

Palo Duro Canyon State Park



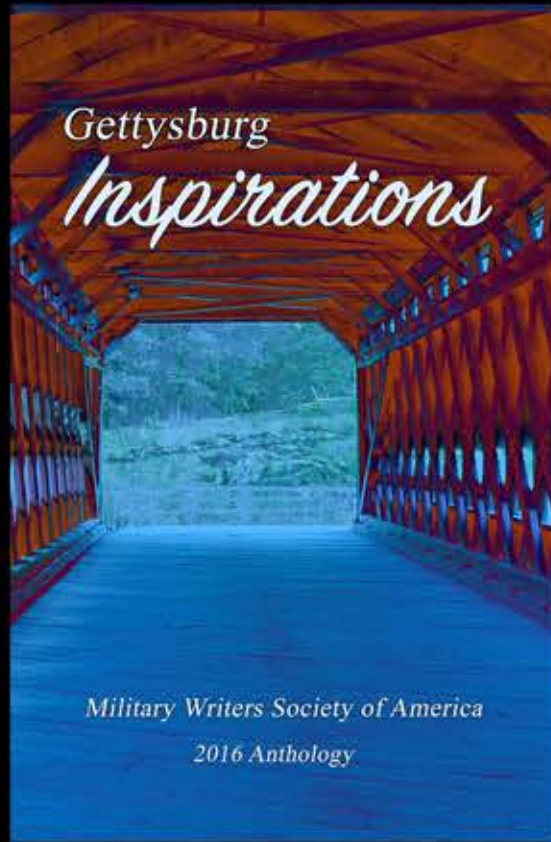
# DISPATCHES

MILITARY WRITERS SOCIETY OF AMERICA

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SPRING 2017



Check out the new Military Writers Society of America 2016 Anthology, *Gettysburg Inspirations* inside.



Fort Fisher, NC



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- Awaken Your Whisper - Kim Kluxen Meredith*
- A Good Marine - Aurelia Smeltz*
- Tent Camping Days - Joe Campolo, Jr*
- I look for him and wonder - Kathy Gaskins/Jenny LaSala*
- Rememer the fallen Sailors of the USS Stark - Nancy Bonar*
- Iwo Jima Eulogy - Joyce Faulkner*
- An Omen - Darcy O'Neil-Johnson*
- Tips & Tricks - How Should a Chapter End - Jack Woodville Londaon, MWSA Director of Education*



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*An Omen - Darcy O'Neil-Johnson*

*Tips & Tricks - How Should a Chapter End - Jack Woodville Londaon,  
MWSA Director of Education*

## *Letter from the editor*

### *Pat McGrath Avery*

The programming committee is gearing up for a fantastic conference in San Antonio. Mark your calendars for the weekend of September 8-10, and submit your registration.

Spring is certainly “springing” and most of us are making summer plans. Why not plan to submit an article to Dispatches for the summer or fall?

In this issue, Nancy Bonar brings us the story of the USS Stark in time for the 30th anniversary and memorial service on May 17, at the Mayport Naval Station Memorial Park. We express our condolences to the families of the 37 victims and our support to the survivors. This tragic story is still timely in today’s world.

I recently had the honor of judging a writing contest in Brownsville, Texas. Among several outstanding entries, I found one that I felt would be of special interest to our readers. Darcy O’Neil-Johnson is writing a book and entered an excerpt, “The Omen,” that is included in this issue.

Kim Kluxen Meredith, Jenny LaSala and Aurelia Smeltz (sister of MWSA member Jim Stevens) submitted articles dealing with loss and grief. Joe Campolo spins a tale of another misadventure. Jack Woodville London offers writing tips and the MWSA Awards team (John Cathcart and Rob Ballister) updates us on the book awards and review program.

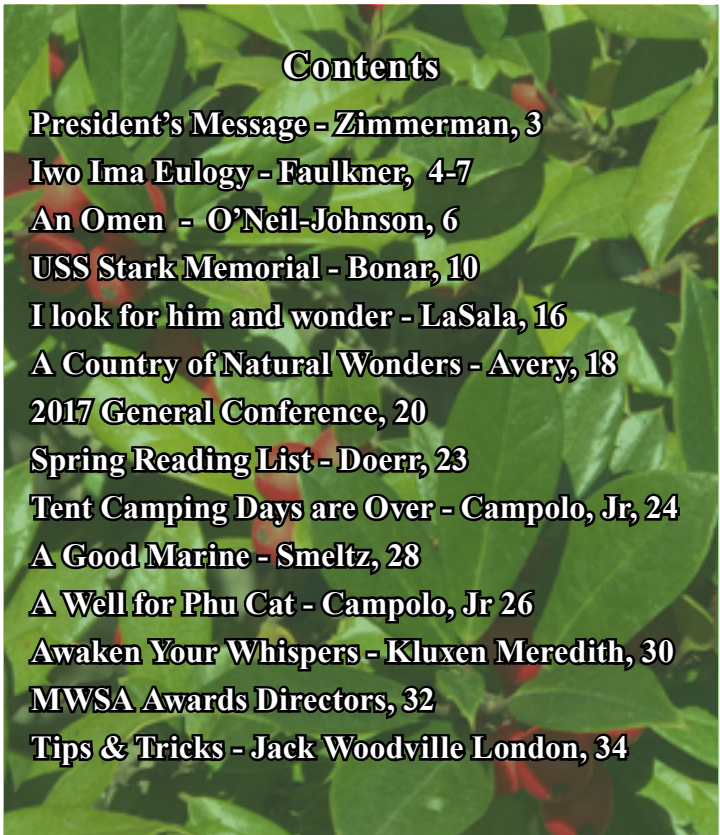
We introduce a new member benefit. We now will post new book announcements to the monthly email blasts and will do three member new book ads per issue of Dispatches. Also, we will strive to publish new author interviews. See rules and instructions on how to submit on page 29.

We hope you enjoy this issue, the spring season and continued writing and reading.



## Staff

Editor - Pat McGrath Avery  
 Columnist - Dwight Jon Zimmerman  
 Columnist - Bob Doerr  
 Columnist - Jack Woodville London  
 Feature Writer - Joe Campolo, Jr.  
 Feature Writer - Joyce Faulkner  
 Feature Writer - Jenny LaSala  
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## Contents

**President’s Message - Zimmerman, 3**  
**Iwo Ima Eulogy - Faulkner, 4-7**  
**An Omen - O’Neil-Johnson, 6**  
**USS Stark Memorial - Bonar, 10**  
**I look for him and wonder - LaSala, 16**  
**A Country of Natural Wonders - Avery, 18**  
**2017 General Conference, 20**  
**Spring Reading List - Doerr, 23**  
**Tent Camping Days are Over - Campolo, Jr, 24**  
**A Good Marine - Smeltz, 28**  
**A Well for Phu Cat - Campolo, Jr 26**  
**Awaken Your Whispers - Kluxen Meredith, 30**  
**MWSA Awards Directors, 32**  
**Tips & Tricks - Jack Woodville London, 34**



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## President's Message

One of the great experiences MWSA offers is the opportunity to review books written by fellow members. At conferences I've had members tell me how grateful they are for that MWSA book review. In many cases, it's the only official review their work received. This year's list of books contains an impressive assortment of memoirs and fiction, and I'd like to give you a chance to get in on the reviewing fun by volunteering to be a reviewer. Not only will you get a great book to read and the satisfaction of knowing you're doing something to help a fellow member, you'll also receive a "thank you" from MWSA. This past year reviewers all got Amazon gift cards.

John Cathcart and Rob Ballister are the MWSA Awards Directors, and I am proud of they stepped forward to take care of the backlog of member books and getting them timely reviews. I'm asking if you could help John and Rob out by volunteering to be a reviewer. You'll be surprised how easy the job is. I'm not kidding. if you can read, then you can do a review!

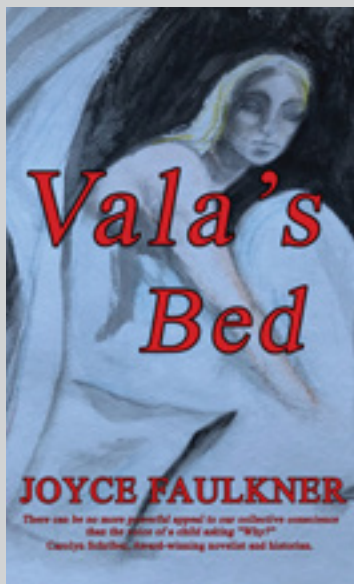
Contact them at [MWSAAwardsDirectors@gmail.com](mailto:MWSAAwardsDirectors@gmail.com). You'll be glad you did!

Dwight Jon Zimmerman, President, Military Writers Society of America





*MWSA Education Director Jack Woodville London crossing the field of Pickett's Charge in Gettysburg*



Choosing to marry an American GI and accompany him home to Cold Creek, Ohio, after World War II, Vala Hess manages to escape her past and provide shelter and protection for her two young sons, Emo and Milo. But her tormented, traumatized past doesn't let go.

Told from the point of view of her older, more sensitive son, *Vala's Bed* explores the emotions and ramifications of growing up as a German in post World War II America. As an American, Emo espouses American ideals while remembering fragments and dreams of a darker past. As he approaches manhood, he is forced to ponder what that means for him. Who is his natural father? Why is his mother so reticent? Who are the strangers who come knocking—or breaking in? What secrets are hidden among the documents, letters, and photographs in his mother's closet? His search leads Emo to a shocking discovery that could change everything he knows about his grandparents, his mother, his sibling...and himself.

ISBN: 978-1943267231

Now Available on Amazon as trade paperback and kindle.

# IWO JIMA EULOGY

*Joyce Faulkner*

The Battle of Iwo Jima is personal to me. I spent my early years sitting on my father's lap, thumbing through a thick book about the Fifth Marines at Iwo. He would run his work-roughened palms over one page or another. Sometimes he'd sniff and rub his eyes. I'd look up and say, "Daddy, are you crying?" He'd shake his head and point wordlessly at a picture of a round hill. I'd stare at the glossy image and wonder what he saw that I didn't. I still have that book 65 years later. Once a year in February, I take it out and examine each page hoping to see his face in the many official photos of the battle. All I ever find is his name, circled in blue ink, among the thousands in the Fifth Division who fought on Iwo. It's the only part of my relationship with Daddy that is tangible now. Everything else feels like an echo.

