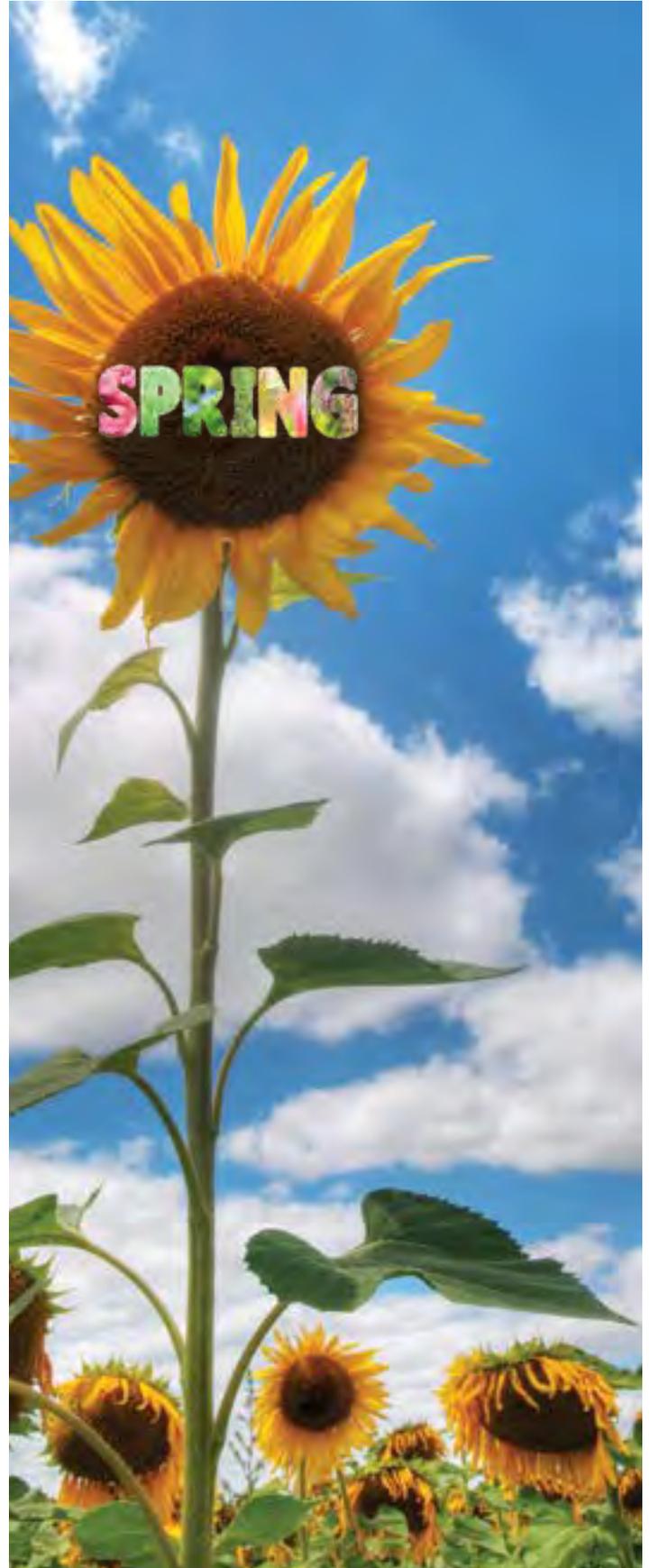
Hugh Simpson ~ Chair  
 JR Reddig  
 jim greenwald

#### AWARDS

Betsy Beard  
 John Cathcart  
 Rob Ballister  
 Barb Evenson

#### MEMBERSHIP

Betsy Beard



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*Bob Doerr*

AS THE WORLD EMERGES FROM the pandemic, my wife and I recently discussed its impact on our own family. Most of our family—brothers, sisters, our children, their children, the various “children’s children”—caught Covid at some time during the past two years. Fortunately, the virus’s impact on all was minimal.

Sitting down to write this message, I started thinking about MWSA, and the impact the pandemic had on us. Not on the health of our individual members, but its impact on the organization. There were some obvious consequences of the virus: in-person conferences were canceled two years in a row, our outreach efforts had to be reined in, our WRITE YOUR STORY classes shut down, but at least we learned how to function on *Zoom*.

Yet we did improve as an organization. During this time of “social” distancing, and for the first time, MWSA presented several online, free classes on various aspects of writing to our membership. My thanks to Jack London for spearheading this effort. Being involved in these, I have discovered (what should have already been obvious) that we have a number of extremely talented members.



Our finances have strengthened and our accounting system has improved—thank you, Hugh Simpson. Our membership has actually grown and its management better than ever. Thank you, Betsy Beard. Finally, we may set a new record this year on the number of books submitted and reviewed for our book awards program. If so, this will likely lead to more medals handed out to our members.

We published an anthology, and due to public demand are creating a standing anthology/collection committee. We anticipate publishing another anthology in 2023.

Things are looking up! See you in New Orleans. ~ Bob Doerr

## SEARCHING FOR UNTOLD STORIES

*A Personal Interview with Rona Simmons*

**G**EORGIA AUTHOR, RONA SIMMONS, HAS had a lifelong interest in history, specifically in World War II history. She confesses, “it is probably more accurate to call my interest an addiction than an obsession.”

But, she comes by it honestly. Her father was a World War II fighter pilot who escorted bombers from North Africa to their targets in southeastern Europe in 1944. Recognizing that many of her generation know little about their family members’ service, she is thankful her father lived long enough to share his memories of the war.

She recorded his story for her siblings and future generations of the Simmons family. Then, she began searching for other veterans’ untold stories.

In 2016, she interviewed twenty World War II veterans whom she convinced to not only tell her about their experiences but allow her to publish their stories. They are included in what became her award-winning book, *The Other Veterans of World War II: Stories From Behind the Front Lines*. For many, that achievement would be enough.

Soon, however, Rona and her husband turned their attention to another veteran: her father-in-law, Lieutenant Harry



Bethea. He was a World War II B-17 bomber pilot but had died in 1964, leaving behind only a handful of grainy photos and a manila folder with a document listing his dates of service.

“About all we knew,” Rona says, “was that Bethea flew from Thorpe Abbots, one of the 150 American wartime airfields in England.” Thorpe Abbots, they discovered, was home to the well-known 100th Bomb Squadron, nicknamed the “Bloody 100th” for the high casualty rate they sustained. Flying missions from Thorpe Abbots deep into Germany in 1944 meant that Bethea would have witnessed some of the worst of the war.

The day-in and day-out missions eventually took their toll. After completing twenty-one missions of the thirty-five the military required, Bethea was removed from flying status and returned to the US.

The reasons for not completing his tour are lost to history (destroyed in the 1973 St. Louis records administration fire or protected by wartime medical record privacy). But Rona and her husband refused to give up and instead searched for surviving members of Bethea’s crew or their family members.

Luck brought them to Carl Dobbins, Ed Skapin, Garnet Symington, and Leonard Aubert—the nephew of Leonard Coleman, Bethea’s co-pilot.

