

DISPATCHES

MILITARY
WRITERS
SOCIETY OF
AMERICA

Rescuing History One Story at a Time
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WINTER 2022

GLORY FOUND
AN IWO JIMA SURVIVOR ENCOUNTER
BY GARY ZELINSKI

Pg 8

WILD WEST'S
NATIONAL MUSEUM
OF MILITARY VEHICLES

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A white ceramic coffee cup filled with a reddish liquid sits on a matching saucer. The cup and saucer are placed on top of a thick, old, yellowed wooden book. To the left, a portion of a thick, beige knitted blanket is visible. The background is black.

MEET
JOHN CATHCART

Pg 14

FROM THE EDITOR

Sandra Miller Linhart

IT'S ALWAYS A BIT CONFUSING for me as I start to put together this magazine in 2021. The Winter 2022 edition... it comes out January 2022. What?

I get confused because we collect stories from the last three months of 2021, compile them, and dish out our yummy member submissions to you after the end of the year—in 2022.

I'm playing around with a new format, which I'm wont to do from time to time. I hope you like it.

Thanks to all of you who have contributed throughout 2021. I hope you continue to do so in 2022. For any of you who've hesitated, there's no time like the present.

We have some good "stuff" within these covers. I'm sure you'll find at least one article to warm your frozen tootsies.

So, brew yourself a cuppa your favorite hot drink, toss a blanket over your knees, summon the family pet, and settle in to read.

It's been a fantastic year (2021) in so many ways. And by 'fantastic', I mean 'remote from reality'. How bizarre. What can we do? I say we write about it.

I hope to see some of your ponderings, your 2021 triumphs over fear, and your heartwarming stories. Cheers!

DISPATCHES REGULARS

COLUMNIST/PRESIDENT ~ BOB DOERR

FEATURE WRITER ~ GARY ZELINSKI

FEATURE WRITER ~ FRANKLIN COX

FEATURE WRITER ~ JOHN CATHCART

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Bob Doerr

AS I'M WRITING THIS, THE holiday season is in full swing. The new year is right around the corner. While you may be reading this well into January, I do hope 2022 is a great year for us all.

In this issue you'll find an article about John Cathcart, a long-term key player with MWSA. This is the second of a few articles I plan to write concerning the handful of 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.

As the book submission window is opening, please remember that while it is great to have your books reviewed and possibly winning a medal, we always need more reviewers to help us get through the review cycle. Please consider becoming a book reviewer.

We continue to plan for a happy, healthy, safe conference in New Orleans [see page 24 for more information].

The registration page should be up shortly on our website. It's been a while, and New Orleans is a great venue. I hope to see as many of you as possible at the conference this year.

~ Bob Doerr, President, MWSA



FLASHBACK

1LT Franklin Cox (USMC, Ret'd)

I

MARCH 18, 1966 ... 1730 HRS

HEAT CONSUMED THE MARINE RIFLE company. The air was thick, hard to suck in. Sweat streams dumped salt into our eyes.

We were humping a search-and-kill operation in an enemy infested area south of DaNang. On the move for six hours, we combed through villages, waded across streams, crossed dried rice paddies and crop fields, sliced through sharp hedgerows and thick tree lines. The three platoons moved south in one long column.

We encountered a few snipers we quickly ran off. The villagers, old crinkled women and younger women with babies clenched tightly, stared solemnly, emotionless.

Twice we were forced to loudly announce our presence when we summoned choppers to evacuate healthy nineteen-year-old Marines suffering heat stroke.

It had been another mundane day for Fox Company, 2nd BN, 9th Marines, as we neared our final objective for the day—the north bank of the Song La Tho River. I was the artillery forward observer for the company.

At 1730 the unit of 140 Marines entered the trap. Instantly and unexpectedly, mortar rounds whistled in, exploding into the first platoon. We were exposed, out in the open. Tree lines, to our left and right, erupted with interlocked AK-47 and automatic weapons fire. Rocket-propelled grenades whizzed into our ranks.

The Mainforce Vietcong R-20 Doc Lap Battalion trapped us in a classic ambush. We were vastly outnumbered and out-gunned. But Marines race to the sound of guns.

The second platoon reacted and frontally assaulted the tree line to our left. The third platoon attacked the right tree line. Marines fell on the brown soil of the hard-panned potato field.

My radio operator and I raced to the first platoon. We hoisted my scout observer into the first medevac chopper that roared in. Shards of shrapnel had raked across his back. Five more wounded were shoved in. He smiled at me through his pain while the chopper lifted off.

I requested fire missions on the left tree line, and across the river where the mortar tubes were.

Quickly, our heavy metal howitzer rounds exploded on target. The company regrouped in a nearby heavily wooded area.

God had smiled upon us. Trench lines over four feet deep and three feet wide had been dug by Viet Cong soldiers years before. The Marines set up in a 360 degree perimeter. The company commander and I slid into a trench in the middle of the circle.

He ordered me to call in artillery nonstop as close as possible. We created a ring of fire. The sun sank and there was no moonlight. Our killed were gently placed nearby while our wounded moaned. We were surrounded. The fight had just begun.

Throughout the endless night, I steered in hundreds of 105mm and 155mm high explosive and white phosphorous shells on enemy targets. Meanwhile, the enemy dropped in hundreds of 82mm and 60mm mortar shells on us for endless hours.

Their shells shrieked in, exploding like thunderclaps. We burrowed deeply into our trenches.

VC probed our lines.

A chopper braved the fire, coming in with water and ammo—ready to ferry to safety some of our wounded. It was slammed by an RPG round, flipped, and smashed into a nearby paddy dyke, twenty yards from our perimeter.

VC green tracers streamed through the nearby bamboo, fired from inside our perimeter.

At 0425, mortar rounds slammed on the ground just outside our trench. There were no casualties. Young Marines soothed their wounded friends and fought like savages.

II

MAY 30, 2021 ... 0230 HRS

AK ROUNDS SNAP THROUGH THE tall, thick bamboo. Another of endless mortar barrages crashes in our midst. The night sky flickers white, then shifts back to a black umbrella.

We cannot call in close-air support. The enemy is too close.

My captain turns to me and suggests the unthinkable. “Frank, better prepare and plot a big one right on top of us if the worst happens.”

I had already done that. Our batteries would deliver a fire mission directly on our position if I send the request. The enemy had penetrated our perimeter of beleaguered Marines.

I have been in this green hell of Vietnam for nine months. Finally, I pray, *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*

I jerk.

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Miller, the white Lhasa Apso, crosses over my feet. I groan. My woman, Lynne traces her fingers softly across my forehead. She whispers comfort.

I am perspiring, short of breath. But so happy. To be alive. To enjoy life.

III

JUNE 28, 2021

Events gallop through his lifetime. Love, children, triumph, disaster. Common experiences for American men.

But, for a few there is a difference.

Deep-buried memories spring to life from the subconscious of the Vietnam War combat veteran. They come to haunt in the middle of the night—unbidden.

We Vietnam survivors know full well the warning the Eagles issued in *Hotel California*.

“You can check out, but you can never leave.”

THE END

Franklin Cox is the author of the award-winning book, Lullabies for Lieutenants.

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Thank you.