I've read a dozen books, many more interviews, and every articles I can find about that tiny island. I've watched hours of silent film converted to video of Marines in Higgins boats circling in choppy waters, awaiting their turn to storm the beaches below Suribachi. At least ten men have shared their very personal stories of their time on Iwo with me. I attended the 65th Anniversary of the Battle of Iwo Jima event in DC, visited the memorial, and the Marine Corps museum at Quantico. I've volunteered a couple years of my time to write and layout a newsletter for the Iwo Jima Association of America. I wrote an historical-fiction novel, *In the Shadow of Suribachi*, and my company has published the memoirs of two veterans of the fight. You might say I am obsessed with the topic, but somehow that moment in history is at the core of who I am. Like other sons and daughters of survivors, I marvel at my own existence. Why did fate rescue the boy who would be my father and take so many others?

In February each year, I take a moment to think about those young marines—those who came home and those who died. I take out Rabbi Roland Gittlesohn's Eulogy and meditate on its message. Rabbi Gittelsohn was a devoted pacifist in the years leading up to World War 2 — even in a world gone mad with the likes of Hitler and Mussolini rampaging through Europe and Hirohito focusing on China, Korea, and the Pacific Islands. Yet, the rabbi became the first Jewish Chaplain the Marine Corps ever appointed—and he was assigned to the Fifth Marines—my dad's division.

Like other chaplains, the Rabbi worked with combatants of all faiths. He put himself in harms way to care for Marines who were doubting or scared or dying. He comforted the wounded and the heartbroken. He honored the dead. He was so effective that he received three service ribbons for his service.

By the end of the thirty-six-day battle, that wretched island was soaked with Marine blood and that of their enemies. Almost every veteran that I've talked with spoke of the Iwo "stink." It was a combination of sulfur, smoke, and rotting bodies. The Seabees got to work building a massive cemetery where the Marine dead of all races and beliefs would rest until they could be returned to their families—Christian graves marked by a cross and Jewish ones by the Star of David.

Because of his work with the men, the division chaplain, Division Chaplain Warren Cuthriel tapped Rabbi Gittelsohn to speak at an all faith dedication service for this cemetery. However, the biases of the time made his selection controversial. Rather than impact the solemnity of the occasion, the rabbi offered to step aside so a protestant minister could officiate. Ultimately, Chaplain Cuthriell decided to have three separate religious services, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish—a diplomatic solution to honor men of all races and ideologies who died fighting on that island.

However, it is Rabbi Gittelsohn's Eulogy that lives on today. Some have called it the Gettysburg Address of World War 2—and the Rabbi does reach back almost a century to quote Abraham Lincoln. Over the years since until his death in 1995, the rabbi was asked to repeat his eulogy for a variety of audiences. The Internet is awash with recordings of it by famous voices like Charles Osgood's.

Personally, it is the text that I turn to when people disappoint, when I find myself lacking, when I forget the basics that I literally learned at my father's knee. That life is a gift, that we all matter, that we must learn from the past...that we must insure "...the birth of a new freedom for all humanity everywhere."





## RABBI ROLAND GITTELSON'S EULOGY, 1945

THIS IS PERHAPS THE GRIMMEST, and surely the holiest task we have faced since D-Day. Here before us lie the bodies of comrades and friends. Men who until yesterday or last week laughed with us, joked with us, trained with us. Men who were on the same ships with us, and went over the sides with us, as we prepared to hit the beaches of this island. Men who fought with us and feared with us. Somewhere in this plot of ground there may lie the individual who could have discovered the cure for cancer. Under one of these Christian crosses, or beneath a Jewish Star of David, there may rest now an individual who was destined to be a great prophet to find the way, perhaps, for all to live in plenty, with poverty and hardship for none. Now they lie here silently in this sacred soil, and we gather to consecrate this earth in their memory.

IT IS NOT EASY TO DO SO. Some of us have buried our closest friends here. We saw these men killed before our very eyes. Any one of us might have died in their places. Indeed, some of us are alive and breathing at this very moment only because men who lie here beneath us, had the courage and strength to give their lives for ours. To speak in memory of such men as these is not easy. Of them, too, can it be said with utter truth:

“The world will little note nor long remember what we say here. It can never forget what they did here.”

No, our poor power of speech can add nothing to what these men and the other dead of our division who are not here have already done. All that we can even hope to do is follow their example. To show the same selfless courage in peace that they did in war. To swear that, by the grace of God and the stubborn strength and power of human will, their sons and ours shall never suffer these pains again. These men have done their job well. They have paid the ghastly price of freedom. If that freedom be once again lost, as it was after the last war, the unforgivable blame will be ours, not theirs. So it be the living who are here to be dedicated and consecrated.

WE DEDICATE OURSELVES, first, to live together in peace the way they fought and are buried in war. Here lie men who loved America because their ancestors, generations ago helped in her founding, and other men who loved her with equal passion because they themselves or their own fathers escaped from oppression to her blessed shores. Here lie officers and [privates], [Blacks] and whites, rich and poor...together. Here are Protestants, Catholics, and Jews...together.

Here no man prefers another because of his faith or despises him because of his color. Here there are no quotas of how many from each group are admitted or allowed. Among these men there is no discrimination. No prejudice. No hatred. Theirs is the highest and purest democracy.

Anyone among us the living who fails to understand that, will thereby betray those who lie here. Whoever of us lifts his hand in hate against another, or thinks himself superior to those who happen to be in the minority, makes of this ceremony and of the bloody sacrifice it commemorates, an empty, hollow mockery. To this, then, as our solemn, sacred duty, do we the living now dedicate ourselves: to the right Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, of all races alike, to enjoy the democracy for which all of them have here paid the price.

TO ONE THING MORE do we consecrate ourselves in memory of those who sleep beneath these crosses and stars. We shall not foolishly suppose, as did the last generation of America's fighting, that victory on the battlefield will automatically guarantee the triumph of democracy at home. This war, with all its frightful heartache and suffering, is but the beginning of our generation's struggle for democracy. When the last battle has been won, there will be those at home, as there were last time, who will want us to turn our backs in selfish isolation on the rest of organized humanity, and thus to sabotage the very peace for which we fight. We promise you who lie here; we will not do that. We will join hands with Britain, China, Russia—in peace, even as we have in war, to build the kind of world for which you died.

WHEN THE LAST SHOT has been fired, there will still be those eyes that are turned backward not forward, who will be satisfied with those wide extremes of

poverty and wealth in which the seeds of another war can breed. We promise you, our departed comrades: this, too, we will not permit. This war has been fought by the common man; its fruits of peace must be enjoyed by the common man. We promise, by all that is sacred and holy, that your sons, the sons of miners and millers, the sons of farmers and workers—will inherit from your death the right to a living that is decent and secure.

WHEN THE FINAL CROSS has been placed in the last cemetery, once again there will be those to whom profit is more important than peace, who will insist with the voice of sweet reasonableness and appeasement that it is better to trade with the enemies of mankind than, by crushing them, to lose their profit. To you who sleep here silently, we give our promise: we will not listen: We will not forget that some of you were burnt with oil that came from American wells, that many of you were killed by shells fashioned from American steel. We promise that when once again people seek profit at your expense, we shall remember how you looked when we placed you reverently, lovingly, in the ground.

THIS DO WE MEMORIALIZE those who, having ceased living with us, now live within us. Thus do we consecrate ourselves, the living, to carry on the struggle they began. Too much blood has gone into this soil for us to let it lie barren. Too much pain and heartache have fertilized the earth on which we stand. We here solemnly swear: this shall not be in vain. Out of this, and from the suffering and sorrow of those who mourn this, will come—we promise—the birth of a new freedom for all humanity everywhere. And let us say... AMEN.

[Rabbi Gittelsohn's sermon and history courtesy of the USMC archives]

Two young women murdered, drug runners from Mexico, an ambitious businessman, a Coast Guard "Sand Pounder" and a stolen treasure from World War II converge in a murder investigation that pits Detective Rachel Vasquez, Hap Lynch and his trusty dog Luke against a murderer with no remorse.

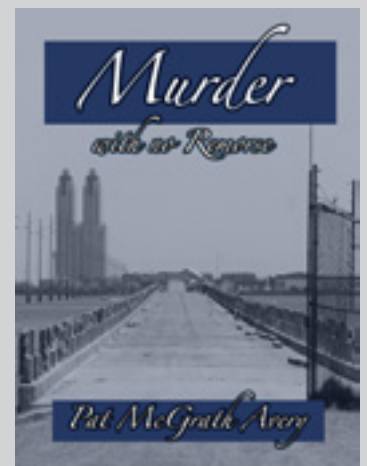
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MEMORIAL ADDRESS - FIFTH MARINE DIVISION CEMETERY (Cont'd)

Any man among us the living who fails to understand that will thereby betray those who lie here dead. Whoever of us lifts his hand in hate against a brother, or thinks himself superior to those who happen to be in the minority, makes of this ceremony and of the bloody sacrifice it commemorates, an empty, hollow mockery. To this, then, as our solemn, sacred duty, do we the living now dedicate ourselves:--to the right of Protestants, Catholics and Jews, of white men and negroes alike, to enjoy the democracy for which all of them have here paid the price.

To one thing more do we consecrate ourselves in memory of those who sleep beneath these crosses and stars. We shall not foolishly suppose, as did the last generation of Americas' fighting men, that victory on the battlefield will automatically guarantee the triumph of democracy at home. This war, with all its frightful heartache and suffering, is but the beginning of our generation's struggle for democracy. When the last battle has been won, there will be those at home, as there were last time, who will want us to turn our backs in selfish isolation on the rest of organized humanity, and thus to sabotage the very peace for which we fight. We promise you who lie here: we will not do that! We will join hands with Britain, China, Russia in peace, even as we have in war, to build the kind of world for which you died.

When the last shot has been fired, there will still be those whose eyes are turned backward, not forward, who will be satisfied with those wide extremes of poverty and wealth in which the seeds of another war can breed. We promise you, our departed comrades: this too we will not permit. This war has been fought by the common man; its fruits of peace must be enjoyed by the common man! We promise, by all that is sacred and holy, that your sons the sons of miners and millers, the sons of farmers and workers, will inherit from your death the right to a living that is decent and secure.

When the final cross has been placed in the last cemetery, once again there will be those to whom profit is more important than peace, who will insist with the voice of sweet reasonableness and appeasement that it is better to trade with the enemies of mankind than, by crushing them, to lose their profit. To you who sleep here silently, we give our promise: we will not listen! We will not forget that some of you were burnt with oil that came from American wells, that many of you were killed by shells fashioned from American steel. We promise that when once again men seek profit at your expense, we shall remember how you looked when we placed you reverently, lovingly, in the ground.

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Amen.





# An Omen

*Darcy O'Neil-Johnson*

For two days it had seemed as if the rain would never stop, and if she had her way, it never would! Yet here she was on a dimly overcast May seventeenth morning, gazing at the profile of her ever so proud husband. His gold shoulder epaulettes bore an outstretched eagle which designating his rank as that of a Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Cavalry. With a little luck, this would be his last campaign, after which, the General's stars that he had so deservedly earned during the War of The Rebellion, would be returned to his uniform, and then she and her 'Boy General' would be re-assigned to a much deserved eastern posting.