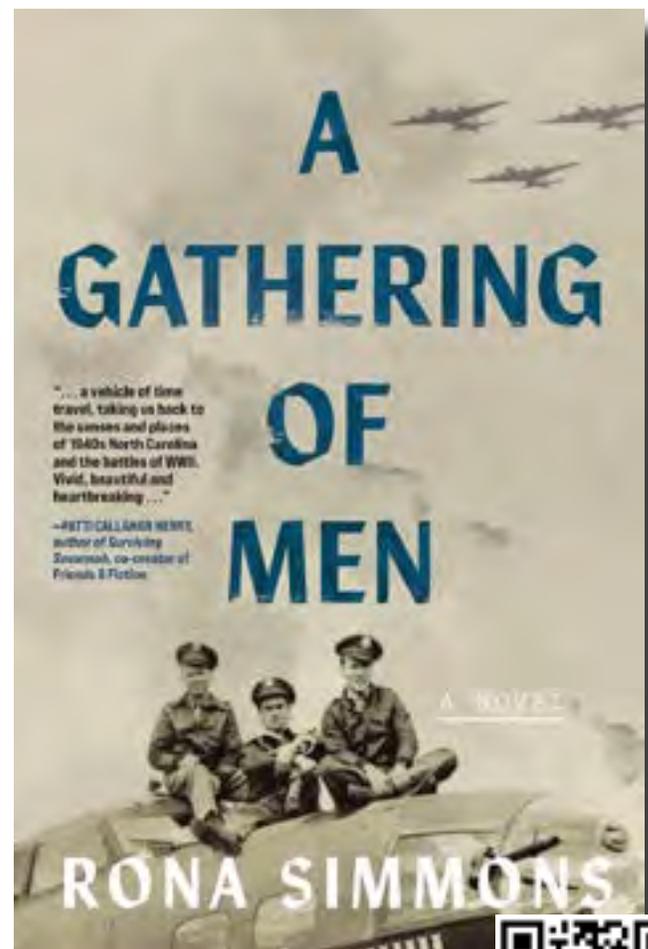
After a series of phone calls and then reading the letters, diaries, and memoirs the veterans shared, Rona reconstructed Bethea’s story. The not uncommon, but rarely discussed, situation is told in her book, *A Gathering of Men*, released February 2022.

Rona says the tale reveals how yet another “band of brothers” honored their fellow airman. To a man, those who knew Bethea avoided any discussion of what might have caused his premature return and chose instead to speak of the man they knew as their friend—a skilled and determined pilot.

Bethea received a Distinguished Flying Cross for returning his heavily damaged plane home on his last mission and, after

recuperating, he returned to the skies—that time in the Pacific. That story, Rona believes, proved to be a better story than what might have happened on one flight to one pilot and to the dozens of others like him.

Rona says we owe them a debt of gratitude for what they did. So, today, she is back in the library and back online, searching for more as yet untold stories.





*FREE Military Writers Society of America  
(MWSA) Workshop for veterans and military  
members*

# VETERANS WRITE YOUR STORY

AWARD-WINNING WRITERS WILL COVER  
TOPICS INCLUDING STORYTELLING,  
CHARACTERS, DIALOGUE, EDITING, AND  
MORE. BEGIN THE PROCESS OF TELLING  
YOUR STORY - FICTION OR NON-FICTION.

AUG. 25, 2022 | 9:00 AM - 3:15 PM | NEW ORLEANS  
VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA) MEDICAL CENTER,  
2400 CANAL ST., PANAM BLDG. RM. 1Q115

Registration required at [ves4mwsa822@gmail.com](mailto:ves4mwsa822@gmail.com). Hurry, limited slots  
available! Registration includes complimentary lunch.

## MWSA 2022 SPRING RECOMMENDED READING

*Bob Doerr*

THE MILITARY WRITERS SOCIETY OF AMERICA (MWSA) is an organization of hundreds of writers, poets, and artists drawn together by a common bond of military service. One purpose of our Society is to review the written works of our members. The books listed below reflect a portion of those books reviewed so far this year and constitutes MWSA's 2022 Spring Recommended Reading List:

*A Gathering of Men* ~ by Rona Simmons

*The Carnevale Conspiracy* ~ by Joseph Badal

*Into The Cauldron* ~ by Glenn Starkey

*LZ Sitting Duck, The Fight For FSB Argonne* ~ by John Arsenault, LtCol USMC(ret)

*Captain of the Tides, Gunner Morgan* ~ by Charles D. Morgan, Jacque Hillman

*Voices From The Civil War* ~ by George J. Bryjak

*Mercy's Heroes; The Fight for Human Dignity in the Slums of Bangkok* ~ by Tom Crowley

*Return to Saigon* ~ by Larry Duthie

*The Girls Who Stepped Out of Line* ~ by Maj Gen Mari K. Eder

*Truly Are the Free* ~ by Jeffrey K. Walker

*Strike Hard and Expect No Mercy* ~ by Galen Peterson

*Sapphire Pavilion* ~ by David E. Grogan

*The Hidden Key* ~ by David E. Grogan

*Fighting Viet Cong in the Rung Sat* ~ by Bob Worthington

*Just Another Day in Vietnam* ~ by Col (Ret) Keith M. Nightingale

*Key to Command* ~ by Michael Godbout

*Uprooted: A Modern Odyssey* ~ by Allen Wittenborn

*War During Peace: A Strategy for Defeat* ~ by William Hamilton, Ph.D.

*Dead Men Flying, A Remembrance* ~ by Mike "Mule" Mullane

*No Hero's Welcome* ~ by Jeffrey K. Walker

*When Heroes Flew: The Shangri-la Raiders* ~ by H. W. "Buzz" Bernard

As the weather improves, you may encounter a lot of pressure to go work in the yard or go back to the office. Wouldn't it be better to find a quiet place to hide out and read a good book? If you're like me and are looking for one, the list above would be a great place to start. More info about these books and authors can be found at [www.mwsadispatches.com](http://www.mwsadispatches.com)

## LEARNING TO LEAD, PT 1

Gary Zelinski

Gary B. Zelinski served twenty-two years on active duty in the U.S.A.F. This is one recollection from his upcoming memoir, **Aim High. A Love Story.**

\* \* \*

*First off, remember everything's your fault.*

**D**URING OUR SIX YEARS IN Omaha at Strategic Air Command Headquarters, I learned from my opportunities to manage people, make mistakes, and then manage even more people. I learned far more from these experiences than all the schooling I received.

Most of my squadron commanders were excellent leaders and great role models. In our six years in Omaha, I had six of them. Some were outspoken and loud while others were downright shy. I learned from each of them. I learned that leadership wasn't a personality contest. Leadership was a commitment and dedication to the mission and the folks in your charge.

My new job as an Intelligence Officer would require a very "high" security clearance. This did not come overnight. I had to fill out a ten-page questionnaire with circles and arrows on the back. A criminal background check and credit history were mandatory. My photograph taken and my fingerprints recorded.