MWSA 2022 WINTER 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. As this is our quiet quarter for book reviews, I have drawn the below from our winter reading list five years ago—with only two edits. Therefore, the following is our 2022 Winter Recommended Reading List:

Forgotten Heroes of World War II by Thomas E. Simmons

Veil of Deception by Michael Byars Lewis

Terror Cell by Joseph H. Badal

Sgt Reckless by Robin Hutton

15 Years of War by Kristine Schellhaas

Cold Winter's Kill by Bob Doerr

Eternally at War by Jeanette Vaughn

The Fifth Bomb by Kenneth Andrus

Testimony of the Protected by Douglas Milliken

Welcome to FOB Haiku by Randy Brown

Black Sun by Glenn Starkey

Journey of an Adventurousome Dane by Jasmine Tritten

Those Who Remain: Remembrance and Reunion After War by Ruth W. Crocker

A few days ago (also from that 2016 reading list) I was wondering if anyone still asks Santa for a book at Christmas. I asked my wife, you know—She who must be obeyed—what she thought. Rather than answer and probably realizing I always prefer telling people what I thought, she asked me if I thought anyone did. I said I doubted it, that everyone was too into their cell phones. She smiled and showed me my eleven-year-old grandson's Christmas list. Right there at the top were three books. *Well, how about that.* If you're like my grandson and are looking for a good book, the list above would be a great place to start. More info about the books listed above and the authors can be found at www.mwsadispatches.com

GLORY FOUND

Gary Zelinski

0600 HRS. BOB HOPE USO CENTER,
LOS ANGELES AIRPORT.



HAVE YOU EVER MET SOMEONE great? I mean, a genuinely great person? The kind of person who makes you think you can't even imagine yourself surviving a tenth of what they went through. Every moment you spend talking with them somehow makes you a better person.

Tom McGraham wrote his life story in his book titled, *The Road to Iwo Jima*.

I had the honor of meeting Tom at the Los Angeles USO center at LAX. Jennifer invited me to join her early one Sunday morning as a volunteer.

Jennifer is the ideal USO volunteer—she's cheerful, with an infectious smile, and a natural ability to understand someone's

needs even before they do. The hundreds of young Marines' faces light up when she talks to them.



Jennifer's accustomed to helping young Marines who pass through LAX after their basic training at Camp Pendleton.

"They all look so young," she says. But they all look the same—young, lost, and appreciative.

That Sunday, she covered the 6:00 to 10:00 AM shift. That was usually a slow time as most of the young military families use the USO as their crash pad during long layovers.

That Sunday began as a typical day until Tom McGraham woke up and rolled his wheelchair out of the storage room where he was sleeping.

Somehow Tom missed his ride after traveling back from a vacation trip to Spain. Not bad for a guy in a wheelchair who just happens to be 89 years old.

As I finished making my 300th peanut butter and jelly sandwich, a young Coast Guard seaman helped Tom get a cup of coffee.

He came over and told me, “You’ve got to meet this guy. This guy fought on Iwo Jima.”

So, the conversation began, and over the next three-and-a-half hours, I learned a great deal about the extraordinary life Tom had led.

Here are just a few of his tales. Please note, I was the junior volunteer at the USO. While Jennifer greeted the young troops or answered the phone, I took out the trash, cleaned the bathrooms and made sandwiches. *Payback, Dad, payback.*



I cleaned the bathrooms for the Marines, and all I got was this T-shirt.

* * *

Tom McGraham was born in New York City. His story began when his grandmother abandoned him at a Manhattan police station. One of his parents was ill and the other unemployed, so Tom was raised by foster parents.

* * *

Not knowing that abandoning your children was an option, I quickly relayed this tip to Jennifer and wondered if there was some statute of limitations. Apparently, abandoning your kids at the firehouse or police station is a thing—a sad thing.

* * *

Tom had a way of storytelling that combined rich detail with wry humor. He had a gentle manner, and even with a lifetime of hard times, his optimism shined through. In all those hours and all his stories, I didn’t hear an unkind word.

I’ve yet to read his book, but I did see his silver medal from the Military History Writers Association. The best I can do is relay some anecdotes of the stories he told me. I’ll try to give you a sense of not only his stories but also the person to whom we all owe so very much.

* * *

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A few days after Pearl Harbor was attacked, Tom and thousands of other young Americans enlisted. Tom chose the Marines. While he was stationed near West Point, he and other Marines were invited to scrimmage with the Army Academy's football team. Among the players were Doc Blanchard and Glenn Davis, two All-American running backs.

"When I tried to tackle Doc Blanchard," Tom said, "it was like hitting a freight train. It took me several minutes to get up, and I was hurting all over."



"...and then, everyone else in my foxhole was gone."

You can count on a Marine being proud of surviving life onboard a Navy ship. Tom told me of his braving Cape Hatteras off the coast of North Carolina's Outer Banks. That was referred to as 'the Graveyard of the Atlantic' because of all the shipwrecks caused by the continuous shifting sands

and shallow inlets. Apparently, going around Cape Hatteras was a big deal, even in a destroyer.

Tom's first duty station was in the Caribbean, which was not exactly the site of the hottest action of WWII. That's what I *thought* until he told me the story of how he and his buddies were riding horses and drinking rum on Antigua. They suddenly came across a German U-Boat crew. The Germans were apparently out of fuel and supplies.

Long out of food and water, the Germans were starving. So, while stationed in Margaritaville, Tom and his Marine buddies captured themselves some German prisoners. Everyone got a medal. Back aboard a troop carrier and on his way to the Pacific Theater, Tom spent his downtime boxing. That was mostly harmless fun until Tom was paired with Tony Zale. Tony was a two-time world middleweight champion.

Tony promised not to hurt Tom, who claimed he got in a few good punches. Tom crossed the Pacific in-and-out of sick bay, nursing his bruises.

Tom was a corporal at the time he landed on Iwo Jima. All told, Tom spent twelve days on that island. In my view, it was eleven-and-a-half really successful days capped by a horrible last half-day. Somewhere in the middle of all that hell, Tom was awarded a battlefield commission.

However, that could not be confirmed because the officer who promoted Tom was killed.

I always knew the Marines who fought on Iwo Jima were a special breed. I just didn't realize how special those heroes truly were.

In Tom's case, they still are.

The Battle of Iwo Jima took place from 19 February until 26 March 1945. The capture of three airfields on this eight-mile-long volcanic rock was felt to be critical and would allow American forces to launch an invasion of the Japanese mainland.

It was simple, take Iwo Jima and win the war—or not. 7,000 Marines lost their lives on Iwo Jima. Over 19,000 young men were wounded. The number of Japanese killed was close to 21,000. Yet, they didn't give up. They were defending their homeland. They fought to the death. Less than 1,000 Japanese soldiers were taken prisoner.

Tom told me stories of friends he was talking to one minute, completely disappearing the next. Shortly after his alleged battlefield commission, he said he lost six men when a mortar landed in their foxhole. I told him that supervision has its challenges.

“Perhaps management was not for you?” I said.

“Perhaps not.” Tom returned.

On his twelfth day—his unlucky day on the island—a shell fragment tore his leg apart. He spent a year-and-a-half in-and-out of Navy hospitals.

Jerry Yellin, a fellow Iwo Jima survivor and author, wrote on the back of Tom's book:

Tom thought about home every day of the twelve days he was on Iwo before he was wounded, and he has thought about Iwo Jima nearly every day of his life since the war ended.



Flag displayed at the National Museum of the Marine Corps, Quantico, VA. Count the Stars. These represent all the Navy Corpsmen who died on Iwo.

Tom said he loved baseball and would have loved to pitch in the big leagues. Unfortunately, he now had a leg an inch-and-a-half shorter than the other.

After his early retirement from the Marines, and while he was recovering, he developed a fastball few folks could catch, let alone hit.

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Then one day, a Navy recreation director suggested he meet Eddie Dyer, the manager of the St. Louis Cardinals.

Tom worked his way to their spring training camp in Florida, where he was hired on the spot. With the Yankees training nearby, Tom was called on to pitch to Joe DiMaggio. Tom says Joe held up on the first few fastballs but then found one and sent it out of the park.