As she continued to look at Autie's profile, she was still dismayed to see that he had cut the golden ringlets that she loved to run her fingers through. He had explained that with the upcoming summer's heat, it was out of necessity that he had had his hair trimmed. Upon seeing the continued dismay on his wife's face, Autie had quickly re-assured her that he would grow the curls back during his absence, after which he would return to her arms with the thick golden mane that she loved to run her fingers through.

Her eyes now followed those of her husband's as the recently united, re-assembled cavalry regiment paraded in front of them and General Terry. She smiled as the individual twelve companies gradually emerged out of the dark morning mist, paraded by on their distinctly colored horses, and then re-emerged back into the mist and faded from view.

The Regimental Band, sitting astride their distinctive white mounts alongside them, tried in vain to enliven the atmosphere by playing the lively tune Garryowen throughout the review.

It was with great pride that she stood beside her husband on the reviewing stand as he received the salutes from his command. Company A astride their Black mounts, the troopers of Company's B, F, I and L on their Bays, the Light Sorrels of C Company, the darker Sorrels of Company's G and K, the Blood Bays of H and the mixed Bays and Blacks of D Company, all of who's individual appearance was in strong contrast to the mixed colored mounts of M Company that reflected the standard appearance of a US cavalry regiment.

It had been under her husband's orders that the regimental companies had been re-aligned according to the horse's color. In her husband's mind it was a common sense move that not only looked good on the parade ground, but one that was helpful to both commanders and separated troopers during a battle. It was a tool that he had effectively used against those damn Rebels during The War of The Rebellion.

At only one time during the review did a series of cold shudders run down her spine; this was when the ghost like Grey mounts of E Company and their dark featureless riders gradually emerged out of the dark grey morning mist and when they faded back into the mist.

A premonition of what was to come, or was it simply a reaction to the damp cold overcast morning weather?

This was a question that would later return to haunt Elizabeth Bacon Custer for the remaining days of her life.





Darcy O'Neil-Johnson is a retired Mechanical Engineering Technologist who has worked on projects in North America, Asia, Africa and Australia. He and his wife spend their summers along the eastern slopes of the Canadian Rockies and their winters in Southern Texas. Darcy is now engaged in writing 'the book that he always wanted to read'.

*An Omen is an excerpt from this book, which is titled; the e18hteen.*



# Remembering the Fallen Sailors of the USS Stark

*Nancy Bonar*

“As the dark sky hung above us, a firm and gentle hand reached down from above. As the lights began to flicker and dim, thirty-seven lives were softly lifted to eternal peace,” said Seaman Bill Steel III after the irresponsible rape of the USS Stark (FFG-31) by an Iraqi Air Force fighter pilot, who apparently mistook the frigate for an Iranian oil tanker.

Steel was a Stinger missileman on temporary assignment duty, when, on May 14, 1987, he joined the frigate’s 221 other crew members in Manama, Bahrain. The “thirty-seven lives” are those of the enlisted Sailors who died—by horrific fire, smoke asphyxiation, drowning or shock from shattered electrical cables and wires, and metal shrapnel—at the hands of a reckless Iraqi pilot and his air-to-surface Exocet missiles that drilled into the Stark. Among the 21 wounded were several officers as well as two enlisted with acute burns. Two

days after the attack, President Reagan said, “We never considered them (Iraqis) hostile at all,” and accepted an apology from Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

**The Back Story.** The USS Stark frigate deployed from its Mayport (Fla.) Naval Station homeport in early February 1987 for a six-month tour. She was among five frigates and two destroyers sortied with the Navy’s Middle East Force in Manama, Bahrain, to help safeguard the Persian Gulf’s merchant shipping. In March, President Reagan announced that the U.S. would protect Kuwaiti oil tankers; they would fly the Stars and Stripes.

The morning of Sunday, May 17, 1987, the Stark lifted anchor in Manama and sailed into the Persian Gulf’s war-free zone for a two-day routine exercise. Topside, one seasoned Sailor noticed that the water was calm,



In this aft view (Page 12), the American flag still waves above the heavily damaged and listing guided missile frigate USS Stark (FFG-31) the morning after she was attacked in the Persian Gulf's international waters. At night on May 17, 1987—without warning and in an unprovoked assault—an Iraqi Air Force pilot launched two missiles into the Stark, nearly cutting the frigate in half. Killed: 37 enlisted Sailors, 21 wounded. This was a senseless tragedy, but the courage and resilience of Stark's crew saved the ship. The 30th anniversary memorizing the fallen Sailors is May 17 at the Mayport (Fla.) Naval Station's Memorial Park. The park opened in August 1987 with the dedication of the USS Stark monument; another one features the names of the lost men. The 30th anniversary and the annual memorial ceremony honoring the fallen Sailors are May 17 at the Mayport (Fla.) Naval Station's Memorial Park. The park opened in August 1987 with the dedication of the USS Stark monument; another monument features the names of the lost men.

but not the far-off skies. As the Sailor told me, he knew it had become rather common for Iranian and Iraqi warplanes to fly over international waters. However, today the Iraqi aircraft, considered “friendly” by Navy ships, seemed nearer than usual. His mind had turned back to the mess deck menu's thought for the day:

---

*“The soldier and sailor, above all other people, pray for peace, for he must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war.” ~ General Douglas MacArthur, commander of Allied Forces, Pacific Theater, WWII*

---

**Prophetic Movies.** It's early evening, and the Stark's 18 officers and 204 enlisted who aren't on duty are asleep or relaxing; some are watching movies. Mike Romanetto and Mark Wasnock watch the flick, “Reckless.” For Mark Selk, it's “Hang ‘Em High,” in which Clint Eastwood drops from the gallows. Mike Tooker views a movie about an evil terrorist attacking an American family. The chances are that Steve Kiser is reading his Bible. Mike Fitzgerald isn't watching a movie or reading, but practicing drums as a member of the ship's band, Poison Squirrels from Hell.

**Poisonous Iraqi Pilot.** He created hell on the USS Stark shortly after 9 pm. Earlier, there'd been looped transmissions about an Iraqi fighter jet moving over the Gulf in Stark's direction. (In this loop were an AWACS aircraft, the destroyer USS Coontz, and the Stark.) The frigate's radar tracked the airplane as it flew closer. Personnel in the Combat Information Center (CIC) supposed that the aircraft wasn't hostile. However, and following standard procedure, transmitted twice were messages notifying the aircraft that it was inbound on a U.S. Navy vessel and asking for identification. No responses. Unknown to the Stark, the fighter pilot had

already launched two anti-ship Exocet cruise missiles; they were skimming one after the other just above the dark waters at about 600 mph, their radar noses sniffing the USS Stark.



*This photograph, as seen by the tender USS Acadia, shows the exterior damage to the USS Stark.*

On the ship's bridge, forward lookout Seaman Apprentice Bob Williams, Junior Officer of the Deck Lt.j.g. Will Hanson, and Lt. Mike Reed saw in the foggy haze a far-off light near the Gulf's surface. Some seconds later, when the first missile was about 20 miles out, Williams shouted into the sound-powered circuit, “Missile inbound, missile inbound.” In tandem, general quarters sounded and Hanson, now seeing two Exocets, quickly communicated, “Inbound missile port side.” In rapid succession, the deadly weapons bore into the Stark's forward amidships, port side just above the waterline and below the main deck. “The two missiles tearing into Stark's steel hull were like pulling open the lid of a sardine can,” Hanson said to me. At the time, the Stark was the first Navy warship damaged by an anti-ship cruise missile.



*Hole created by missile in the ship's hull.*

**Mortal Fires.** The Exocets penetrated Stark's hull in the same area of the forward amidships, port side, above the waterline and below the main deck, and created a jagged 10 x 15 hole (see photograph taken during damage repairs). Inside this gaping cavern were two lower decks, including enlisted berthing areas. The first missile didn't detonate. However, it spewed in its path—across berthing and into passageways—burning rocket motor propellant and chunks of metal. Two chunks shot like cannonballs through the starboard or far side of the ship; metal shrapnel pierced human skin. The second missile exploded inside the hull, adding more burning rocket fuel. With the combined propellants now on fire, the temperature was 3,500 degrees, producing an inferno neither before seen on peacetime ships of the modern-day Navy nor in its firefighting training.

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*Never in Navy history has a ship sustained such damage and survived. Multiple kamikaze attacks on World War II warships usually left external damage but not such internal destruction as on the USS Stark. I know of no ship that received such damage internally, that received damage of this type and survived.~ADM W.W. Rowden*

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On the two lower decks, where early-on temperatures soared up to 1,500 degrees before dropping down to around 400 degrees aluminum bulkheads, ladders and decks, including in living areas, melted, twisted, and buckled. Of the Stark's 37 who perished, 11 were in three berthing areas, including the chief petty officers' quarters. In the latter, one of three men to die by fire was Command Master Chief Petty Officer Steve Kiser. Amazingly, later found in the ashes was his singed, but readable, Bible.



*Shown in the photograph is a view looking down into the lower decks.*

On the main deck, the radar equipment room burned. One level up in the aluminum superstructure, scorched was the bridge and its port wing, and the CIC and its vital equipment. The CIC personnel evacuated included Dave Foisy, an operations specialist who'd soon learn

that close friend and Fire Controlman Jeff Calkins, 20, had perished.

Because fires and smoke were primarily forward, the aft helicopter deck was used for DC operations and for staging firefighting teams. The hanger on the helo deck became the medical center for tending to the injured or dying. Hospital Corpsman (HM) First Class David Dickerson, despite shrapnel wounds, tended to the wounded with an assist from others. (He is among the 10 enlisted and officers awarded the Navy/Marine Corps Medal for heroism.)

**Saving the USS Stark.** It's to the credit of the surviving officers and enlisted who, against all the odds, saved their ship. Before DC personnel fixed several fire mains damaged by the missiles, there was either no, or low, pressure for seawater normally pumped into fire hoses. It would take a book to describe all of the challenges for damage control and firefighting personnel. What surprised me the most involved oxygen, but not the masks, which melted on faces so intense was the heat. To attach to the masks were 300 oxygen canisters (more than required), but these were quickly exhausted. For this and other reasons, firefighting teams had to leapfrog every 20 or so minutes.

The first to reach the Stark after the attack was a privately owned salvage tug that arrived at 1:30 am and, before departing, extended its water cannon toward the missile magazine. Also arriving over the hours to assist were destroyers Waddell, Conyngham, and Coontz, frigates LaSalle and Reid, and an East Force Desert Duck helicopter. Their aid included but wasn't limited to, flying Stark's wounded to a Bahraini hospital, delivering a Navy doctor and medical supplies, and bringing aboard the Stark oxygen masks and canisters, damage control supplies, additional water pumps for fighting fires, and firefighters to help the wearied Stark ones.