I filled out my answers to a host of questions. These questions also covered the Communist Party and drugs. Anyway, it would take ten months for my clearance to come through. During that time, I learned a lot about leadership.

During the ten months of waiting for my clearance, my time was spent sitting next to the largest film processing operation in the DoD. I wasn't even allowed through the door.

My first job as a newly minted second lieutenant was to manage a small accounting section of twelve to fifteen young airmen. Young "airwomen" was more like it. The majority of the workers

were young female enlisted troops. The toxic chemicals of the photo lab were deemed to be unsafe for expectant mothers. So, there I was, leading a gaggle of young mothers-to-be. Many were thankful to have a desk job and sit down for their shift, but most wanted to be back in the lab at their real job. They were upset at being pulled out of the lab and singled out for special treatment.

My section's job was to account for the material and expenses of all the work from the lab. We managed a budget of millions of dollars with byzantine accounting practices. It defied logic and was difficult to learn. To this day, I am thankful I was in management and not the one with the abacus.

Was I supposed to learn the Airmen's names? Wasn't it the master sergeant's job to handle all that 'people' stuff? Besides, by the time you did start to recognize them, they'd up and had their babies, and you'd have to start all over again.

Once the pregnant airmen had their babies and took a few weeks off, they were deemed safe to return to the lab. They no longer needed the non-lab job I was tasked to lead. Luckily for me, there seemed to be no end to the supply of pregnant young airmen to populate my section. At times, it felt like a revolving door. "Paid family leave, maternity leave, etc." were merely concepts at that time. Most of the request



for leave I processed were due to "medical conditions" vice any insightful policy.

"Medical conditions" because a doctor could write a duty excuse for any length of time. Family leave, maternity leave were just social experiments in the early 80s.

The section superintendent was a master sergeant named Cecil Cutler. Cecil was always there to listen to the complaints of the troops and solve any "issue" that came up. Cecil had the happiest demeanor of anyone I'd ever met. He came in with a story that made you laugh and then you

*Continued on page 10*

*Continued from page 9*

had to cry to stop your laughing. He ended every working day by telling everyone to “...cool your pencils. Go home everyone, big day tomorrow. People are counting on it! Get it?”

Cecil had keen radar. He knew when he was being played and when he needed to be the boss.

Once, Master Sergeant Cutler and I were called to report the next morning for a random drug test. Everyone was subject to these tests. At that time marijuana was thought to be a direct link to heroin and slipping secrets to the enemy. Anyway, Cecil and I showed up around seven at the base hospital for the famous “pee in the cup” ritual.



We stood in line around twenty strong, together with Airmen Basics through major. I didn’t know at the time, but it made sense, colonels and above had their own special room to pee. Rumor was, they were old and needed to sit down.

Cecil set his cup down on the counter. The counter now had a dozen or so sample cups full of urine. Cecil looked at all the specimen jars.

“Hey, this one looks a little light.” Cecil squarely looked at the nurse and grabbed what I thought was a random cup of urine and proceeded to drink it. I swear one or two people fainted. The nurse was none too happy.

I knew something was amiss when the nurse said, “Damn you, Cecil, stop scaring the airmen!”

Apparently, that was one of Cecil’s favorite jokes—a sample cup full of apple juice is all that’s required to make some people happy.

“So, what’s my job Cecil?” I asked after a few months.

Cecil replied. “First off, remember everything’s your fault.”

With authority comes responsibility and accountability. If our section failed, nobody would care if the superintendent did his job or the troops did or didn’t do theirs.

So, for the next several months, I kept my head down. While Cecil “handled”

the day-to-day issues, I focused on the things not seen—supplies, training, better efficiency reports. I guess I really did keep my head down.

Nobody seemed to know or care if I came or went. Although my desk was in the same large room, I rarely spoke to anyone and never in public, after all, that was Cecil's job.

Then one day, the Wing Commander made a surprise visit. The “full bird colonel” made the four-mile drive in his staff car just to walk through my section. I nervously called the room to attention. I proceeded to introduce the commander to the young women in my section. Now... a random 2LT was introducing people with whom he rarely spoke to the big, big boss—the *Boss* whose picture was on the wall?

As we walked from desk to desk, it seemed the colonel knew the airmen better. He called them by their first names, knew their due dates, and if there were young siblings at home.

At the end of his visit, he turned to the room and said congratulations. “No other

section in the entire wing has as many promotions as you. Great work everyone. Thank you.”

With that, the Commander left.

I had focused on the invisible stuff. I focused on supplies, training, and efficiency reports. I focused on writing more accurate efficiency reports for the young airmen who worked for me. I also took additional steps and attached a handwritten index card to each efficiency report with more personal details.

I wanted the “chain” to know how hard those folks were working and who they were, as airmen. I guess it worked. The Chain of Command knew the young women of my section and, to their surprise, I knew them, too.

So, six months after receiving my commission, I lost my first and last names. I was then only “Sir” or “Lieutenant”.



## MEET VALERIE ORMOND

*Bob Doerr*

**I**N THIS THIRD ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTING MWSA “All Stars,” I would like to introduce everyone to Valerie Ormond.

Valerie (AKA Val) has been a member of MWSA for over a decade, and has been working behind the scenes ever since joining, making MWSA a better organization.

She has served on our Board of Directors, helped write our current by-laws, volunteered to review books for MWSA, and has written our bid proposals when we have looked for outside contract support.

Val has been the driving force behind our outreach program, has taught at several of our WRITE YOUR STORY classes, and has spearheaded our Ambassador program.

She helped identify and establish relationships with many other non-profits with missions similar to MWSA. She is a past PRESIDENT’S AWARD recipient and has been a finalist for our WRITER OF THE YEAR award and FOUNDER’S AWARD. She continues to willingly help MWSA whenever and wherever she can.

She has also been a major factor in the successes of several of our conferences. I say factor and not solely responsible, because she had the foresight to bring to the conferences her most talented, tech



savvy, and willing co-volunteer—her husband, Jaime Navarro.

Jaime has been an all star in his own right, stepping in and ensuring our audio/visual needs are met, even when things looked like they were falling apart. If you see them at the conference in November, tell them thanks! I know I will.

Both Jaime and Valerie were decorated career officers with the U.S. Navy, retiring at the rank of Captain. It has been my privilege to have worked with them as members in MWSA.

**MWSA DISPATCHES IS LOOKING FOR MEMBER SUBMISSIONS .**

We have free resources available for members in good standing, from [Interviews](#), to poetry, photograph submissions, and book adverts.

We offer this opportunity for your art to be published in a national magazine exclusively to our membership.

If you'd like to submit a feature article (1500 words or less, please), photograph(s), poetry, artwork, or have any questions, please email:

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



***FIGHT, FLIGHT, OR FREEZE; A LOVE STORY***

by **Jim Enderle**

Genre(s): Biography; Memoir

Format(s): Kindle; Paperback; Hardcover, Audio

ISBN-13 : 978-1943267804

A riveting tale of love and redemption, and the beauty to be found in the intersection of the mysterious and the terrible. Jim Enderle's powerful prose reveals the "courageous catalysts" of grief and joy which transform ethical principles into action, in war and in our daily lives.