Later Joe came over and, with a big grin said, “Sorry, son.”

Tom went on to tell me some of his tales, such as meeting Ronald Reagan—the actor, not the president. He went on war bond tours like the three Marines who raised the flag on Mount Suribachi did.

For Tom’s actions on Iwo Jima, he was presented with a flag flown over that famous hill.

At one of those celebrations, he says he met Betty Grable.

“You’re kidding,” I said.

“Kissed me, too,” he said.

Tom married. Not once or twice but three times. His first wife was a Las Vegas dancer.

Tom explained, “Let’s just say she wasn’t the settling down type.”

After discovering her with one of the bouncers in a downtown motel room, he

let her go. Tom’s first marriage lasted three weeks.

I can’t remember what he said about his second wife, but his third wife was for keeps. Tom and his bride shared thirty-four years together before she passed away.

Tom has two children and a few grandchildren living in Southern California.

He says he wrote *The Road to Iwo Jima* for them, but I think his life’s story is one for all of us.

14 AUGUST 2021

In 2013, shortly after I wrote this blog, Tom sent me a signed copy of his memoir. Tom passed away at his home in Murrieta, California, on 6 July 2014.

This Journal was written in *Gratitude*.

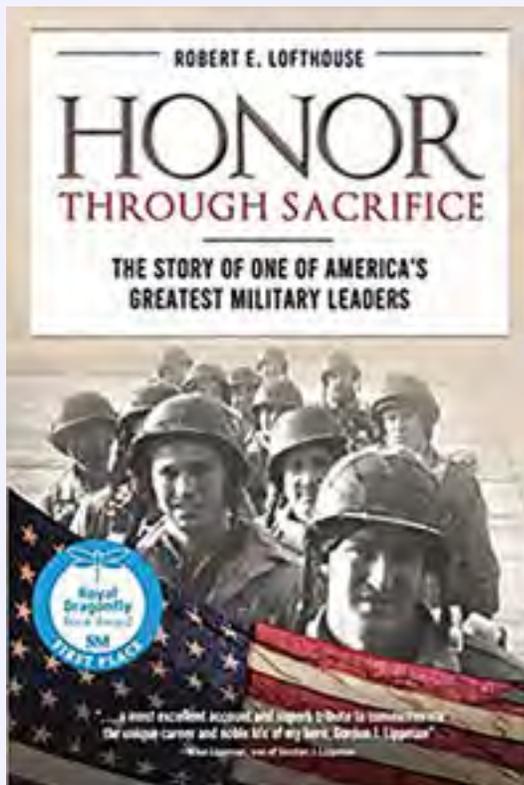


MWSA DISPATCHES IS LOOKING FOR MEMBER SUBMISSIONS .

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 (1300 words or less, please) or have further questions, please email:

dispatches@mwsa.co



HONOR THROUGH SACRIFICE

by Robert Lofthouse

Genre(s): Military History

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“A man can fight if he can see daylight down the road somewhere,” President Lyndon Johnson told a senator in March 1965. “But there ain’t no daylight in Vietnam—there’s not a bit.”

Even as he said that, he was committing the first US ground combat units and initiating a massive bombing campaign in North Vietnam. Unaware of President Johnson’s private misgivings about the conflict, Gordon Lippman dutifully entered Vietnam as the 3rd Brigade/1st Infantry Division executive officer in September of that year.

MEET JOHN CATHCART

Bob Doerr

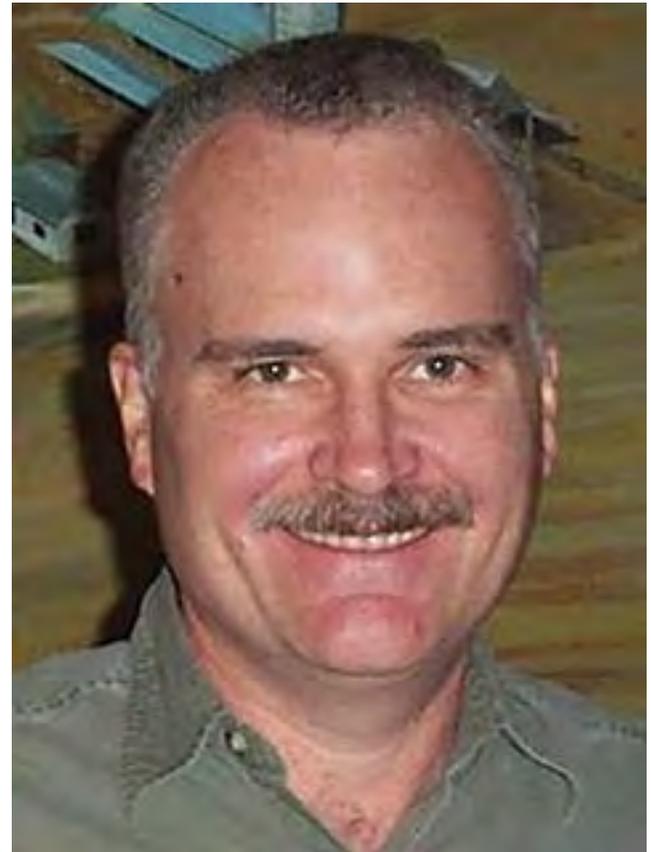
AS I MENTIONED IN MY article in the last issue of *Dispatches*, I continue to be impressed with the talents and volunteerism of our MWSA members. A few have out-shown the many, with volunteer efforts that have truly been the life's blood for our Society.

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.

My goal in these articles is to allow our membership to know more about these MWSA contributors or all-stars. In this issue, the person I am highlighting is our very own John Cathcart.

Many of you know him as the "Golden Voice" behind the microphone at our awards ceremonies. He has indeed turned our awards ceremonies into a first-class production. However, he has done a mountain of volunteer work behind the scenes that has consistently improved the quality of the organization and enhanced the Society's value to its membership.

John has been a member since 2007 and from early on became a key contributor. Years ago, he became our webmaster and rebuilt our simple website. Years later,



after a few years hiatus, he volunteered to become the webmaster again, turning it into our current sophisticated website.

He integrated our site with social media and opened our own Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites/pages. He created a system so some of what we include on our web page automatically is shared with our social media sites.

Five years ago, he offered to become our Book Awards Director and enhanced our system of scoring books. He assumed the role of membership manager and designed

an automated process to deal with membership registration and renewals. He was single-handedly doing most of the volunteer work needed to keep the Society afloat.

While he has recently weened himself of some of these responsibilities, he continues to stay involved and to help.

So, by now you should get the point. For well over a decade, John's been deeply involved in helping MWSA become a better organization.

But who is he? Well, I dug around online and was able to pick up a few things I'd like to share:

John graduated from George Washington University and then spent twenty years in the USAF as a pilot.

In those twenty years, John and his family moved fifteen times—including four overseas tours. In addition to training aircraft, John piloted the B-52, FB-111A and the F-111F. His last military flying assignment was in the C-12, which he flew while serving as a military attaché in Colombia and Venezuela.

For the remainder of his military career, John worked in a series of staff assignments, including the Office of the Secretary of Defense at the Pentagon and the US Southern Command.

Shortly after retiring from the Air Force in 1998, he was hired by American Airlines. He spent most of the next sixteen years

flying 737s out of American's pilot base in Miami.

In 2015, he traded in his airline uniform for much more casual clothing befitting a fully retired person. He now devotes most of his time to scaring—not catching—fish in the lake behind his house, spoiling his grandchildren, driving his wife crazy, and dreaming of new books to write.