As for the Stark listing to port—from water coming through fire hoses and broken fire mains—Capt. Glenn Brindel ordered, to balance the ship, the starboard flooded. On Monday, May 18, afternoon, and with the major fires extinguished, key activities were de-smoking and dewatering the ship, putting out flash fires, and the body search. The five-member search team comprised three from the LaSalle, including its Navy Chaplain Lt. Peter McGeory, who blessed each body. Team members from the Stark were HC Dickerson and Masters-at-Arms First Class Dwayne Massey. The body bags were lowered into the LaSalle for the trip to offshore Manama, where Conyngham also towed the Stark.



**After the Iraqi** missiles had slammed into the USS Stark on May 17, 1987, firefighters and other damage control personnel worked through the night and into the next afternoon. They knew that shipmates had died; saw some of the bodies, but not to the extent of 36 (the 37th vanished at sea). Survivors will say that it's their 37 brothers who are the true heroes, that they'll never be forgotten. This is rightly so, but in my opinion that there were other heroes. These are the surviving officers and enlisted whom, with courage and resilience, saved the ship and, in doing so, most suffer from the memories.



**Gunnery Mate Gunn** John Kareski was 45 when he died of cancer. However, because of the horror and agony he witnessed on the Stark, Kareski bore the burden of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Many other of the Stark crew still ride the PTSD emotional rollercoaster. John was from my hometown; his submariner dad served under the sub's CO, my late brother.



**Seaman Mark Caouette**, 26, a college graduate intent on making the Navy a career, lost a leg, had severe burns and shrapnel wounds. In an attempt to fix a damaged fire main so that hoses would work and knowing he'd die, Caouette inched toward it as several shipmates urged him to stop. But he fought a little longer, and then died. His next of kin posthumously received his Navy/Marine Corps Medal for heroism and the Purple Heart.

**Among nine others**, both enlisted and officers, who received the Navy/Marine Corps Medal was LT Art Conklin. He'd been in charge of damage control since joining the Stark. Right after the missiles mutilated the frigate, Conklin quickly popped up wearing just nylon shorts, a wetted T-shirt and thin-soled shoes. To resolve a fire main issue, and because he couldn't see through the black smoke, Conklin traversed to the main by holding onto a system of pipes; they were so hot his hands blistered, and the heat melted his shorts and shoes.



**Petty Officer Wayne** Richard "Rick" Weaver III, 22, was below the main deck in the combat berthing compartment. Gulf water had streamed in through the hull hole, and live electric wires arced and lights dimmed. Although gravely wounded from shrapnel, he and several others helped brothers put on their emergency escape breathing devices (EEBDs). Unfortunately, Rick was too busy lending aid to don his own EEBD. Later, when a search party's Petty Officer Chuck Stephenson entered the flooded berthing, he found Rick in the water and gently lifted his body onto a top bunk. Posthumously awarded to Rick's bride of two years were the Purple Heart and Navy/Marine Corps Medal for heroism.



**Six Stark sailors** went overboard into the Persian Gulf. Lost at sea was Terrance "Dan" Weldon, 20, an operations specialist whose wife was expecting their first baby. The five others—who'd worked their way out of the ravaged combat berthing and through a maze of hot, smoke-filled passageways—fell through the missile-created hull cavity into the nighttime Gulf. Tim Gable, Gary Mahone, Bil McLeod, Bill Morandi and Tim Porter clung to their emergency escape breathing devices, one another or a thrown overboard strobe-lite life ring. It was early morning before a Bahraini Defense Force helicopter rescued four of the men; the destroyer USS Waddell (DDG-24) picked up Mahone. Miraculously, these sailors had avoided the water's sharks and poisonous sea snakes.



**Mark Samples, 23**, a gunners mate missiles, sat alone throughout that horrific night next to the missile magazine. Clashed in his hands was a fire hose with seawater to cool the red-glowing steel walls of the missile magazine. Had the missiles exploded, the USS Stark would have sunk. Awarded the Navy/Marine Corps Medal for heroism were Samples and five other enlisted and four officers. Posthumously, the next of kin of the 37 killed in action were awarded the Purple Heart. Also awarded Purple Hearts were Mark Bareford and James Wheeler, both fire controlmen. Each suffered burns over major portions of his body.



**Mark Wasnock completed** Navy boot camp at age 18 and, at 19 reported to the USS Stark as a gas turbine (engines) technician-mechanical. One of the last things he remembered doing in support of firefighting efforts was hearing someone on the ship's fantail ask to get from the medical office or sickbay the crewmembers' dental records. There would be a need for the records to help identify the dead. Without hesitation, Wasnock threw on a gas mask and proceeded up the port side of the acrid smoke-filled and mangled ship. He grabbed the records and, because his legs were now weak and hurt like hell, stumbled back aft. There, he collapsed from severe smoke inhalation and exhaustion.

**Yes, all men** of the small, but mighty guided missile frigate USS Stark are heroes, as was the now scrapped ship herself. I will forever be grateful for your "strength for freedom."

It was June 1 when the Stark moved to alongside the tender USS Acadia, which had arrived from the Philippines. Over three weeks, the goal of the Acadia's temporary repairs to the frigate was to install radio equipment, and clean and patch her enough for sailing as quickly as possible back to Mayport. (It was aboard the Acadia that most of Stark's men ate and slept, as the frigate wasn't livable.)

**Journey Home for thirty-six Sailors.** Meanwhile, on May 20 at the Bahrain International Airport, some men of the Coontz hosted a memorial service and were honor guards who carried the thirty-six (the thirty-seventh had vanished at sea) flag-draped transfer cases into a USAF Starlifter aircraft. Also boarded were Stark's Ensign Steve Hales, Chief Petty Officer Steve Dias, and Shopkeeper Mike Nelson, who escorted their fallen shipmates to the Army mortuary in Frankfurt, Germany, and on to Dover (Del.) AF Base. At the mortuary, forensic specialists identified the remains and returned them to transfer cases. Hales led a memorial service and thanked mortuary staff members for their respect for both the fallen and the pain of their families.

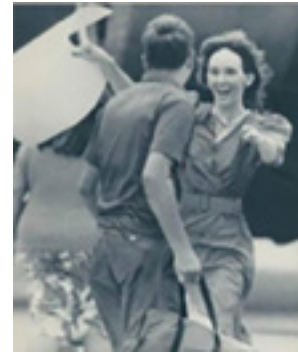


President Reagan was at the Mayport Naval Station on May 22 to speak to an emotional crowd of more than 1,000, including loved ones of the USS Stark Sailors who'd died. The President said, in part: Yes, they were heroes...they live in the world that God has promised all of us. They await us, and we shall all be together again.



May 26, inside the Dover AFB Memorial Hall: "Under the cover of darkness, like a thief in the night, death stole the lives of thirty-seven American sailors. We

welcome home...these husbands and fathers, these sons and brothers, these shipmates," said Rear Adm. John R. McNamara, Navy Chief of Chaplains. Also at the brief ceremony, the men of a Navy honor guard stood at the USS Stark's bodies in their flag-draped transfer cases. Before the service, the Navy Band had quietly played the Eternal Father hymn. After the service, and for the first time, the lost Sailors' survivors could talk face-to-face with May 17 Stark personnel/ escorts Hales, Dias, and Nelson. The final leg of the journey home for the thirty-six Sailors was to their hometowns and the escorts from the Stark included Paul Labare and Tim Martineau.



*Greeting one of the forty-four, Radioman Tony Giddens, is wife Kathy.*

In early July, as the USS Stark prepared to sail from Bahrain toward home, forty-four of her crewmembers flew to Mayport for R&R so that they could assume the watch standing for many of the Stark sailors when the ship arrived.



*The USS Stark's men salute as the frigate arrives August 5 at its Mayport Naval Station homeport to both a joyous and somber crowd.*

There were 222 Sailors on May 17, however, because of the ship's damage, including to berthing, and due to the reassignments of temporary crewmembers as well as those injured in the attack, the Stark was sailed skillfully home by only 100 enlisted and officers. Following



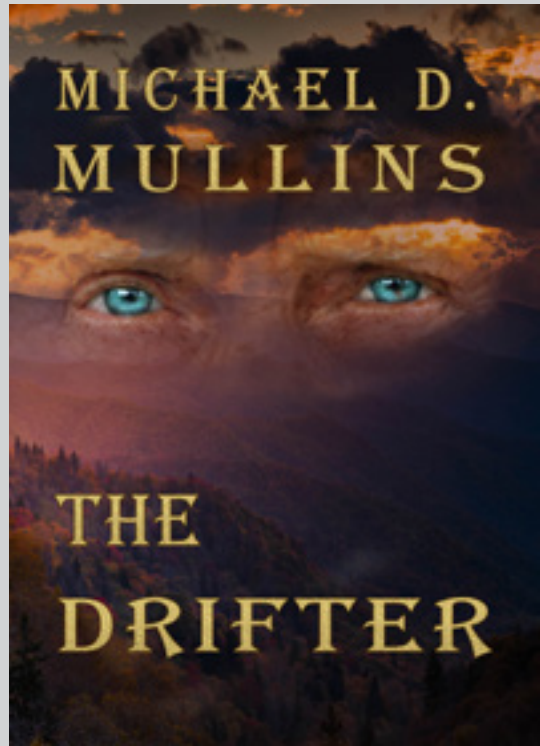
15 months at a Mississippi shipyard—the Navy would spend \$142 million to repair the ship—the guided missile frigate USS Stark (FFG-31) headed back to sea. She was decommissioned in 1999 and sold for scrapping in 2005.



**Motto: "Strength for Freedom."**



Congratulations to Mike Mullins. His new book, *The Drifter*, received Second Place in eBooks in the 2016 The Author Zone Awards Program.



ISBN-13: 978-1943267125

Available in both trade paperback and kindle

*The Drifter* is a story about a Vietnam veteran and career Central Intelligence Agency operative who had one assignment too many. It made him question his heart and soul. Did he have any of either left? Were they hardened beyond redemption? Richard Pearce loves America and serving its people, wherever that took him, whatever he had to do, but fears he lost his humanity as his expertise became legend. Pearce begins a journey to find the answers to his questions, to quell his introspection. Along the way he finds adventure and discovers that his instinct to protect people is as automatic as breathing. His travel takes him into the heartland of his country where he hopes to find a way to fend off his demons. Somewhere in the magnificent mountains of the south he hopes to find peace in himself and perhaps even some way to forgive himself for a life defined by violence.