*Fight, Flight, or Freeze* discusses the miracles of therapeutic forgiveness and resolution, with a twist: the non-linear path back to his family must be processed through reconciling the astonishing personal effects of two al-Qaeda militants killed in one deadly and traumatic confrontation.

*A Conversation with MWSA Member*

## **ROBIN “R.G.” ROBERTS**

*Interview date: 23 February 2021*

**R**.G. ROBERTS IS A VETERAN of the U.S. Navy, currently living in Connecticut and working as a manufacturing manager for a major medical device manufacturer.

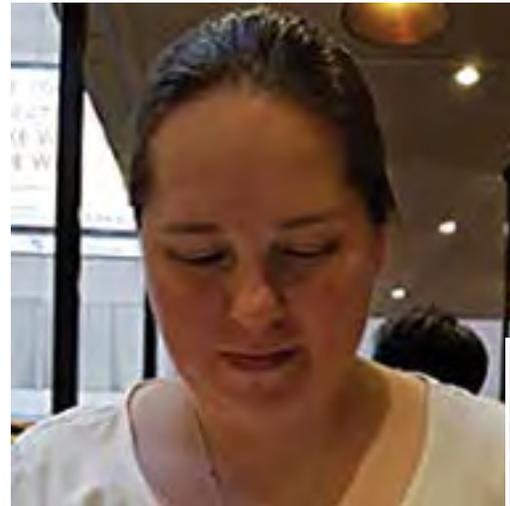
While an officer in the Navy, she served on three surface ships, taught at the Surface Warfare Officer’s School, and graduated from the U.S. Naval War College with a master’s degree in Strategic Studies & National Security, with a concentration in leadership. She later earned an M.A. in Writing from Albertus Magnus College.

**MWSA:** Would you recommend MWSA membership to other authors?

**R.G. ROBERTS:** Absolutely. Finding fellow military-focused authors is hard. Also, as a reader, I like to read authentic military-themed books across multiple genres. MWSA is a great place to find good reads.

**MWSA:** Why write about a submarine war when you served on surface ships?

**ROBERTS:** The idea of an underwater-focused World War III came to me while I was at the Naval War College. They always say World War I was the war of the battleship and World War II was the war of the aircraft carrier.



I started wondering...what would World War III be? With satellites and long-range sensors extending both the surface and air warfare pictures, where can you find real stealth? Underwater. I spent time finding submariners to testify to that.

The last real frontier on earth is under the sea. We’ll eventually start exploiting resources on the ocean floor. Companies are already building underwater hotels (!) and there are tons of precious metals and other resources under the seabed. But much of those resources are in international waters, and countries’ exclusive economic zones frequently overlap. That’s a recipe for conflict.

I write a lot of surface warfare in the books, too. It’s like going home. One of my main characters is a surface warfare officer commanding a destroyer. But as the war moves on, missiles get used up

and surface ships are easier and easier to find. The war transitions more and more to the one medium where true stealth remains possible.

**MWSA:** Why place the war in the late 2030s and not now?

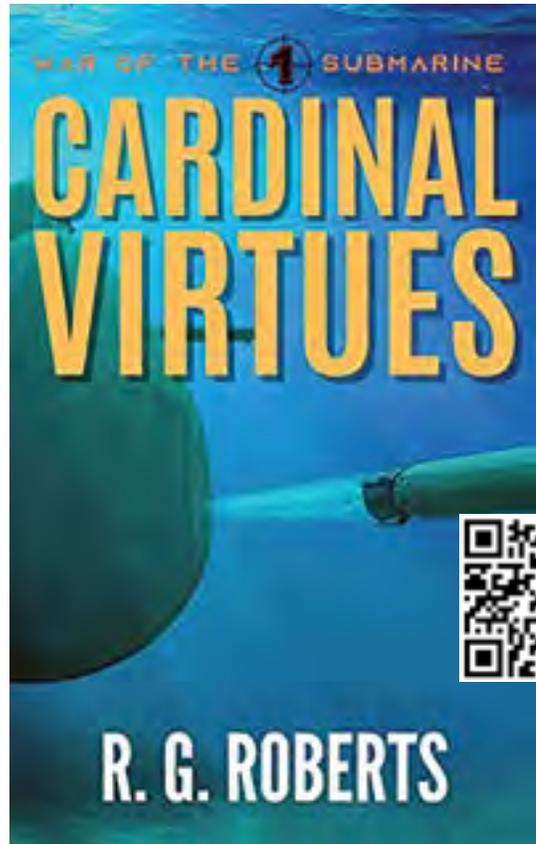
**ROBERTS:** There are a couple of reasons for this. The first reason, if I have to be honest, is because I didn't want to accidentally put something classified in the series. By pitching it forward a decade-and-a-half, I can extrapolate new technology that's replaced current-day tech, and thus not throw something in still lurking around in the back of my brain.

Secondly, because if I want a big war, a "mother-loving Navy war," like it's called in one of my all-time favorite World War II movies, I have to set up a situation where that war can happen. That means letting the geopolitical situation go from uncomfortable to tense over the next decade-and-a-half.

Lastly, I love the idea of underwater stations. We're just not there yet on the technological front. We probably *could* make them...but we haven't. So, there we are.

**MWSA:** What made you start writing?

**ROBERTS:** I can't remember. I've written back as far as I can recall—back to kindergarten when I was given the option to draw pictures or write stories. I gave up on sleep while I was in the Navy to write,



sneak time at lunch to write, and stay up late when inspiration hit. Writing is a part of me, and I'll do it whether anyone reads my work or not.

**MWSA:** What books do you have out?

**ROBERTS:** *War of the Submarine* started as a serial on *Kindle Vella*. I weekly post a new episode/chapter, while I'm writing. It's in season two now, which is also *Book 2, The War No One Wanted*. Once *Book 2* is complete on *Vella*, it'll move to paperback/ebook/hardcover thirty days later.

There is also a prequel on Amazon, *Before the Storm*, of novella-length. This is a

*Continued on page 16*

*Continued from page 15*

fun story about Alex Coleman in his XO days, chasing undersea pirates with his old college roommate.

I also have a fantasy serial on *Vella* with a strong war flavor, as well as an alternate history set in the late Roman Republic focusing on Caesar's wars in Spain, *Caesar's Command*.