John is indeed a top-notch writer, a key player on MWSA's team, and an individual I have learned to very much appreciate.



A Conversation with MWSA Member

PENNY RAFFERTY HAMILTON, PH.D.

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 13 DECEMBER 2021

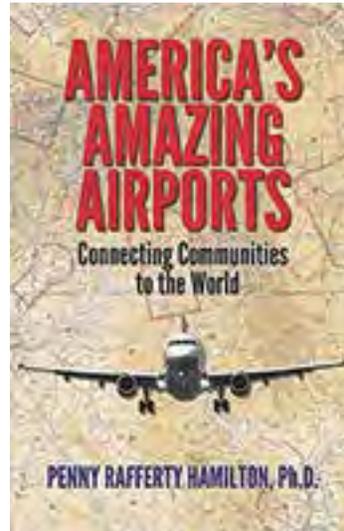
PENNY RAFFERTY HAMILTON IS AN award-winning writer and photographer with over forty years authoring articles and books. Dr. Hamilton reflects her passions—aviation, Western heritage, and women's history.

A world-record setting aviator, her current focus is aviation and aerospace history. Recently, she authored *America's Amazing Airports*, *Inspiring Words for Sky and Space Women*, and *101 Trailblazing Women of Air and Space*.

Dr. Hamilton holds degrees from Temple University, Columbia College (Distinguished Alumna Award winner), and the University of Nebraska (Alumni Achievement Award Winner).

Her ground-breaking *Teaching Women to Fly Research Project* findings were published in the *Proceedings of the Human Resource Development International*, and in the International textbook, *Absent Aviators: Gender Issues in Aviation*.

Hamilton appears with her airplane on that book cover. Hamilton is a Laureate of the Colorado Aviation, Colorado Women's, and Colorado Author's Halls of Fame. Her success story was featured on Rocky Mountain Public Television *Great*

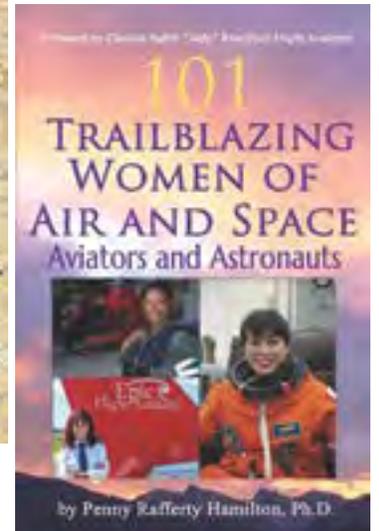


Colorado Women, produced in documentary style.

Hamilton was named National Association of State Aviation Officials Aviation Journalist winner.

She co-holds World & National Aviation Speed Records. She is honored in the Amelia Earhart International Forest of Friendship, ABC-TV Channel 7 Denver *Everyday Hero* Award Winner, Federal Aviation Administration Central Region Aviation Education Champion, two-time winner of the U.S. Small Business Administration Media Advocate Award, and Eli Lilly International Oncology on Canvas Art Competition winner.

Multi-talented, Hamilton is dedicated to sharing the stories of inspiring women and aviation history.



MWSA: How did you find out about MWSA?

PENNY RAFFERTY HAMILTON, PH.D.: My husband of fifty years, Dr. William A. Hamilton is a long-time writer in the field of military issues and history. Because he was heavily involved in the editing of my recent books, he noticed the large number of women included from military aviation, especially World War II. He suggested MWSA members would be interested in these inspiring stories.

After several emails sharing my background, MWSA volunteers encouraged me to join. I did so on December 7—eighty years after Pearl Harbor as my symbolic tribute to those brave WWII military members and their families.

MWSA: Do your books include military aviation history?

HAMILTON: Definitely, Yes! Readers enjoy inspiring stories. Adventures in military aviation add another element of challenge to their tales. For example, my *America's Amazing Airports* book includes the stories of several military aviation heroes. Because our airports are the centerpieces of our amazing air transportation system, honoring our military aviators is a lasting tribute to their sacrifices and service. Rather than just list airports named after military leaders, I want to share “the rest of their story,” as the late Paul Harvey would say.

Also, I often write print and e-zine articles based on research from my books. For example, *Airports Honor Vietnam Military Pilots*, a recent *State Aviation Journal* article, was based on my original research for my *America's Amazing Airports* book.

MWSA: Are female military aviators in your new book, *101 Trailblazing Women of Air and Space*?

HAMILTON: Yes. For example, a few from around the world associated with World War II. America's WASP (Women Airforce Service Pilots), and Russia's Night Witches of the 588th Night Bomber Regiment. Of course, the WWII civilian women who flew for Britain's Air Transport Auxiliary.

We all need to be reminded of these trailblazers who charted a course for us. Often, their stories are not well known. Several contemporary U.S. Military women aviators are included in the book. Coming from an academic background, I want to encourage readers to “Explore More,” which is what I title my bibliographies.

My books are more pictorial history, which is easy to read for a wider age range of readers. The photographs often propel the story.

If a young woman sees a pilot, or astronaut, or airport manager who looks like she does, research shows she is more likely to pursue the field.

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We encourage young women interested in aviation to post photographs of themselves near an airplane or inside one so that image is always in front of them.

MWSA: Who was the most inspiring in your book?

HAMILTON: Short answer is “ALL,” of course. All the early aviators had a lot to overcome. Women overcame cultural norms. Pioneer aviators flew aircraft literally strung together with piano wire and canvas. Some “aeroplanes” were barely airworthy. Also, the knowledge of aerodynamics was literally ‘seat-of-your pants’. Everyone had a steep learning curve.

Many readers will be familiar with America’s first licensed woman pilot, Harriet Quimby (1911), and Bessie Coleman, the first African American/Native American woman to hold a pilot’s license, and the first Black person to earn an International pilot’s license (1921). But, some might not be as familiar with parachutist, Tiny Broadwick, and Chickasaw stunt pilot, Eula Pearl Carter.

Many readers will know about our early women astronauts as Sally Ride and Shannon Lucid,. But, they may not know about the original MERCURY 13 women.

In my *Inspiring Words for Sky and Space Women: Advice from Historic and Contemporary Trailblazers* book lesser

known vignettes about Native American space engineer, Mary Golda Ross, and NASA Astronaut Kalpana Chawla are told. I believe in the MWSA motto, “Saving History one story at a time.”

MWSA: What is next?

HAMILTON: 2022 will be a year filled with more inspiring tales. Right now I am researching and writing several manuscripts.

MWSA members may be interested in *Athena’s Daughters: Women Warriors of the Sky*. It will be packed with real life stories of military sky stars as U.S. Navy test pilot and NASA astronaut, Suni Williams.

Also, I will include Suni’s inspiring journey in another book titled, *Astronauts of the World: Women in Space*, because many countries have female space trailblazers today. We want to tell their stories to the world.

Of course, all these books need grant support, sponsors, or interested publishers who understand the passion in our industry. Whatever life brings, I know it will be inspiring and motivating. Thank you MWSA for allowing me to share my passion for these true stories.

MWSA: What are a few favorite quotes from your books?

HAMILTON: General Chuck Yeager, “Rules are made for people who aren’t willing to make up their own.”

Martha McSally, U.S.A.F. Colonel (retired), “Before I became a fighter pilot, everyone said that women didn’t have the strength. Well, I had just completed the Hawaii Ironman Triathlon.”

Jessica Cox, “Never let fear stand in the way of an opportunity.” From her inspirational book, *Disarm Your Limits: The Flight Formula to Lift You to Success and Propel You to the Next Horizon*.

This young woman is the world’s first licensed armless pilot. Because of a rare

birth defect, Jessica was born without arms. She learned to use her feet as hands.