# I LOOK FOR HIM AND WONDER IF ANY OF YOU KNEW HIM

*“To all that helped get my brother James Donald Gibson home and for having a special service for him 07/27/69.*

When he came home for leave we had so much fun with him. We stayed up all night and he told me he didn't think he would come back to life. He was wounded in March of 1969 and he wouldn't come home. He got two Purple Hearts and other awards. My sister has the medals...

James' unit was participating in a search and clear operation near the village of Ngai Lai in the Quang Nam Province, Republic of South Vietnam. He was mortally wounded when the unit came under intense enemy fire. We received formal notification from the Department of the Army, 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry, 196th Infantry Brigade, Americal Division.



*James Donald Gibson*

I thank you from the bottom of my heart. He was in the Army Company D, I think. I have his papers and every letter he wrote me and my parents in my attic. I also have his bag the Army sent home. It's never been opened. The last letter I got from my brother he said he was being called out and would finish the letter when

he got back. He never did. I can almost tell you word for word he wrote. I was the oldest of the three girls left at home. When we would get a letter and after we had dinner, we would sit around as my mom and dad read it at one time. I look for him on every post that is put on here. I wonder if any of you knew him. He was my only brother. I still miss today. The following is a picture of James with one of his best friends, Terry who died of a heart attack at the age of 41.



My husband was a Marine and was also in Vietnam and was over there when my brother was killed. He never acted the same. I look back on my husband and I should have seen something. He tried to commit suicide twice and had himself committed. The doctors told me that it was better for him to commit himself than me. He promised he'd never do that again. But he killed himself on Christmas Day 2013. My son and I found him hanging. The VA has been good to me. So many need help and their families have no idea. Tomorrow is never promised but it's so hard going on without him. I had been with him since I was 16 and we were married for 43 years. I will be okay because of my son and daughter and my grandkids.

We have a lot of love in my little family and we will survive this someday.”

- Kathy Gaskins

Suicide Prevention hotline: 800-273-8255

Veteran Stories collected and featured by <http://www.jennylasala.com/>



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
Headquarters, 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry  
196th Infantry Brigade, Americal Division  
APO San Francisco 96256

19 AUG 1969

Mr. and Mrs. Noah D. Gibson  
Box 48  
Nichols, South Carolina 29581

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Gibson:

It is with deepest sorrow that I extend to you the sympathy of the men of the 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry, for the loss of your son, James.


On the morning of July 27, 1969, James' unit was participating in a search and clear operation near the village of Ngai Lai, approximately 5 miles southeast of Ha My City, in the Quang Nam Province, Republic of South Vietnam. At 8:55 A.M., James was mortally wounded when the unit came under intense enemy small arms fire. I hope you gain some consolation in knowing that your son was not subjected to any prolonged suffering.

I sincerely hope that the knowledge that James was an exemplary soldier who gave his life assisting his fellow man and in the service of his country will comfort you in this hour of great sorrow.

A memorial service was conducted for your son. James' comrades joined me in rendering military honors and final tribute to him. You were in our thoughts and prayers at that time also.

The sincere sympathy of this unit is extended to you in your bereavement.

Sincerely yours,

  
CLARENCE P. CAMPBELL  
LTC, Infantry  
Commanding



*Palo Duro Canyon*

## A Nation of Natural Wonders

The United States abounds with some of the world's great natural wonders. On a recent trip from south Texas to Colorado, we discovered two of these treasures.

The Palo Duro Canyon State Park, located in the Texas Panhandle, is one of nature's wonders – carved out thousands of years ago by the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River. Called “the Grand Canyon of Texas,” it is 120 miles long, 800 feet deep and up to 20 miles wide. One amazing aspect is that it is in the middle of vast prairie land.



The state park, which encompasses more than 29,000 acres of the canyon, opened in 1934. Like many parts of our country, the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) built the camping and cabin facilities that enhanced the new park. As part of Roosevelt's New Deal, the CCC employed young men who provided manual labor to develop natural resources on government lands. Today visitors still enjoy the fruits of their labor.

The canyon served as home to several Indian nations including the Apache, Comanche and Kiowa, until 1874, when the US ordered the Cavalry to move the Indians to Oklahoma. They did this by capturing 1,400 of their horses, keeping some and destroying the rest. Without their horses, the Indians had little hope of survival and surrendered.

In 1876, Charles Goodnight settled in the canyon and opened the JA Ranch. With wide-open land, the ranch provided pasture for more than 100,000 head of cattle. A piece of the ranch is still operational today.

We arrived during Texas Spring Break Week, and loved seeing so many young people and families hiking the many trails and enjoying the park.

For more information, visit <http://www.palodurocanyon.com>

Our second “find” was in the northeast corner of New Mexico. The



Capulin (cap-poo-LEEN) Volcano National Monument is located off Hwy 67 between Raton and the Texas border.

Sixty thousand years ago, the volcano erupted and today visitors can drive to the top of the conical formation and look down into what was once a mass of gaseous lava. It is definitely a mountain drive that winds its way to 8,182 feet above sea level.

As you look over the top of the crater, you see mountains in the distance. As you look the opposite direction, prairie grasslands reach as far as the eye can see. The views are fantastic and it is said that on a clear day, one can see into Texas, Colorado and Oklahoma. Although the day was clear, we didn't know any landmarks.

The views are fabulous and if you're lucky, you might spot some of the deer and other animals that inhabit the national monument grounds. Our sighting of several pronghorn antelope enhanced an already enjoyable adventure. They were even close enough to get some decent photos.

Five trails offer various levels of difficulty and different views including the Greater Vent Trail that leads to the bottom of the crater. The lava flows covered more than fifteen square miles and are best viewed from the crater rim. The volcano is extinct and, therefore, in no danger of erupting again.

The literature states that ladybugs swarm the park plants during the summer. We visited in March as spring was just beginning to adorn the countryside. I'm still trying to imagine the sight of thousands of ladybugs.

For more information, visit <https://www.nps.gov/cavo/index.htm>.



*Capulin Volcano Crater*



*MWSA  
2017  
General  
Membership  
Conference  
September 7-10  
at  
The Historic  
Menger Hotel  
on the  
Riverwalk  
in  
San Antonio  
Texas!*





# MWSA 2017 General Membership Conference

*Bob Doerr*

Everyone should know by now, but in case you haven't heard, this year our conference will be held at the Menger Hotel, San Antonio, TX, 7-10 September. We couldn't have picked a better place to hold it. Not only is San Antonio consistently rated as one of the most romantic cities in the country, the Menger Hotel is haunted!! How can you go wrong??? Romance and ghosts!

This convention is an important one as MWSA has been going through a number of changes and is in the process of making several significant improvements for our members. We need your input and support. Registration is ongoing and early bird pricing runs through the end of March.

Convention topics will include how to improve your writing, networking, and marketing skills, along with briefings about San Antonio's significant military history. Did you know that San Antonio is one of the oldest cities in the US or that it has more Spanish missions than any other city in the U.S. If you have any interest in military history, you need to come to San Antonio!!

Watch for more information on the conference and volunteer to be on a panel! Reservations can be made online now. Do come, get involved, and have a good time!

Click on link below to register:

<https://militarywriterssocietyofamerica.wildapricot.org/events>



# 2016 Military Writers Society of America Anthology



This year, there will be two Anthologies—one written by the participants of the 2016 Gettysburg Writers Retreat and one by the 2016 Pulaski Country History Crawl participants.

*Gettysburg Inspirations* is now available.

It includes “Elliot’s Map” by Joyce Faulkner, “Thoughts on a Common Soldier” by Mindy Phillips Lawrence, “The Wait” by Joe Epley, “I will not be a number” by Richard Davidson,” “The Sixth Copy” by Florence March, “Living in the Shadow” by Florence March, “Reunion” by Carolyn Schriber, “Understandings” by Christopher Avery, “A Cousin’s Promise” by Dwight Jon Zimmerman, “Retreat” by Pat McGrath Avery, “Two Points of View” by Bob Doerr, “The Ghost Stuff” by Luke the Detective Dog, and “An Uncivil War” by Jack Woodville London.

You can purchase it on Amazon or you can send a check for \$18 to Military Writers Society of America. PO Box 1768, Cranberry Township, PA 16066. Please include the address where you would like us to send it.



# MWSA Recommended Reading List Spring 2017

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. From a compilation of book reviews, we've selected the following as our 2017 Spring Recommended Reading List:

*The War Within, the Story of Josef; by Patricia Walkow*

*They Called Me Doc ; by Larry C. Miller*

*The Road to War: Duty & Drill, Courage & Capture; by Steven Burgauer*

*Sin Eater; by John Schembra*

*A Passel of Trouble—The Saga of loyalist Partisan David Fanning; by Joe Epley*

*Invasion: Ice Hammer Book 1; by Basil Sands*

*Missing Star; by Don Westenhaver*

*The Twilight of the Day; by Ian A. O'Connor*

The sun is shining, and I can literally see the weeds growing in my yard. The grass has enough respect for me to hold off for another week or two, but the weeds – Ha! I don't want to, but it looks like I'll need to bust out my lawn mower and get to work today. I'd much rather be reading a good mystery, some historical fiction, someone's stories about Viet Nam or some other conflict, heck, I can read most anything. Didn't someone once say that reading was our most valuable pastime? Someone should have. If you're looking for a good read, just look back at the middle of this article. More info about the books listed above and the authors can be found at [www.mwsadispatches.com](http://www.mwsadispatches.com)



# Our Tent Camping Days Were Over!

*Joe Campolo Jr*

Some years ago my wife Ann and I decided to buy a recreational camper. With a modest budget we visited an RV dealer in the area to see what they had available. Their showroom included a variety of campers, both large and small. Some included every creature comfort one could ask for, others were a bit more Spartan, but still a step up from our old tent camping days.

After disclosing our budget, (I'm cheap) the dealer got a sour look on his face and directed us to the back of the lot where their "pre-owned" inventory resided. There we found a group of older camping units in various conditions.

The one that best fit our intended outlay (did I mention that I'm cheap?) was a very large 1970s era truck camper fixed upon a 1984 GMC heavy duty pick-up truck. The vintage unit stood like a hulking mammoth amongst the newer more streamlined campers in the lot; faded paint and rust tarnishing its once, no doubt, sparkling image. The truck itself was powered by a three hundred and fifty cubic inch engine with a four barrel carburetor. It was equipped with two twenty six gallon fuel tanks, oversized steel belted tires, and an extra-large capacity radiator; it oozed raw power. Secured to this mighty beast was the vintage camper itself, which slept four. (Five if they were friendly) It contained a queen size bed, a fold out twin bed, a small stove, refrigerator, furnace, forty-gallon water tank and two forty gallon propane tanks. It had a small bathroom with a toilet and sink; the shower spigot was affixed to the exterior of the unit, which for the more tepid camper may have compromised any sense of privacy, not to mention leaving the bather at the mercy of the elements.