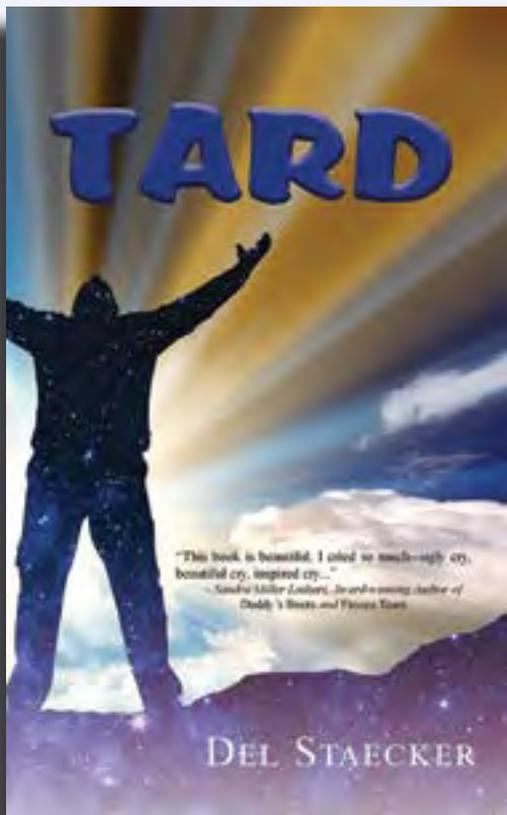
I am a multi-genre writer, but my works focus on leaders faced with difficult choices, and they feature wars of one sort or another.

**MWSA:** Why have so many of your characters graduated from Norwich University?

**ROBERTS:** Probably because I'm a NU grad myself. I remember being very happy when W.E.B. Griffin included a Norwich grad in one of his books—you almost never see Norwich in military fiction!

For my fellow Wick grads out there, I'm original Charlie Company, class of 2004.

Read the entire interview here:



## TARD

by Del Staecker

Genre(s): Thriller/Suspense

Format(s): Kindle; Paperback

ISBN-13 : 978-1943267934



This is a novel whose hero journeys from Lancaster County, PA, to the cornfields of Iowa. It's about cruelty and sin and friendship and forgiveness, and it's about the power of storytelling. It's gritty and realistic but also mystical and philosophical, challenging the reader to look for the miraculous right here on earth, and often where you'd least expect to find it.

A fantasy-crime story that will lead you through and beyond cognitive dissonance and confirmation bias into a place where dreams come true.

From Underrated Reads (dedicated to discovering literary gems): *Tard* is a unique novel and one of those literary gems that is hard to come by. A must-read!



# MILITARY WRITERS SOCIETY OF AMERICA



MWSA Public Page  
433 followers · 42 following

Following

Learn More

**D**ID YOU KNOW MWSA HAS a public Facebook page for your benefit?

You can post upcoming MWSA-related or relatable events, resources, stories... All for MWSA members.

Author interviews, book reviews, upcoming events, educational avenues, and links to previous events can be found at the click of your mouse.

Check it out:

<https://www.facebook.com/MWSA.MembersPublic>

You're welcome.



## WAR STORY #12

Gary Zelinski

Gary B. Zelinski served twenty-two years on active duty in the U.S.A.F. This is one recollection from his upcoming memoir, **Aim High, A Love Story**



*Air Force Marksmanship Ribbon*

**A**UGUST 1974. AT AIR FORCE Basic Military Training, a recruit needs to put ninety-five out of 100 rounds in the target to qualify for an Air Force Marksmanship Ribbon. The Marksmanship Ribbon is a big deal. You get to wear it on your uniform—forever.

Recruits *really* wanted it. I *needed* to have it. On day one of small arms training, we learned how to assemble and disassemble the M16. We also spent a lot of time on safety. Not *Dick-Cheney* safety, but real safety.

On day two, we actually got to fire the rifle—a big deal for new recruits and one of the highlights of basic training. It was the first time I'd ever fired a gun. The only other time I fired a weapon was years later in Officer Training School. There, we got to fire a .9mm sidearm. The target was much closer—it didn't help.

I've confessed to my lack of hand-eye coordination before, so this story shouldn't be much of a surprise. On

that fateful day of small arms training, self-respecting recruits hoped to excel. For the sake of our honor, we *needed* to excel—excel and win a cool ribbon for our uniform. With no ribbons and no stripes, you might as well drive a bus.

Because my last name started with a Z, I was the last male in a line of over 100 recruits, all anxious to prove their mettle. Laying in the prone position and nervous, waited the 100. We waited in the San Antonio heat and humidity, and we sweated like fish. The concrete at the firing range was cool, which helped a bit, but not nearly enough.

Then, in marched the female recruits. Did I say *female*? We were eighteen years old, and it had been months since any of us had seen a female.

Yes, women could join the military even way back in my day. Everything was separate, though. They had their side of Lackland AFB, and we had ours. All training, and of course the barracks and chow halls, were separate so, we never saw them. The only time we came together was on the single small arms firing range. One firing range was enough for the Air Force. After all, we weren't the Army.

As I recall, the first gal in line was gorgeous, and so was the gal next to her.

Not as gorgeous as your mom, but from the same gender.

As the female recruits took their places, I glanced over. No, I didn't stare. I even removed my cap, just to be polite. I was cool—hot and sweaty, but cool. We had little time to exchange a few awkward words.

They appeared nervous and looked like they didn't even want to be there.

"So, are you shooting for a Marksmanship Ribbon," I asked?

"Hell no," they both said. "We couldn't hit the side of a barn even if we were standing in it," one of them said.

Then, I had a brilliant idea. The idea was so great I was assured of winning *that* ribbon. I feared I wouldn't get enough rounds in my target on my own. I told the two female recruits a Marksmanship Ribbon was important to me.

"Would you mind shooting at my target?" I asked. "Not all your rounds...just a few. To help me out."

"Sure," they said. "No problem."

Now, instead of 100 shots to make the needed ninety-five, I had 300! Well, in theory.

At the command, "Commence Fire," we fired our 100 bullets in short rounds. A volley of lead echoed up and down the range. As clouds of smoke grew heavier, my eyes burned.

After several shots, I looked over at the first female recruit. She had both her eyes closed. The second recruit was even worse. She was crying, shaking with tears pooling on the concrete. I feared my plan wouldn't work.

At the command, "Cease Fire," we retrieved our targets.

First, each recruit counted the bullet holes in their own target. Next, if you claimed ninety-five holes or more, a drill instructor needed to certify your score—certify your score and sign your target. On his signature, you could claim your ribbon.

I couldn't believe it. It must have been a fluke. My target had over ninety-five bullet holes. I stopped counting at ninety-five, but the drill instructor continued to count. Finally, he stopped. He stopped counting at 150. The drill instructor signed my target.

After the drill instructor left, I thanked the two female recruits. I never saw them again.



*Air Force Good Conduct Medal.*

*Continued on page 20*

*Continued from page 19*

Three years after graduating from Basic Training, I was awarded a Good Conduct Medal. It was the 'Employee of the Quarter' medal. Only thing was, it took three years to get one.

To be awarded this medal, you needed to have excellent efficiency reports. But more important than that, you must not have any convictions of court-martial. Not having recently stabbed anyone, I was awarded one.

The cool thing about the medal was officers don't get 'em. For lieutenants and captains, and a few majors, good conduct is a given.

Later, as an officer, I attended many formal ceremonies wearing my dress blues.

Fellow officers would often ask, "What's that medal for?" Few had ever seen a Good Conduct Medal.

"I got this in France," I'd say.



*The National Defense Service Medal.*

In our final week of Basic Training, we could earn a real luxury. If we had no demerits and our gear passed inspection, we could request a pass to go to the Base Exchange. To travel, we needed to sign out of the barracks and travel in groups of two or more.