Aviation and Aerospace history are exciting. Writing about achievers is inspiring and a blessing for me every day. MWSA members know what a gift it is to write about stellar individuals who energize you to do your best.

Learn more about the author at www.PennyHamilton.com



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LEARNING TO LEAD

Gary Zelinski

IF YOU'RE NOT HAVING FUN, QUIT DOING IT.

IN 1980, I WAS ON my first assignment as a 2nd lieutenant. After high school, I enlisted in the USAF. Five years later, I had earned a college degree and received a commission in the USAF. I was twenty-three years old.

The 'lab' was a series of buildings within buildings and housed in what was known as Building D. Building D was thirty-nine acres or 1,700,000 Sq Ft.

Building D on Offutt AFB was one of the largest buildings in the world. It was constructed in World War II for the assembly of Martin B-26 Bombers. In 1944, the production line was retooled, and in a little over a year, the plant produced 531 B-29s.

The long-range B-29 was used extensively in the last year of WWII against Japan. The two planes to drop atomic bombs, the *Enola Gay* and *Bockscar*, were made in the building.

The floor of the building was almost exclusively made of wooden bricks. The pieces of wood were the size of a red clay brick and covered in a thick layer of tar.

Wooden floors were needed to reduce the chance of sparks. The bomber plant was

made of wood, and an errant spark would have meant disaster.

I often started my day before sunrise and ended after sunset. I believe I lost an entire winter of sunlight working in Building D.

My first job at the lab was not in the photo-reconnaissance section. Could I really be trusted with a job so important? My first job was as the Officer-in-Charge of the support section.

Our section might not process the rolls of film from U-2 or SR-71 spy planes, but it did everything else you could do with film. The black-and-white unit had a couple of enlargers that could magnify an image 150X. Yes, you could read a license plate from 70,000 ft. The color unit rivaled the best commercial labs in Hollywood.

We processed public affairs photographs from all over the Strategic Air Command. Once a year, we processed the update to the Single Integrated Operations Plan. The SIOP, to those of us in the know, was SAC's crown jewels.

The color slides contained all SAC's nuclear targets—including the bomber flight paths and the ICBM Launch options.

Decades later, after a lifetime of living with some of our nation's most tightly-held

secrets, none weighed as heavy as those I learned as a 2nd lieutenant.

Over 100 NCOs and airmen worked in my section. We had enough work to fill twenty-four hours a day for five days a week. Often, a dozen or more folks pulled special duty on the weekends.

A basic truism of photographers and photo processors was the simple slogan, “You’re only as good as your next roll of film.”

The men and women in my section took their jobs seriously, were dedicated, and treated each roll of film as if it were from their own family vacation. That said, mistakes happened. And, with a lot of work came opportunities for a few screw ups.

I quickly learned it was my job to explain screw ups in such a way the workers could continue to focus on doing their jobs.

The only job I hated (and the one I feared most of all) was the Commander-In-Chief’s Wives Club holiday party. Screw up that one and heads would roll—mostly mine.

The superintendent of my section was a quiet senior master sergeant named Mike Howell. Just like me, Mike was a photographer, not just a film processor. While I cut my picture-taking career short, Mike had made the most of it and was just a few months away from retiring.

Before coming to Omaha, Mike was stationed in Berlin, where the military gave him a special allowance to buy civilian clothes. They bought him two or three non-issued cameras and even gave him monthly bonuses or ‘walking around money.’ Turns out, Mike’s job was to be a tourist. Mike’s job was to blend in. He spoke fluent German and had a passport or two...or three...or?

Mike’s job was to walk around and take photographs. Mike never said exactly who or which part of the Air Force he worked for. Anyway, like I said, Mike was a quiet man.

One day shortly after I started in the Support Section, SMSGT Howell came into my small office with a problem.

“Seems that one of our master sergeants is chronically late.”

As the MSGT was a shift leader, this meant he often missed the shift change meetings. How could he manage the shift if he didn’t even make the handover meeting?

SMSGT Howell explained he had tried repeatedly to counsel the MSGT but to no avail.

Still, why did I have to talk to him? *Aren’t personnel problems better handled by the Senior NCOs?*

“Because this might warrant a formal letter of counseling,” SMGST Howell explained.

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“We need you, a commissioned officer, to formally document the counseling.”

“Mike, will you be there at least?”

“Nope, nope. Just would not be right. Poor guy might think we’re ganging up on him.”

“Fine,” I said.

For SMSGT Howell’s part, he would arrange for the MSGT to report to me in my office the following day precisely at shift change.

1500Hrs and shift change came and went—no MSGT. I had composed a formal letter of admonishment the night before. I was reworking it, strengthening it. Sharpening my disappointment.

Finally, twenty minutes late for a formal counseling session on being late, the MSGT showed up.

So did his spouse.

This guy brought his wife.

So now I’ve got...I don’t know what I’ve got.

Call the tower, I’m auguring in.

I closed my office door.

The MSGT sat down. Oddly, he sat on the chair next to the door and the one farthest from my desk.

On the other hand, his wife sat next to me. *Right next to me.*

Why, what the hell? How can I get out of here? Those thoughts raced through my mind.

I can’t remember their names, and I’m glad I can’t.

So, this spouse, this MSGT’s wife, starts explaining how they want children.

“Don’t you like children, Lieutenant?”

“You have children.

“How nice, how special.”

I felt I was in a bad dream, and couldn’t wake up.



“Are those your children I see in the photograph?”

“Two children, how nice.”

“We want children, we’ve been trying for so long, and it just isn’t happening.”

“You see, sir, *you* have him working past midnight every night, and when he gets home, he’s just too tired. I wait up, I try. But he’s just too tired.”

“You see, sir, we can’t try in the morning—you make him work so late, he sleeps all day. The only time we have is right before he needs to go to work. I tell him to hurry up, I want him to hurry up, but he can’t always.”

“You see, sir, *you* are keeping us from having children, Lieutenant.”

Shit, shit, shit, I thought.

“I’ll try and change your shift schedule around,” I said.

“Try and get here on time,” I said.

“I wish you the best,” I said.

“Good luck,” I said.

“Goodbye,” I said.

Just then, I caught a glimpse of SMSGT Howell in the adjoining office.

That office, a much bigger office, belonged to the chief. The chief was the highest-ranking enlisted person in the squadron. Mike and the chief had been in the next office the whole time.

“Were you there the whole time?” I asked.

“Did you hear the whole conversation?”

“Why, Lieutenant, we just figured—with such an important issue—we would need an ‘officer’ to handle it.”

“*Rat Bastards*,” I said.

The chief pulled out three cigars from his desk and put his feet up. Mike was grinning like the Cheshire Cat.

Mike retired a few months later. No ceremony. Very quiet.

I worked next to the chief for three more years. The chief always had my back.



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MILITARY VEHICLES

Sandra Miller Linhart

OVER THE SUMMER I HAD the pleasure of visiting a fascinating museum—The National Museum of Military Vehicles in Dubois (pronounce Du-Boyce), Wyoming.

Dubois is a quaint little town just east of Jackson Hole and Yellowstone National Park. It's got charm and a history that would give even the grumpiest traveler a chuckle. Go ahead, ask one of the locals why their town is pronounced Du-Boyce. Wyoming is full of rebel spirit, for sure.

As a Wyoming native, I am partial to that neck of the woods as I was born and raised just a hop, skip, and jump from Dubois in a small (yet just as charming) town of Lander.

I figure not many of you know much about Wyoming except that the wind blows a lot. I couldn't confirm that, though. Mountain towns like Lander only occasionally get winds. I've heard rumors Casper, Laramie, and Cheyenne could give the Windy City a run for her money.