Although the interior décor was straight off the set of the Brady Bunch, just as Ralphie dreamt about his bb gun in *A Christmas Story*, I was smitten by this hulking conveyance from campgrounds of yesteryear. A deal

was struck and soon we were pulling our magnificent, though admittedly seasoned, home-on-wheels into our driveway. I had to creep ever so slowly up to the garage as the top of the camper exceeded that of the gutters on our house. The width of the behemoth forced me to disassemble our back fence and gate in order to get it through.

Although I had driven slow enough to gain some of the neighbor's attention, the looks they gave were not exactly the looks of envy and admiration I had hoped for. I chalked it off as jealousy or ignorance regarding the wonderful world of RV camping, which we had now entered.



*We loved our purchase.*

After showing off our new toy to anyone who got near our house, we scheduled a weekend camping trip at a public campground not too far from home. This would be our shake-down cruise where we would both learn how (if) everything worked, and get acquainted with the finer nuances of (semi) modern camping. Other than taking out a gutter and a few tree branches, no major disasters occurred.

However, I was untested regarding the dreaded "black water" disposal procedure, so I insisted that



all necessary bathroom trips be made at the public restrooms the campground featured. My order was ignored by us both during the middle of the night, forcing me to use the on-site disposal facility before we left—an extremely unpleasant experience in every way. (Reference the movie RV.)

Satisfied with our maiden voyage, the camper soon found itself on a cross country trip to the east coast. My good friend Tim, who I served in Vietnam with, suggested we make a pilgrimage to the Vietnam War memorial in Washington D.C. So off I went, to pick up Tim and a friend of his in Ohio before traveling on to D.C. However after spending not one full day on the trip, Tim's friend decided that traveling in a cramped truck cab was not his cup of tea and bailed, leaving Tim and I to make (and fund) the voyage on our own.

The trip went along fine, until we hit rain and fog in some mountains west of Washington D.C. The clearance between the side of the mountain and our lumbering camper was so slight I thought we'd surely scrape the remaining paint off of the vehicle while getting through. Things took a serious turn for the worse when our windshield wipers stopped working. Of course, there were no exits until we cleared the area, and had there been any I wouldn't have been able to see them anyway.

We survived the white knuckle drive and made it to a campground where we slept and managed to replace the windshield wiper motor the next morning. We then proceeded to a campground outside of D.C. where we stayed for two days. We took a commuter bus into Washington D.C. itself where we visited Arlington National Cemetery, The Vietnam War Memorial, and several other attractions. The trip home was uneventful and quiet as we were immersed in our own thoughts regarding our visit to the Wall. (And the logic of taking a vehicle that gets seven miles to the gallon on a cross-country trip.)

Mileage aside, with a successful voyage under its belt, Ann and I felt that our camping unit, albeit costly to operate, had proven its mettle and we soon prepared for another trip. We planned on going to a small campground in Central Wisconsin about four hours from home. The campground was on a lake with a nice population of fish so we hooked up our small boat to tow behind the camper. Looking forward to our trip, we left early in the morning on the fourth of July, equipped for a five-day stay. Packed with food, clothing, fishing gear and supplies, we got out on the highway and headed north. It was a hot day so we had the air-conditioner

going full blast. The trip went smoothly for the first couple of hours. Being the fourth of July, the roads were packed with holiday travelers. With a full load and towing a boat, we stayed in the right hand lane.

At around the half way point to our destination the temperature gauge on the truck pegged dead hot. Alarmed, I pulled over on the shoulder and popped the hood. You could have roasted a pig on the engine block as waves of searing heat emanated from it. I gave the engine about fifteen minutes to cool, then drove along the shoulder and pulled off at the next exit. Luckily there was a truck stop with a full garage right at the intersection. I pulled in, and although the mechanic was ready to close for the holiday he agreed to work on the truck. After checking it out, he said the serpentine belt was shot and it would take about an hour to change. I gave him the go ahead and we waited.

When the repair was done, we topped off the two gas tanks (yeah; seven miles to the gallon) and got back on the highway. However we didn't get five miles before the temperature gauge pegged dead hot again! I let go with a few nice expletives, pulled over on the shoulder and popped the hood, but this time all hell broke loose.

Huge, bright flames leapt from the engine compartment on all three sides of the open hood, some reaching four or five feet in the air. For several seconds Ann and I just stared in astonishment. Coming to our senses I yelled at Ann to get out of the truck. As she grabbed her purse and opened the door I pushed her out, ran around to her side and ushered her back about twenty feet behind the truck. I told her to stay put and ran back. Flames now engulfed the entire front of the truck including the cab that we had occupied just seconds earlier. I opened the back of the camper to see if there was anything I could save, but the fire now burned through and through and I was driven back by the heat. I did manage to get some fishing tackle out of the boat (priorities) but soon even there the heat was too intense, so I had to retreat back to where Ann was standing along with a few good Samaritans who had pulled over. One of them had a cell phone and called the fire department. We stood watching helplessly as the holiday traffic slowly motored past our burning rig, gaping at the ever increasing fire.

Soon a state trooper arrived and after assessing the situation started directing traffic into the far left lane, as flames were now encroaching into the right lane. Being in a rural area, the first volunteer fire department arrived shortly after. The fireman in charge stared in astonishment at the huge fireball, now raging on the side of the road. Obviously anticipating a small engine

fire, he hurriedly radioed in for more help. Within the next half hour several more volunteer fire units arrived, and try though they may, they could neither put out, nor slow the fire down for quite some time.

Fueled by 52 gallons of gasoline, 80 gallons of propane, four oversize steel belted radials, and untold other flammable odds and ends, the fire was so intense the four state troopers now on hand closed all lanes of the northbound highway. The grass between the northbound and southbound highway as well as the shoulder ignited from the heat, forcing some of the firefighters to tend to those areas.

The black top underneath the burning vehicles melted and caught on fire as well, spreading along the road like a snake, diverting yet more firefighters. Adding to the din, cement in the lane next to the shoulder started fracturing from the heat.

We provided entertainment for the holiday crowd.

As all of this was taking place, Ann stayed back watching in horror. I hopped back and forth between the various firefighters and police, trying in some way to help and also to convince them not to take any unnecessary risks attempting to save anything. The last thing I wanted was to see anyone get hurt trying to salvage our less than prime camper, truck, and fishing boat.

My requests to the firefighters fell on deaf ears, as they continually moved closer and closer to the raging inferno while applying water and chemicals. One of the state troopers on hand advised me that these people lived for events like this and to just sit back and let them have their fun. I was okay with that until one of the firefighters had to be placed in the rescue squad as a result of heat exhaustion. That bothered me considerably, as I felt it was unnecessary. (And I was worried just a little bit that I might be held liable)



*We provided entertainment for the holiday crowd.*

In the meantime, passersby were putting on their own show. Northbound traffic was closed completely for

almost one hour until the blaze was under control. Many holiday travelers, unhappy at having their vacations delayed, yelled obscenities or communicated their displeasure with a hand gesture. I sheepishly grinned and ignored them in most cases. In other cases I yelled back or returned the offensive gesture.

Other people were more understanding, giving us looks of sympathy or shouts of encouragement. One of the firefighting team members on hand was a grievance councilor who stayed with Ann during most of the ordeal. (This was before therapy puppies and hot cocoa were in vogue.) Attempting to show a brave face, Ann told the firefighters that the ribs in the freezer were probably done by now and they could have them for dinner.

As the huge tires burned, the sky became blackened with thick, acrid smoke. It turned the early-afternoon sky black and hindered the camera activity of the news chopper which kept circling overhead trying to film the event. (He was probably flashing that same hand gesture.)

Within three hours, but what seemed like forever to us, the fire was out and all that remained was the charred hull and power train of the truck, the boat trailer, anchor and the little Smoky Joe Weber grill; minus handle and hardware which had burned up along with everything else in our possession. The boat and camper itself, along with our clothing, fishing tackle, household goods, personal items, food, beverages, tools, etc. were "gone with the wind." Now, as if on cue, every person on site stood still and took stock of the situation. And in one last bit of triumph for the gods of fire, the Smoky Joe Grill, which evidently had been building up with heat pressure, blew. The top half of the sphere went screaming straight up into the air about forty feet. As everyone watched, gravity finally took over and it fell back to earth right in the midst of everyone, landing with a bang, still spinning for another twenty seconds, like a dime tossed on a steel plate. That was the coup de gras, after which everyone on hand, Ann and I included, laughed and cheered. Exhausted firefighters now sat and relaxed, a few troopers started leaving and traffic was freed up to go on its way.

A large wrecker with a flatbed trailer arrived and the skeletal remains of our truck, camper and boat trailer were loaded on and taken to a nearby service center. We thanked everyone on hand and said goodbye. They said goodbye in return and wished us luck. One of the troopers drove us to the service center where our burnt-out wreck was now on display for local rubberneckers



to enjoy.

After filling out paperwork we phoned our son Billy in Milwaukee and gave him a brief description of our situation. He immediately left to come and get us. Now with idle time on our hands we drank liquids and consoled each other over our loss, while passersby stopped and gawked at the charred remains of our property.

When Billy arrived, he pulled into the lot and slowly got out of his car, staring incredulously at the burnt-out remains of our once fine truck, camper, and boat. What did remain from the fire, the hull of the truck, drive train and boat trailer, sat discolored and warped, naked and exposed to the world. From the earlier phone conversation, Billy had gotten the impression that there was just a small engine fire and the vehicle would be repaired and picked up at a later date. Now he stood in shock, staring back and forth at the skeletal remains of our rig and then at us. Ann, watching Billie's reaction, now started sobbing. I walked over to him and cracked a few jokes, "You should see the other guy" and things of that nature. He just kept shaking his head in amazement. We touched base with the shop manager who told us there would be some reports and a scrap charge he would send us, whereupon we left. The trip home was fairly quiet, with all of us numb, so small talk was pretty much out.

After the ordeal, we were relieved to get home to a familiar and safe environment. Being the fourth of July, Billy had plans for the evening so he headed back to Milwaukee. We called our insurer and left a message on their voicemail. Our daughter JoAnn was in California at the time and we decided to tell her when she returned so as not to ruin her trip. Ann called her sister who was having a fourth of July party at her house. She suggested we stop by to try and salvage the rest of the day. When we got there, of course, we had to retell the story, to everyone's amazement. But we did manage to relax a little and had a pretty good time and a couple of good laughs regarding the whole episode. Later everyone was glued to the television as our catastrophe made the six o'clock news out of Milwaukee. The aerial film was of poor quality, with smoke from the fire the only thing visible, so it was just a short blurb.