Did I say travel? I meant march.

We had to march. Hence the need to have at least two recruits. One to call cadence and the other to march out of step. That would be me.



Most of the recruits made a beeline for the cigarette aisle. I didn't know what to get. But I still had the change from the five dollars my father gave me, so I bought a *Coke*.

The other thing we did was buy our very own National Defense Service Medal. The medal was authorized by Congress during periods of war or armed conflict.

None of us were sure or understood *why* we got to wear the medal. Vietnam was over. We all called it the BX medal. Nobody gave it to us. We had to go to the BX and buy it.

As I walked back from the BX, I noticed two recruits marching and calling cadence. For some reason, looking across the street and seeing those recruits, the reality of enlisting in the military hit me.

I looked at those soon-to-be Airman Basics. They had no stripes on their sleeves yet were very proud of their National Defense Service Medal.

Those Airmen were the price of freedom, ready to die if needed.

According to our nation, they were expendable.

So was I.



*Would you like to place an advertisement in Dispatches?*

Current rates:

*Full page ad - \$150*

*1/2 page - \$85*

*1/4 page - \$50*

*(payable to MWSA)*

To get started, email [info@mwsa.co](mailto:info@mwsa.co) for details.

Images must be of higher resolution—at least 300dpi. Your *Dispatches* team will do their best to make your ad look professional but your best option is to send an already completed ad in .jpg or .png format.

Contact [info@mwsa.co](mailto:info@mwsa.co) for questions or concerns.

*Thank you.*



*A Conversation with MWSA Member*

## **WILLIAM A. "BILL" HAMILTON, PH.D.**

*Interview date: 23 January 2022*

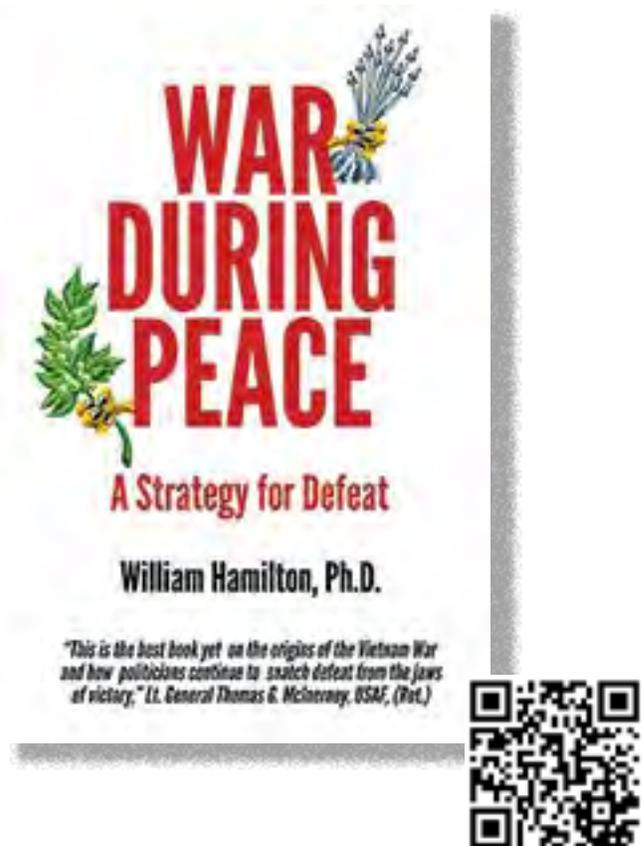
**W**ILLIAM A. "BILL" HAMILTON, PH.D. is an American journalist, novelist, military historian, retired military officer, former college professor, and a formerly featured commentator for *USA Today*.

An instrument-rated pilot, he is the co-holder of a world aviation speed record. Hamilton is a laureate of the Oklahoma Military Foundation Hall of Fame, the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame, and the Nebraska and Colorado Aviation Halls of Fame.

Hamilton served twenty years on active duty as an Army officer, including two combat tours in Vietnam. His military decorations include The Silver Star, the Legion of Merit, the Distinguished Flying Cross, twenty Air Medals, four Bronze Stars, and the Purple Heart, among others.

Bill co-authored with his wife, Penny, four espionage novels. under the pseudonym William Penn. In 2020, Bill was named a Grand County Citizen of the Year.

He holds degrees from the University of Oklahoma, the U.S. Army Language School, The George Washington University, U.S. Naval War College, the University of Nebraska, and Harvard University Kennedy School of Government.



**MWSA:** How did you find out about MWSA?

**BILL HAMILTON:** Readers of the biographies of famous military leaders often read that he or she was “mentioned in dispatches.” Of course, most wannabe military heroes want to be “mentioned in dispatches.” That set me to wondering who writes those dispatches. In Vietnam, I came to know the late, great Joe Galloway rather well. Now, there was a war correspondent who knew how to write dispatches. And

that led me the Military Writers Society of America.

**MWSA:** What caused you to become a career military officer?

**HAMILTON:** My maternal grandfather was a lawyer and so was my favorite older cousin. I grew up thinking I would go to law school at O.U. and wind up as a small-town lawyer and probably run for the Oklahoma Legislature.

My sainted father served in the Navy out in the Pacific during WWII. His brother, my Uncle Edward, was an infantryman poised to take part in the invasion of Japan. My second cousin, Rear Admiral Tommy Hamilton served as air boss on the USS *Enterprise* during the Battle of Midway. At war's end, Cousin Tommy was skipper of the USS *Enterprise*. So, on my mother's side, were law and politics. On my father's side, was the military.

**MWSA:** How did you get involved in journalism?

**HAMILTON:** As a teenager, I was a paperboy for *The Anadarko Daily News*, my hometown newspaper which, since 1984, has carried *Central View*—my weekly newspaper column. While on active duty, I wrote several articles for *Infantry Magazine* and other military publications.

While teaching history at Nebraska Wesleyan University, the publisher of *SUN Newspapers* hired me to write a weekly

column on national and international affairs.

Not long after that, my wife and I, with some partners, were able to buy *The Capital Times of Lincoln* from the *Omaha World Herald*. While my wife and I were co-editors of that newspaper, I was hired by *USA Today* as a featured commentator. When my favorite editor retired, I did as well, ending nineteen years of writing in loyal opposition to *USA Today* editorials.

We eventually sold our interest in *The Capital Times* and moved to Colorado where I continue to write *Central View*. (See: [central-view.com](http://central-view.com)). I eventually ended up in the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame. From paperboy to laureate. Go figure.

After many years of sitting on a shelf, I dusted [my master's thesis and my doctoral dissertation] off and wrote *War During Peace: A Strategy for Defeat*.

After moving to Colorado in 1992, my wife and I decided to co-write a series of espionage novels that are largely autobiographical of places and events we experienced in a military career that took us all over the world. (See: [buckanddolly.com](http://buckanddolly.com)). They are soon to be re-released as a four-novel set.