But I digress. This bit is about the best 'little' museum in Dubois.

And by 'little'...

The 140,000 square foot museum features over 450 military vehicles and historical artifacts, capturing 100 years of American ingenuity from WWI to the Global War on

Terror. Additional highlights include a theater, two meeting rooms, a gift shop, and a research library.

The main galleries feature a thoughtfully designed WWII vehicle gallery, post-WWII vehicle gallery educating guests on the veteran experience during the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and a smaller artifacts and armament gallery.

Their mission is, "To honor the service and sacrifice of our Veterans and their families. To educate next generations of the history of American freedom. To preserve and share historic military vehicles."

The owner (of all the vehicles—yes, he owns them all) is typically on site to give guided tours. An added bonus is an arms room which, among a gazillion other guns holds *thee* rifle that apparently fired the "shot heard around the world" and started the Revolutionary War.

The next time you find yourself around my old stomping grounds, be sure to check them out. Or check out their FB page, [Facebook.com/NMMVWY](https://www.facebook.com/NMMVWY)

The very best part? Admission for adults and seniors is \$15, but U.S. Military Veterans get in for free.

6419 US Hwy 26, Dubois ~ nmmv.org

A Conversation with MWSA Member

ANNETTE LANGLOIS GRUNSETH

ANNETTE LANGLOIS GRUNSETH GRADUATED FROM the University of Wisconsin–Madison in Communication Arts: Radio/TV/Film during the turbulent anti-war protest years of the Vietnam War.

Following a forty-year career in marketing and public relations in healthcare, she has focused on writing poetry published widely in journals and anthologies such as *Dispatches* (MWSA), *Midwest Prairie Review*, *Bramble*, *The Poetry Box*, and *Poets to Come* (Walt Whitman anthology).

Grunseth has received awards for her poetry with *Wisconsin Academy Review*, *Wisconsin People & Ideas*, and the *Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets*. Her poem *On Behalf of a Grateful Nation* was a finalist in *The Mill, a Place for Writers*, Poetry Prize. She was a *Pushcart Prize* nominee for her book, *Becoming Transparent: One Family's Journey of Gender Transition* (Finishing Line Press.) Her most recent book, *Combat and Campus: Writing Through War*, is a hybrid featuring a collection of her journalist-brother's letters written from Vietnam, historical non-fiction, and poetry.

MWSA: How did you find out about MWSA?

ANNETTE LANGLOIS GRUNSETH: MWSA member, Ruth Crocker, encouraged me to



join MWSA. How we connected is a story in itself. Her husband, Capt. David R. Crocker, was the commanding officer in my brother's unit in Dau Tieng, Vietnam.

While working on my brother's letters from Vietnam, planning the book, out of curiosity I "googled" Capt. David Crocker and when I did, Ruth Crocker's name came up. What synchronicity!

She is an author, a book publisher, and ultimately published my book, *Combat and Campus: Writing Through War*. (Elm Grove Press, 2021.)

I have participated in nearly every MWSA educational class via Zoom during our

sheltered-in months of 2020-21, meeting many amazing writers.

MWSA: Why did you decide to publish your brother's letters from Vietnam?

GRUNSETH: After returning home from Vietnam in 1969, my brother experienced PTSD, but it was not yet identified as a war-related illness. Then, my brother passed away in 2004 from an Agent Orange cancer after being in medical treatment for fifteen difficult years.

I published the book to remember and honor him along with thousands of other soldiers who died as a result of the Vietnam war.

Along with most Vietnam soldiers, he was not given a welcome home. It is my hope the work of this book will help others heal, feel recognized, and honored.

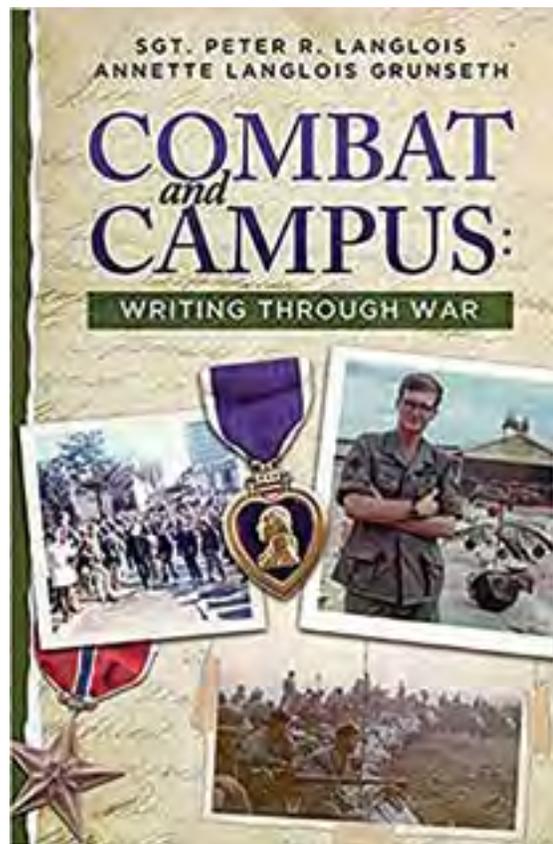
For everyone, it is important history to be documented and remembered. It needs to be part of high school and college history classes.

MWSA: What makes this book unique?

GRUNSETH: My brother, Peter R. Langlois, was a recent graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a degree in journalism. In his well-written letters, he chronicles the smells, sights, and sounds during some of the darkest days of the Vietnam war from 1968-69. He returned home to a nation still protesting the war in which I, his younger sister, had walked to class behind National Guardsmen

marching across the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus.

What makes the book unique is our correspondence and my documentary poetry in response to the war in Vietnam and social change happening at home. Between his combat and my campus experiences plus the aftermath of both, we share what was learned and what was lost.



MWSA: What else would you like readers to know about the book?

GRUNSETH: My brother was a skilled photographer and took excellent photos with a 35mm camera he purchased at the PX in Vietnam. He took photos then mailed home the canisters of film.

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When he returned, he compiled an extensive photo album where he captioned the photos with locations and names of his fellow soldiers.

Not only are his letters an accurate recording of history, he illustrated his experiences as a good journalist would do. Many of his photos are included in the book.

An interesting fact: Our parents kept these thirty-six letters in a safe deposit box as they knew they were an important record of Vietnam war history. It was the dying wish of my parents that his letters be published to help others and preserve this history.

MWSA: Where can people get the book?

GRUNSETH: *Combat and Campus: Writing Through War* is available on my website:

<https://www.annettegrunseth.com> and also from the publisher, Elm Grove Press, <https://www.elmgrovepress.org/bookstore/> as well as on Amazon.

Reviews and excerpts from the book are also on my website.

MWSA: Have you received mail or comments from your readers?

GRUNSETH: Yes, since the book launched on May 17, 2021, I have received letters from many veterans and others.

Through Ruth Crocker, I was able to connect with some of the soldiers who were in my brother's unit.

One veteran wrote saying, "The writings in the book mean more to me than you will ever realize. For over fifty years myself and many others in A Co. 2/22 Inf. have looked for closure about events that took place so long ago and your writing has given some closure to me."

Another reader emailed to say, "I love the raw emotion and perspective of Peter's letters. Your poetry woven with his letters is masterful. Such good transitions quotes pulled out as chapter headers, photos, and the emotional tension is perfectly paced. I cried several times. I was transported in time—much more so than the few other memoirs of the war I've read. Peter didn't revise, soften or adjust his story with his later perspectives. I felt like he was writing the letters to me, as if I knew him."