The next week was hectic with calls back and forth to our insurer, the state patrol and the towing company. We also had to go on several shopping sprees as much of our personal property had been consumed by the fire. This made Ann happier and me unhappier. (For months and even a few years after, we would be looking for something and then suddenly remember "oh yeah, that

was lost in the fire.")



*The nice little camper we got after the fire.*

Fortunately we had replacement insurance on our vehicle and personal property, so I was eventually able to replace the truck, camper and boat...with an upgrade in each case. And as I expected, when everything was clear and done, the insurance company canceled our policy faster than Oliver Hardy taking down a cream puff.



*The 36-foot rig we had prior to the mobile home. (our "long, long trailer")*

Despite our disaster, Ann and I kept right on camping. With our new (used) travel trailer pulled behind our new (used) pick-up truck, we had many fine camping excursions with our children and friends. We've had a couple other rigs since then as well. Today we have an old mobile home near a lake in Central Wisconsin where we spend much of our time. We don't have to tow it, level it, flush out any waste tanks or even wash it.

We do, however, have to make sure IT DOESN'T BURN TO THE GROUND!

My beloved brother, Jim Stevens, wrote for your magazine and was a member of MWSA. Sadly, he passed away peaceably in his sleep on March 1 while I was visiting him at his home in Laguna Woods, CA.

## *A Good Marine*

*Aurelia Smeltz, Sister of Jim Stevens*

A good Marine  
Has left us  
To join his band of brothers  
In Virgil's Elysian Fields  
The eternal resting place  
For poets, heroes, and  
Men without guile  
A day in March  
He went away,  
A day in March  
He left us,  
This proud marine  
  
He dwells now in the Elysian Fields  
A place of peace and beauty  
This loyal marine  
He swims now  
In placid streams  
Of waters sweet and cool  
This faithful marine  
Semper Fidelis  
Always faithful  
Semper Fidelis  
Always true,  
The good Marine,  
The proud marine  
The faithful marine  
  
Jim, my favorite brother



## Attention Members of MWSA:

We are offering another benefit to members of Military Writers Society of America. If you are launching a new book, send us the good news and we will introduce it to our MWSA audience. The first three submissions each quarter will receive a 1/3 page ad (\$100 value for non-members) in Dispatches. On submission, you will be told if your book will appear in the magazine. If you miss the magazine, you can request an announcement in the monthly email blast.

In addition, each issue of Dispatches will feature one two-page spread MWSA author interview which will include cover art, author headshot and bio. The interview will be limited to the first request each quarter.

Here are the rules:

- ✓ You must be a member in good standing of MWSA.
- ✓ Your book must be published, complete with an ISBN. We will not accept ARCs or manuscripts.
- ✓ Your date of publication must be no more than twelve months before requested date of ad in Dispatches.
- ✓ Your book must comply with the rules specified by the Awards Program, i.e., no pornography, must be respectful of the government of the United States of America and the United States Military.

Here's how to submit:

- ✓ Submit your cover art (jpg), genre and subcategory, a summary, and where your book can be purchased.
- ✓ The quarter you would like your ad to appear in Dispatches.
- ✓ If you would like a Dispatches staff member to interview you for a full article about your book, please indicate that in your submission. Only one interview per issue, so first come first serve.
- ✓ Send to [patavery@gmail.com](mailto:patavery@gmail.com)

# Awaken Your Whispers

By Kim Kluxen Meredith

(author of *Listen for the Whispers: Coping with Grief and Learning to Live Again 2013*  
MSWA Silver Medalist in spiritual/religious book category)

I crouched under my second-grade desk as the school-wide alarm bell screamed in my ears. A faint whisper slipped out of my chapped lips as I folded my skinny arms over my blonde curls. I forced my eyes shut.

Oh, God, please don't let the Russians come to my town.

America was deep in the Cold War. As a seven-year old, I routinely participated in our elementary school's air-raid drills. I obediently assumed the duck and cover position, but I did not understand the purpose. What was a Russian? What did they look like? How would they get to my tiny village in upstate New York? Would my meager wooden desk save me from a bomb?

When the safety exercise was over, I crawled out from under my desk and sat back in my chair. I smoothed the wrinkles in my starched dress and crinoline petticoat. Dick and Jane and Spot and Puff innocently stared at me from my reader as my teacher directed us to resume our lesson. I stowed my nagging, unanswered questions in a secret place in my head where they marinated until I released them again during the next frightening drill.

Decades later, on a chilly March afternoon in our nation's capital, I let the fur-trimmed hood of my black wool coat fall forward and shroud my head as I leaned on my stomach on the grassy hill behind the top of the

Vietnam Veterans Memorial to make a rubbing. My two young children watched from the base below.

A few minutes before, I had discovered my high school friend's name in the directory and located his position on the wall.

John J. Stegland III—Panel W1, Line 4.

I needed to take home a tangible reminder of his family's sacrifice. But I did not expect the etched letters in the black gabbro wall to release such a flow of residual tears.

When my father phoned to tell me about my high school friend's death, I was three states away and a sophomore in college. The reality of the Vietnam War was even further away. I saw the disturbing clips on the nightly news. Occasionally I joined my friends in protest. But I was on the sidelines. The sad news of his death briefly paused my carefree college life. After hanging up the receiver on the pay phone, I cried. I tried to process the loss, but my geographical distance and limited understanding prevented me from fully feeling its impact. My mother sent me a clipping from the local newspaper. I put it in my jewelry box. The editor used John's high school graduation picture in his obituary. John's face would never age past 21.





As an adult, I heard about the new memorial in Washington and I decided that I needed closure. After all, it is never too late to whisper goodbye.

“Excuse me ma’am, you are not supposed to be up on the grounds behind the Memorial. You can use a ladder to reach this spot instead,” the uniformed guard respectfully informed me.

My throat tightened. The damp sod muffled my whisper. John was my friend. I needed to touch his name. I quickly finished rubbing my number 2 pencil across a creased white piece of paper.

Goodbye John. I miss you.

Many years passed and my whispers intensified.

I was riding home alone in my car from the commuter train station when a distinct voice filled my head. It was so real that I thought perhaps it came from my car radio. When I checked the dial, the radio was turned off.

This is the man you are going to marry.

After a nine-month courtship, this man, David Stewart Kluxen Jr., and I were married.

Fifteen years later, a one-car accident left my 44-year-old husband a quadriplegic. His voice was silenced. A machine forced air through David’s limp body. But his mind was as sharp as the bone fragments that severed his spinal cord.

After two weeks in intensive care, David deliberately formed the words.

Help me die.

We both knew our time on earth together was coming to an end and he needed my assistance to die with dignity.

One whisper boldly echoed in my head and brought me to my husband.

The other whisper was silent and took him away from me.

My whispers have called to me for a long time. They come from a gentle, warm place deep down in my core. Sometimes they are just an odd feeling. Sometimes my own timid voice speaks. Other times there is an object or a sound that captivates my attention. In their most sophisticated form, my inner voice echoes in my head. My soul speaks through my whispers. They are my moral compass. They demand to be heard.

We all have whispers. But we need to learn how to listen to them. They are gifts from God, but so often they go unopened. We need to learn to trust their messages. It is important to allow them to give us the courage to stand up tall and live an authentic, mindful life.

Perhaps now in a time of moral divide, all of us need to pay better attention to our own whispers. Perhaps we need to step back from the cacophony of the day. From the chatter of the media. From the tempting eddies that can suck us down to a place that is dark and confusing.

By checking our moral compasses, we can honor those who fought for our country. We can acknowledge our freedom and liberties that are unmatched in the world. Let’s step up and be brave and listen to our whispers and let our feet and voices take us to places where we can be seen and heard.

Let’s awaken our whispers.



# MWSA Awards Director Status Update and Random Thoughts

*John Cathcart/Rob Ballister, Awards Directors*

## **Status Update**

Now that we are moving into the second third of our six-month awards season, MWSA continues to make impressive progress. We have received a total of 41 books—two of which were subsequently removed from consideration. Of the remaining 39, 11 have been scored and MWSA reviews posted online.

Looking at the scores received so far, it would appear that MWSA continues to attract high-quality books for review and award consideration. Scoring totals so far indicate that—similar to last year’s results—as many as two thirds of the books submitted may eventually garner MWSA medal!

As of today, we have sixteen open review slots and are awaiting forty-two scores. As a reminder, each book has three reviewers assigned. If you are interested in joining our MWSA reviewer corps, by all means let us know. Reviewer training can be accomplished in less than an hour; and we could sure use your help!

## **MWSA reviewing and book clubs**

Although the internal deliberations associated with MWSA’s book scoring—and especially the process of reconciling divergent scores on the same book—must understandably remain private; I thought I would share a few personal observations about our team of reviewers and our objective scoring process.

First of all, lest there be any doubt, we have a highly professional and dedicated group of reviewers at MWSA! If you could see the detailed evaluation—and at times, even soul-searching—that arise from some of our books, you would appreciate how seriously each MWSA reviewer takes their job.

Although we’re all MWSA volunteers, I think it’s safe

to say that we’re quite a diverse group. We have widely varying backgrounds, opinions, and beliefs. However, one thing we all share is a commitment to providing thorough, objective and standardized evaluations of the books submitted by our members.

At times an MWSA reviewer’s job is easy. It’s not particularly challenging to review a book that falls on either end of the “quality spectrum.” When a book is well-written, thoroughly edited, and tells a fascinating and/or important story; it’s easy to score and review with high marks. At the other end of the spectrum, when it’s obvious the author has skipped the editing process or otherwise submitted a book “not ready for prime time;” it’s easy to use our objective scoring system to appropriately recognize its shortcomings. The difficult part of our job is considering those books that fall somewhere between the two extremes.

It occurred to me recently that our process—although much more formal—can at times resemble deliberations during book club meetings. Opinions can vary widely and be supported by both facts and emotion. It’s the nature of the beast! Our review process, and especially the fact that each book is read by three different reviewers, helps ensure that we remain focused on our main goal: objective and consistent evaluation.