**MWSA:** How did you get so involved in aviation?

*Continued on page 24*

Continued from page 23



**HAMILTON:** Mostly, by accident. After my tour as an infantry company commander in Vietnam, the Army assigned me to be a Ground Liaison Officer to the 19th U.S. Air Force, and the 4th Tactical Fighter Wing at Seymour-Johnson AFB in North Carolina. At the time the 4th TFW was commanded by Colonel Chuck Yeager, the Air Force pilot who broke the sound barrier.

When I went over to present myself to the 4th TFW, I was unaware of Colonel Yeager's fame as a WWII fighter pilot. I only knew Colonel Yeager broke the sound barrier. During our first meeting, I accorded him the same respect I would display toward any Air Force bird colonel. Apparently, he liked that.

He told his deputy, "Assign a locker to this Army officer, Issue him a complete set of flight gear. Get him through the altitude chamber and Martin-Baker ejector seat training. There will be times when he will fly as my guy-in-the back."

And I did on several occasions.

**MWSA:** So, what's next?

**HAMILTON:** Some time ago, I published *The Wit and Wisdom of William Hamilton: The Sage of Sheepdog Hill*. It is mostly a collection of *Central View* newspaper columns. However, as I remember vignettes from my checked past, I write them down. They could end up in an expanded version of *Wit and Wisdom*. Or, I might write a memoir of my military career and call it: *Some Funny Things Happened On My Way to the Stockade (almost)*. We'll see.

**MWSA:** Why did you write *War During Peace: A Strategy for Defeat*?

**HAMILTON:** I wanted my fellow veterans to understand the origins of the Vietnam War.

Read William A. "Bill" Hamilton's entire interview:



**2022 MWSA GENERAL MEMBERSHIP  
CONFERENCE & AWARDS BANQUET**

**REGISTER NOW!**



*AUG. 25 - 28, THE HIGGINS HOTEL, NEW ORLEANS, LA  
"A WORDSMITHING EVENT"*



**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE A MENTOR OR  
VOLUNTEER IN SOME OTHER WAY AT THIS  
YEAR'S CONFERENCE, PLEASE LET US KNOW.**

A Conversation with MWSA Member

## JOHN R. STOEFFLER

Interview date: 30 March 2022

**J**OHAN R. STOEFFLER ATTENDED PENNSYLVANIA Military College and graduated in 1963 with a BA. Commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army, Stoeffler spent one year of his two-year active duty in Korea.

After active duty he went to work for General Electric and worked on projects in his community. He created KIDS WHO CARE, a program which led children in collecting toys, food, and clothing for those in need.

Stoeffler also organized *Republicare*, a program with the local Republican Party and the Salvation Army to collect items for the needy during Christmas seasons. Stoeffler retired in 2003 and moved to St. Petersburg, Florida in 2016.

For five years, Stoeffler wrote a weekly commentary column in the *St. Louis West News* titled *As I See It*. He also wrote country music and penned a book of poetry: *God, Family, Freedom*.

**MWSA:** What was the inspiration for your book, *Lexie's Gift*?

**JOHN R. STOEFFLER:** In 2008, I awoke one morning thinking about the children of our deployed armed forces members, and how sad they must be missing their



parents. I had an idea for a pillow with the picture printed on it of their mom or dad. I discussed my vision with my wife, who thought it was a good idea. With that in mind, we created “Sweet Dreams” Pillows.

An individual who heard about our program offered to make us a website, and the orders flooded in.

We (my wife and I along with our volunteers, whom we refer to as our “Pillow Platoon”) made and shipped over 13,000 pillows—all for free.

Health issues unfortunately forced us to discontinue that great project. That

it made a difference to the children was evident in responses from parents of those children who received their *Sweet Dreams Pillows*. Responses like, “The monsters are gone,” and “The bedwetting has stopped,” are just two of hundreds of responses we’ve received.

The hardest pillows to make were those for children of a parent who was KIA. All-in-all, it was the best job my wife and I ever had that didn’t pay a cent.

**MWSA:** Any new writing projects in the offing?

**STOEFFLER:** No new writing projects at this time.

**MWSA:** Can you think of another writing project that would be as rewarding as your *Sweet Dreams Pillow Project* was?

**STOEFFLER:** No.

**MWSA:** Are the subjects of your book, *Lexie’s Gift* real?

**STOEFFLER:** While the characters in my book are fictitious, the names are those of family members.

**MWSA:** What do you hope children who read this book will take away?

**STOEFFLER:** As the story ends, Lexie (who made a special pillow for her best friend, Susan) is asked by a boy who sees Susan’s pillow if Lexie will make one for him and his brother as their daddy, a Marine, is deployed. Lexie asks Susan if she will help, to which Susan gleefully agrees.

In making pillows for others, both girls learn it is more rewarding to give than to receive.

## YOUR MWSA MEMBERSHIP TEAM

WHERE TO GO FOR INFORMATION. WHO TO CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS.

MEMBERSHIP | [membership@mwsa.co](mailto:membership@mwsa.co)

REVIEW & AWARDS | [mwsaawardsdirectors@gmail.com](mailto:mwsaawardsdirectors@gmail.com)

EVENTS & CONFERENCES | [events@mwsa.co](mailto:events@mwsa.co)

DISPATCHES MAGAZINE | [dispatches@mwsa.co](mailto:dispatches@mwsa.co)

OUTREACH & EDUCATION | [outreach@mwsa.co](mailto:outreach@mwsa.co)

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES | [volunteer@mwsa.co](mailto:volunteer@mwsa.co)

WEBSITE & CONTACT | [info@mwsa.co](mailto:info@mwsa.co)

## SWIFT, SILENT, COLD, AND LETHAL

*Jorge Torrente*

IT WAS PAST 11P.M. WHEN the harbinger drops of rain began to fall. Elpidio silently started downhill, the lightly wooded slope not offering much protection.

His ragtag rebel band followed him, splashing as little as possible, ducking low, inching their way toward the enemy line.

Néstor and Rosa were right there with Elpidio at the forefront, their rifles diagonally strapped on their backs, muzzles down, a grenade in each hand. Néstor shot a glance at Rosa. She nodded back, ready.

The light rain thickened as they advanced. The heavens opened up with a heavy downpour, which added to the darkness of the moonless night. The rebels lost sight of the enemy line, but if they couldn't see the enemy, the enemy couldn't see them.

This was it, and Elpidio impatiently swung his right arm forward several times, urging his men to follow him in a straight run downhill, toward the machine-gun emplacement.

Masked by rain and darkness, the rebels charged forward, their jaws set. The splashing noise of many feet moving fast down the mountain was now unavoidable.

They had to break through—they were surrounded. It was do or die.

The two army soldiers manning the machine-gun cursed the rain as they fumbled with their plastic rain ponchos.

“I just want to know who the motherfucking designer of this thing was. By the time I finish readying it—”

“Shhhh! Don't you hear it?” the other one said. He snapped up a flare gun and shot it into the air.

As soon as the sky lit up, the horror became visible on his face. The rebels were less than one hundred yards away and closing in fast.

“They're coming!” he shouted.