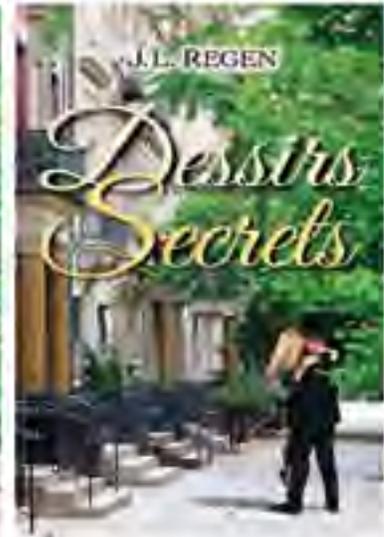


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SECRET DESIRES

ISBN: 978-0-9984099-1-7

Nothing in Margo Simmons' life comes easy. She can't claim the inheritance on a condo apartment her uncle has left to her until she is gainfully employed in a job for a year. She meets the man of her dreams but anguishes over a loving relationship because he is still emotionally tied to his deceased wife. With great difficulty, she becomes the guardian to a recently orphaned child she had been tutoring. Margo evolves from an insecure, newbie elementary teacher into a woman determined to fulfill the secret desires locked in her heart. My story speaks to anyone who has suffered a loss and had to start over.

J.L. Regen's book was inspired by a real life story of lovers who join hearts against many odds. She lives in the New York metropolitan area, is a published photojournalist, has short suspense stories online, and has taught English as a Second Language to students around the world. This is her first contemporary romance. She has also published three nonfiction books, has submitted her WWII historical family saga for review, and is now working on her WWII suspense series.

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Cover by Karen Phillips who resides in California and has a diversified list of clients.

J. L. is available for interviews and book readings/signings in your area.

A Conversation with MWSA Member

RONA SIMMONS

INTERVIEW DATE: 28 APRIL 2021

RONA SIMMONS IS AN ATLANTA-AREA author of historical fiction and nonfiction. After co-authoring *Images from World War II* in 2016 celebrating the art of WWII veteran and artist Jack Smith, Simmons again turned to the Second World War for *The Other Veterans of World War II: Stories from Behind the Front Lines* released by Kent State University Press in 2020. Her next book, a work in progress, combines her passion for history and research to tell another story with a unique perspective on the war.

Simmons has written for literary journals, magazines, and newspapers and is active in her local writing community. She is active in her local writing community and local veterans organizations (as a member of the Atlanta World War II Roundtable, the North Georgia Veterans Group, and Stories Behind the Stars, a group that is documenting the stories of all 400,000 fallen of WWII).

She is also a contributing author and book reviewer for DODReads.org, an organization dedicated to reading and lifelong learning.



Simmons graduated from Tulane University and received her post-graduate degree from Georgia State University. Prior to launching her writing career, she spent thirty years in business, ending with a period with IBM as a business consultant.

MWSA: How long have you been associated with MWSA?

RONA SIMMONS: Having embarked on my third book on WWII and contemplating a fourth, I decided it was time to make the commitment to the discipline of writing on military matters and engaging with a community of like-minded writers for mutual benefit.

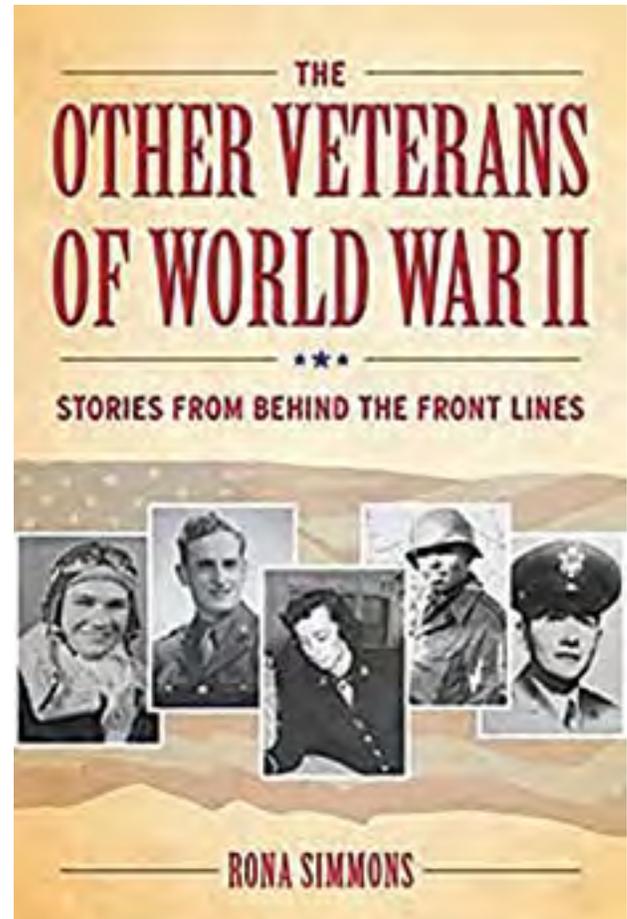
MWSA: Can you share a bit about why you chose to write about history, the military, and WWII in particular?

SIMMONS: I come by an interest in the military “honestly,” as they say. My father served in World War II as P-38 fighter pilot, flying bomber escort for B-17s into southern Europe. He remained in the military after the war, so I grew up in a military family, in-and-out of foreign countries and in dozens of homes and air stations across the country.

My parents were avid readers and believers in education; and we had a wall of books in our home. I chose *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* from those shelves—no *Harry Potter* or *Chronicles of Narnia* (Well, I’ll admit, maybe there was a *Nancy Drew* or *Agatha Christie* tome as well). Regardless, that book stayed with me and spawned a love for seminal events in our history.

Years, make that decades, after the war, I finally encouraged my father to talk about his service during the war. It was not that he did not want to speak about his experiences—it was just that no one had bothered to ask.

What I thought would be a two or three hour conversation turned into weeks of delving into his now faded records and talking and taping. At the end I produced a mini memoir for the family. I was hooked.



MWSA: Now, please, tell us a bit about your recent book, *The Other Veterans of World War II*.

SIMMONS: In 2016, I met, quite by chance, WWII veteran, Jack Smith. We immediately hit it off and soon were collaborating to bring together his incredibly detailed paintings of iconic scenes of WWII into a book to preserve the story of his and his brother’s service and to help educate readers about the war. In the attending research, I learned the story of another WWII veteran—this time not someone on the deck of a ship under attack by Japanese dive bombers, nor

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someone slogging through the jungles in the Pacific, but a humble and determined army sergeant who served behind the lines.

He was a member of the Quartermaster Corps' graves registration unit—a unit and a job I had never known of, nor could I imagine the horrific responsibility he shouldered. The encounter made me realize that although the dramatic stories of WWII soldiers have been the stuff of memoirs, novels, documentaries, and feature films, the men and women who served in less visible roles, never engaging in physical combat, had received scant attention.

Convinced their frequent depiction as pencil pushers, grease monkeys, or cowards was far from the truth, I set out to discover their real story. I talked to veterans, read their letters, perused their photos and journals, and touched their mementos. With their stories in hand, I decided to compile them not just into a collection of tales, but into a telling of the history of the war through their eyes.

The book follows the men and women as they report for service, complete their training, and ship out to stations far from home.

I tell of their dreams to see combat and their disappointment. Ultimately, however, I found the non-combat veterans had far more in common with front-line

soldiers than differences. And, I believe the book provides a more complete picture of the war, bringing long-overdue appreciation for the men and women whose everyday tasks, unexpected acts of sacrifice, and faith and humor contributed mightily to the outcome of the war.

MWSA: Can you share what you are working on now?