The soul-searching I mentioned earlier has been evident in our behind-the-scenes deliberations for several books. Here are just a few examples of the kinds of issues we tackle each day:

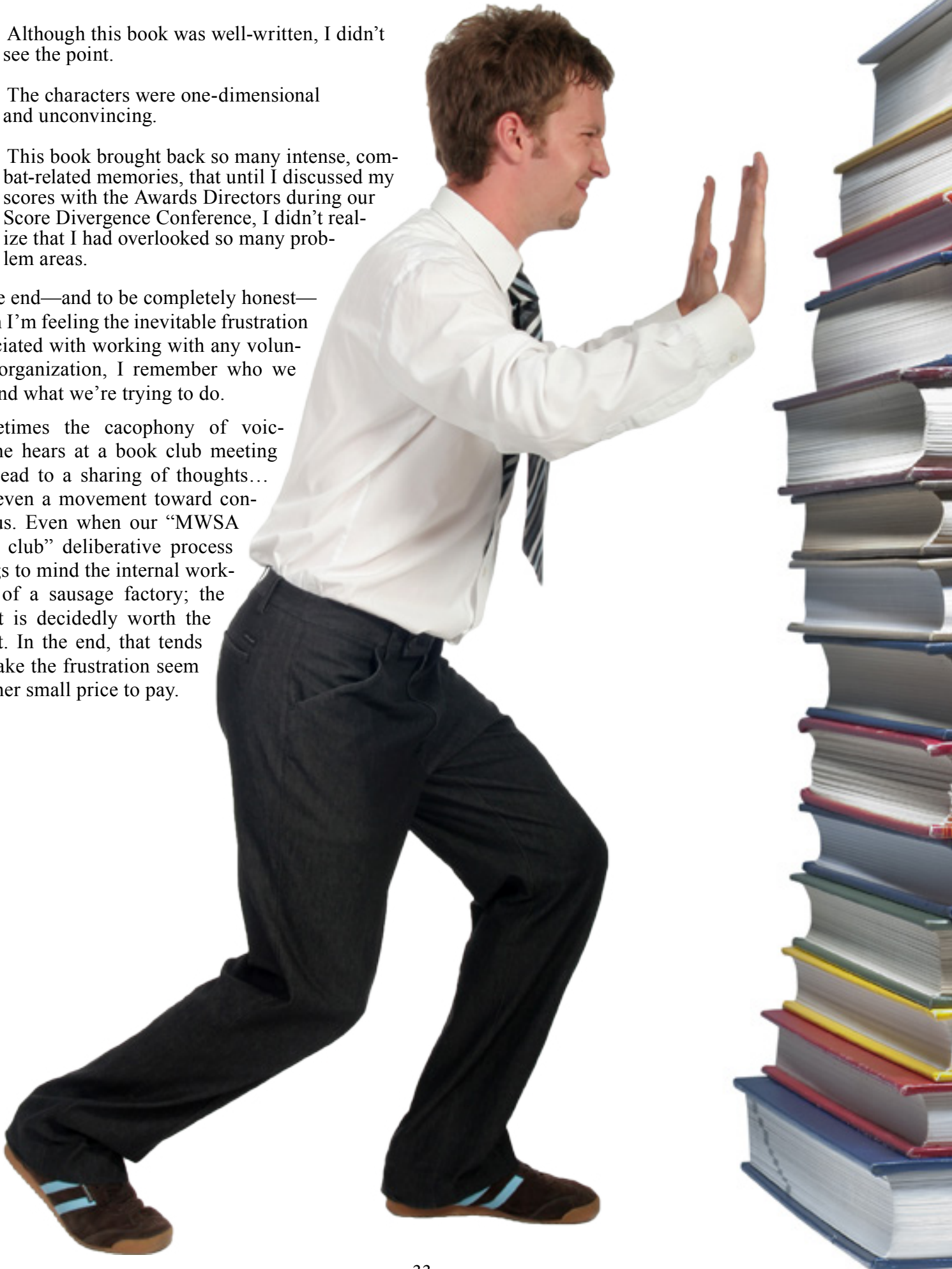
- ✓ I thoroughly enjoyed this book, but I had to mark it down because of grammatical errors and typos.
- ✓ I wish the author had not gone off on so many different tangents that resulted in undeveloped dead ends.



- ✓ Although this book was well-written, I didn't see the point.
- ✓ The characters were one-dimensional and unconvincing.
- ✓ This book brought back so many intense, combat-related memories, that until I discussed my scores with the Awards Directors during our Score Divergence Conference, I didn't realize that I had overlooked so many problem areas.

In the end—and to be completely honest—when I'm feeling the inevitable frustration associated with working with any volunteer organization, I remember who we are and what we're trying to do.

Sometimes the cacophony of voices one hears at a book club meeting can lead to a sharing of thoughts... and even a movement toward consensus. Even when our "MWSA book club" deliberative process brings to mind the internal workings of a sausage factory; the result is decidedly worth the effort. In the end, that tends to make the frustration seem a rather small price to pay.



# TIPS AND TRICKS

## THE CRAFT OF WRITING:

### HOW SHOULD A CHAPTER END?

*Jack Woodville London,*

*MWSA Director of Writing Education and Author, A Novel Approach*



*Morocco 1634 by Gerard Mercator #4172298*

A good chapter is like a bad treasure map. It will lure you in. It will lead you through uncharted territory. Yet, at the end, it will not yield the treasure—it will just make you want to continue the search. And, more importantly, how do writers approach the decision of chapter breaks?

Ideally, each chapter will cover an event, a character, or a storyline with internal cohesion. The chapter should build on characters or events that lead toward the story's resolution. Its first paragraphs often stake out the new territory. Its middle portions relate to or progress the overall story. The end of the chapter should hint at something to come without giving away what it is or

when or where it will be seen.

But how should a chapter end? Should it loop back to the beginning paragraphs and complete a story arc so that the chapter is internally complete? Should it act like a cliffhanger à la *The Da Vinci Code*, a sort of door-slams-shut and no-way-out nail bite? Should it introduce someone or something new? The answer, of course, is 'it depends.' Here are the traditional transition points between the end of one chapter and the beginning of the next:

- ✓ when the following chapter will change the scene or the setting;



- ✓ when the following chapter will change the period in which the current phase of the story takes place;
- ✓ when the following chapter changes the focus on the characters or conflict;
- ✓ when the following chapter changes the story line; and
- ✓ when the following chapter changes the point of view.

Notice a common thread there? The author knows what is coming but the reader doesn't. So, how should chapters conclude to keep the reader engaged?

Consider this: the end of a chapter should not end much of anything. Instead, imagine writing the concluding sentences as hints of reminiscence for what led everyone up to that point, tinged with hope or anxiety, or by planting some anxiety, foreshadowing what lies ahead. For example, dropping a kid off at the bus to summer camp is pretty humdrum. Kid leaves, mom cries, bus drives away. That same chapter is much more interesting when there is a hint of dread, the parents waving goodbye in smug comfort as their child's head disappears among the other kids, and none of them know what the reader knows—someone has dumped an anaconda into the camp lake.

Let's look at some techniques to bring chapters to a head and conclude them.

**'Taking stock.'** This involves a bit of summing up. Study *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. After ten chapters of learning how clever is Elizabeth Bennet and how vain is Mr. Darcy, we, and she, are startled when Mr. Darcy appears in her private rooms and proposes marriage to her. Austen then helps the reader take stock: Darcy proposes marriage, he says, in spite of Miss Bennet's inferiority, his family obstacles, her obligation to be flattered, and despite he having obstructed her sister's chances with Bingley on the same grounds. She refuses. That sums up the novel so far, or at least the conflicts, in a nutshell. The chapter then ends with Miss Bennet reflecting on how until now she had misread the situation, comparing in her mind the shock of Darcy being in love with and offering to marry her to her objections to his pride and conduct. She concludes by reaffirming her decision.

**'Shifting story lines.'** In *The Corrections*, Jonathan Frantzen writes the story of each of the Lambert family in book sections that have the common

thread—'Demanding Mom wants us all home for Christmas before Dad dies'—running through each of them. He ends chapters by writing a false resolution to the immediate sub-conflict. For example, the Gary-and-Caroline chapter ends with them making up after fighting about Mom, then anticipates the disaster to follow. The phone rings, Gary and Caroline look up, Mom is calling, and Gary (and the reader) knows something bad is coming when he learns that Mom has dragged Dad out on a ship at sea.

**'Change scene, setting, or point of view.'** In *The Secret History*, Donna Tartt writes a full chapter in which Richard has spoken with Charles, Camilla, and Henry about who was where after the killing. She ends the chapter with foreshadowing, the sound of a key turning in the door lock, and the comment "That'll be Francis."

**'Change the time or era.'** In *Everything is Illuminated*, Jonathan Safran Foer's novel of self-discovery, chapters end with a clue to a different period in time. For example, after Grandfather brushed his teeth and went to bed and the dog went to sleep, Alex lies awake listening to the sound of Grandfather's breathing, knowing that both of them were awake and thinking of the same question: what Grandfather had done in the war.

Each author of these examples ends with a different technique, but each is aware of what comes next. In the follow-on chapters, Miss Bennett reads Darcy's letter that explains his objectionable conduct. Gary's Mom and Dad make each other miserable on the cruise of the Grunnar Myrdal. Francis arrives and adds facts to the doubtful coincidences of the stories of Charles, Camilla, and Francis. Alex and Grandfather step aside for the time being as the antecedent to their story flashes back two hundred years in time.

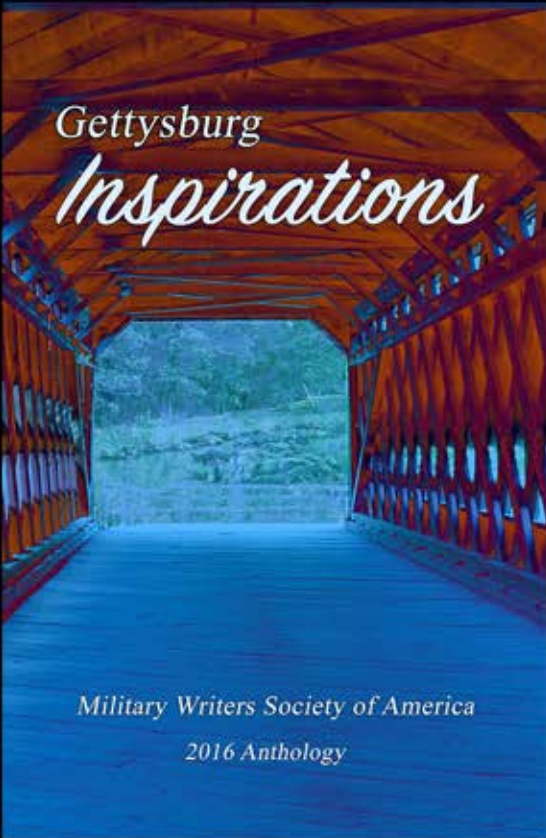
In short, the succeeding chapters in our examples build on an unresolved question or begin a different storyline while, at the same time, weave in issues, characters, or events from this and earlier chapters. When a new question, or story, or character appears, the chapter ends.

Writing is an art, not a science. Even so, the most linear of works, even a high school chemistry textbook, must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. It is that middle of the treasure hunt that reminds us that between the beach and the palm trees there are twelve dead men on a dead man's chest. End each chapter by planting some clues, but don't let the reader go straight to the treasure.





**Palo Duro Canyon State Park**



Check out the new Military Writers Society of America 2016 Anthology, *Gettysburg Inspirations* inside.



**Fort Fisher, NC**