Both soldiers leapt into action—one of them crouching in the mud to feed ammunition, the other grabbing the two-pronged grip. The huge gun tore into life, its furious muzzle flashing.

When Elpidio heard the flare gun's muffled shot, he knew they had been heard. The flare exploded up high.

They clutched the grenades in their hands. The bright light slowly descended, reflecting on the millions of raindrops, like countless icicles hanging above their heads.



The response from the soldiers' line of defense was quick and savage.

*"Granada!"* shouted Elpidio.

Néstor, Rosa, and Elpidio lobbed their grenades toward the machine-gun emplacement. The eighteen rebels hit the ground as one. After the explosions, only sixteen stood to resume the charge, firing their rifles from the hip. With the machine gun silenced, they were encouraged to finish what they had begun.

*"¡Hijos de puta!"* shouted Néstor at the top of his lungs, in an unconscious self-encouraging effort. He ran, firing his rifle. Three more of his friends had just gone down. He saw Elpidio heavily splashing

ahead. Rosa to the right—fast, nimble, determined.

Thirteen rebels broke through. Soldiers from both ends of the fractured line fired their weapons at the escaping rebels, gunning down some, but also shooting their own in the crossfire.

Leaving the mayhem behind, Elpidio and his remaining men streaked down the steeper slope behind the enemy line. They sunk their heels harder into the wet ground, angry bullets buzzing close by. Officers shouted at the soldiers to go after them.

As he ran, Néstor saw a small wooden hut with a tall communications antenna to his left. It was built at the bottom of the steep slope among the trees. Two Russian-made jeeps were parked close by. Silhouetted in the weak light coming through the hut's window, several men stood outside holding what looked like pistols in their hands.

Elpidio looked at Néstor.

Néstor nodded and charged straight at the cabin. Five men followed him. Elpidio and the few others continued toward the vehicles.

Since breaking the army line, the rebels had not fired a single shot and were zeroing on their new objectives. They used every tree and bush to shield their

*Continued on page 30*

*Continued from page 29*

approach as the night and the rain worked in their favor.

Néstor saw uniformed men outside the cabin, moving this way and that, looking up the hill, probably wondering if the rebels were dead. He waited until the three men heard their approach and pivoted towards them, firing their handguns.

They were highly trained soldiers—they stood their ground, showing no fear at the sudden appearance of desperadoes.

The exchange was furious. Seconds later, the three uniformed men and three of Néstor's own were dead on the ground.

Néstor and the two others made it to the cabin. As he went by, he shot a glance at the insignias on the epaulets of the soldiers they had just wasted. All officers. But he had no time to spare.

As the three turned to run through the cabin door, someone sitting behind the steering wheel of one of the parked jeeps fired at them, hitting one of the two men still with him.

A short moment later a long burst of gunfire shattered the jeep's windshield and the driver's door. Shards of glass flew and blood splattered inside the vehicle.

Briefly looking sideways, Néstor saw a tall figure with shoulder-length wavy hair who had just emptied an AK's magazine, blowing away the sudden menace.



The rebel stood frozen, looking around, reloading with swift hands. Néstor recognized the shadowy figure and kept on going. When the rebel looked at the hut, the weak light coming from inside illuminated a couple of green eyes burning cold.

It was Rosa. Not one muscle in her face moved. She had followed Elpidio, but by the time Néstor approached the hut, she had ranged ahead, her long legs and feline movements allowed her to scout forward like the track-and-field athlete she had once been. Her gut had told her someone would be in the vehicles.

Simple as that.

She had become highly skilled in the art of guerrilla warfare. When fighting, she was swift, silent, cold, and lethal.

## MWSA MARCH NEWS BLAST

*Bob Doerr*

WITH SPRING AND WARMER WEATHER coming, we thought we'd better get a few announcements out to everyone before spring fever sets in.

First, don't forget to register early for our annual membership conference to take advantage of the early-bird rate. It will be the first time in three years we've been able to get together. The conference will give us a great opportunity to share ideas, network, and relax away from home. Here's the link:



*2022 MWSA General Membership Conference & Awards Banquet  
—Military Writers Society of America (mwsadispatches.com)*

This year is an election year for MWSA and we will be seeking individuals to run for our four executive board seats (President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer) and for our four Directors-at-large positions.

While we'll hopefully have a few who may want to stay in their current position, we will undoubtedly need some of you to step forward and volunteer to fill a leadership position. The term is only two years, and the opportunities you'll have to guide this

great organization will be significant. More to come soon, but please consider throwing your name into the ring.

We plan to hold this year's second writer's workshop on the afternoon of May 15th. We have an excellent presenter lined up for this free workshop, and the topic *Writing Memoirs* is especially relevant for our group. More to follow, but mark your calendars today.

I receive several unsolicited emails a month from people outside MWSA asking that I let our membership know this or that. I ignore most of them simply because I don't have the time to vet the sender or the topic.

Every now and then, I get something that seems genuine and I try to share it. I recently received one such email.

It was from the University of Virginia Creative Writing Department asking me to let our membership know the university is looking to hire someone for the position of Assistant Professor of Creative Writing for this fall term.

For more information and to apply, visit:





## WELCOME TO THE MWSA ~ WHO WE ARE

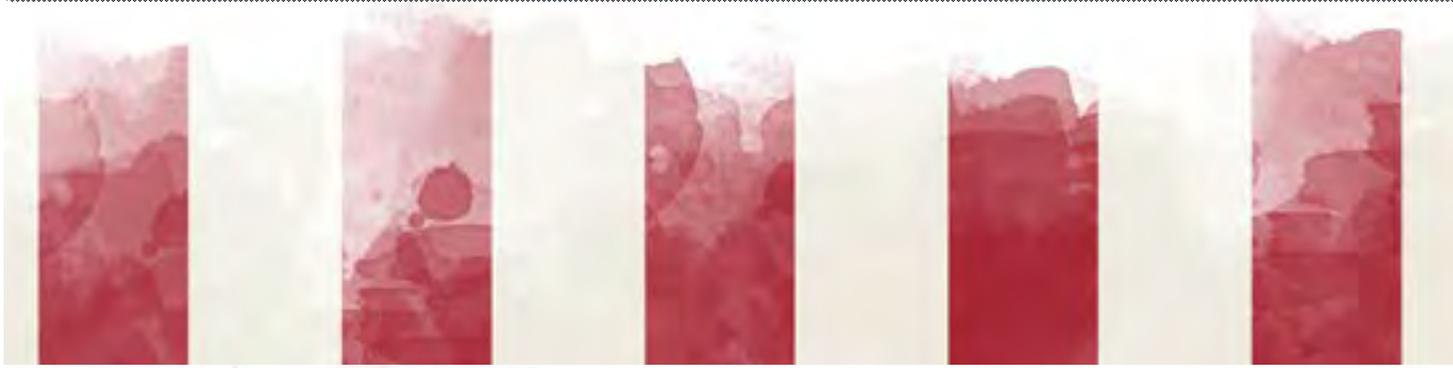
*John Cathcart*

**W**E 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