SIMMONS: 2020, being the seventy-fifth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, was a fortuitous time for the release of my most recent book, *The Other Veterans of World War II: Stories from Behind the Lines*.

Stories of the war rose to the top of our consciousness. My book offered a unique perspective on the war—the untold stories of men and women who worked far from the spotlight yet served their country honorably and with courage.

A Gathering of Men, the working title of my new book, takes that same premise, that is, of telling an untold story—this time of soldiers in the air and on the ground during the allied bombing campaign in Europe.

It's fiction this time, but, like my earlier work, the protagonist is not the hero portrayed in numerous books in the genre. It again takes a different perspective on the war. And more than a work of historical fiction, the book interweaves exhaustively researched, little known details of the war into the story. So much

so, that I prefer to think of the book as a “nonfiction novel.” I look forward to being able to share more soon.

MWSA: Having written both fiction and nonfiction, how would compare the two and which do you prefer?

SIMMONS: That’s a hard question to answer. Both offer so much—not just to the reader but to the writer. To me as long as a book is based on a true story or an actual event or perhaps a turning point in a person’s life, it offers a chance for the reader to learn something. I am a big proponent of life-long learning and devour books with these elements. As a writer I also believe both forms can challenge me—they require me to dig deep into history, artifacts, and stories behind the stories to find the nuggets that make a compelling new read.

MWSA: Finally, what advice can you offer to those starting out on their writing career particularly in military writing?

SIMMONS: I suppose the age old piece of advice is to read and read widely in your chosen field.

To be successful I believe you have to bring something new to the table and the only way to do that is to know what has already been said about your topic.

Then, of course, you have to do the research to bring up the little details that make the story come alive.

And maybe, too, it is necessary to know when to stop researching, when to stop writing, and when to stop editing and share your work.

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PRESS RELEASE

Believing in Horses out West Hits Amazon #1 New Release

MILITARY WRITERS SOCIETY OF AMERICA (MWSA) author Valerie Ormond's latest novel, *Believing In Horses Out West*, reached an **Amazon #1 ranking** on day one, a milestone occurrence for an author who has self-published for the first time.

The young adult fiction novel takes Sadie Navarro on an adventure from Maryland to a Montana ranch to check on a horse she rescued. At Homeplace Ranch, Sadie

learns about ranch life, makes new friends, and encounters an unwelcome mystery.

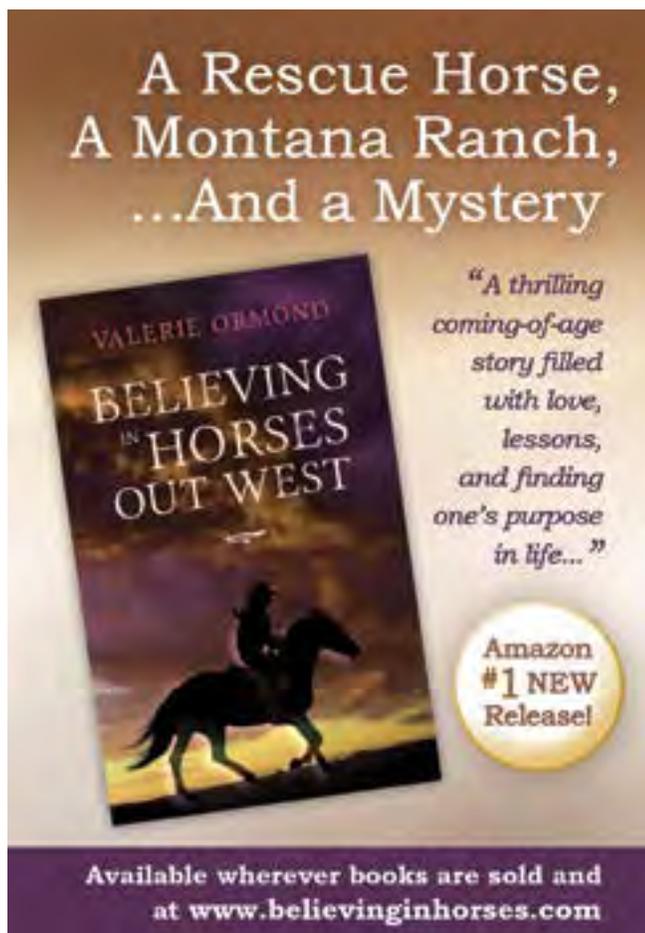
New York Times Bestselling Author of *Sgt. Reckless: America's War Horse*, *Robin Hutton*, described the book as, "A thrilling coming-of-age story filled with love, lessons, and finding one's purpose in life..."

Equestrian author Carly Kade and host of the *Equestrian Author Spotlight Podcast* said, "The book highlights the special bond between humans and horses...It's so easy to recommend this lovely story to horse lovers of all ages...."

Ormond's first two books based in Bowie, *Believing In Horses* and *Believing In Horses, Too*, published with J. B. Max Publishing, won eight national and International awards including the MWSA Awards, an EQUUS Winnie Award, and the Maryland Touch of Class Award. Her nonfiction and fiction stories have appeared in books, magazines, and news articles worldwide.

Believing In Horses Out West is available via *Amazon*, *Barnes & Noble*, book retailers, and at [www. BelievingInHorses.com](http://www.BelievingInHorses.com).

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(443)994-5651



ABOUT VETERAN WRITING SERVICES, LLC: Valerie Ormond retired as a naval intelligence officer and founded *Veteran Writing Services, LLC* providing professional writing and consulting services. Besides her award-winning *Believing In Horses* books, Ormond's fiction and nonfiction stories have appeared in books, magazines, and news articles worldwide. For additional information about her horse books, please see <http://believinginhorses.com/>.



WELCOME TO THE MWSA ~ WHO WE ARE

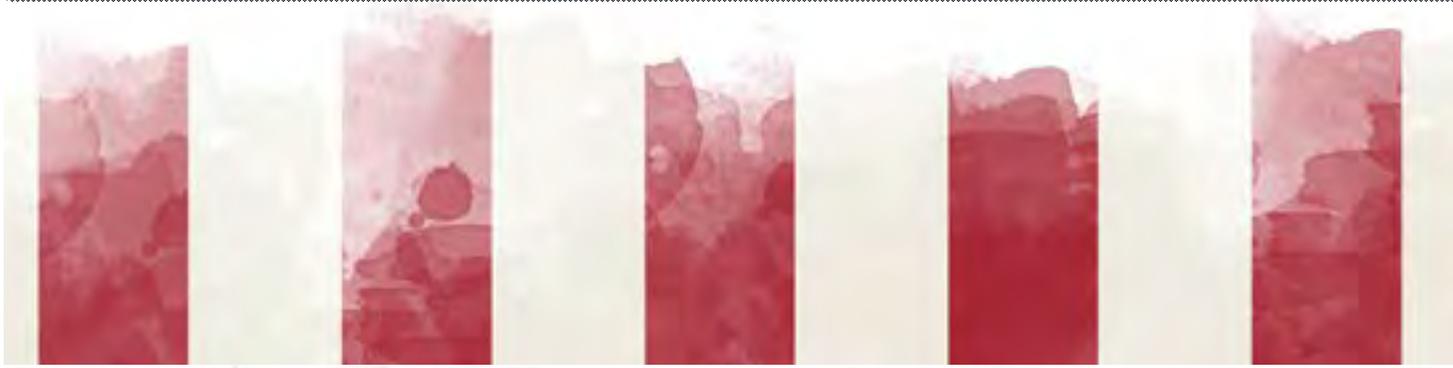
John Cathcart

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.

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SAVING HISTORY ONE STORY AT A TIME

