

DISPATCHES

MILITARY
WRITERS
SOCIETY OF
AMERICA

Rescuing History One Story at a Time
www.MWSAdispatches.com

WINTER 2020



WWII QUIZ

Pg 12

2020 BOOK REVIEW
& AWARDS PROGRAM

Pg 26



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Sandra Miller Linhart

WELCOME TO A NEW YEAR, a new book award season, and a new *Dispatches* editor.

Pat McGrath-Avery stepped down from the position she's held for many years to pursue other things, but you haven't seen the last of her. You'll catch her submissions every now and again. She's been an integral part of MWSA over the years and was one of the first people I met when I joined, back in 2009. Always laughing, always smiling, always taking pictures. She passed her baton to me and I'll do my best not to drop it.

We have some newer voices in this edition of *Dispatches*. I encourage you to read Liberty Bell's *Writing in the Face of Fear*, on page 6. [Dennis Maulsby](#) engages us with *Bull Run Picnic*, on page 20. You'll find the second installment of [Dwight Zimmerman's](#) *MWSA Military History Trivia Quiz* on page 12. Test your knowledge of WWII and have some fun, to boot. Dwight also gives us an update on a request he made. You'll find that on page 8.

We love to print your stories, poems, pictures, and author interviews. If you've been thinking about submitting something, there's no time like the present. Email us at dispatches@mwsa.co for more information.

As Bob reminds us, it's a voting year. Put your hat in the ring or volunteer to help. We need you in any capacity.

Here's hoping 2020 is productive, peaceful, and nothing short of amazing.



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 FEATURE WRITER ~ JOHN CATHCART
 FEATURE WRITER ~ DENNIS MAULSBY
 FEATURE WRITER ~ LIBERTY BELL
 FEATURE WRITER ~ DWIGHT ZIMMERMAN
 PHOTOGRAPHER ~ PAT McGRATH-AVERY
 LAYOUT & DESIGN ~ SANDI LINHART



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Bob Doerr

WITH THE HOLIDAYS NOW BEHIND US, the cold weather firmly entrenched around us, and our minds focused on how to pay our holiday bills and lose the extra pounds from the holidays, it's easy to lose focus on what's happening in the next few months ahead.

So, to bring some of you up-to-date, we have firmed up registration fees and dates for this year's conference in New London, CT. Registration forms and further info about the conference are on our website. Take advantage of the earlybird rates and sign up now!! We've actually brought the costs down. Thanks to Jim Greenwald for all the hard work.

The book review cycle has once again started, so get your books submitted soon and offer to be a reviewer. More details are available on the website.

Finally, this year is an MWSA election year. We'll be getting more information out to everyone soon, but if you are interested in running for a position please let us know.

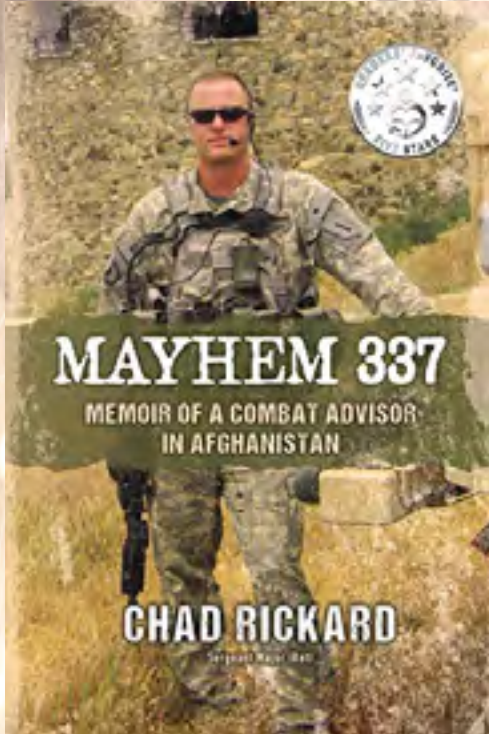
Thanks again, and I hope 2020 is a great year for everyone! — Bob



An Interview With MWSA Member

CHAD RICKARD

Date of interview: 23 October 2019



CHAD RICKARD WAS BORN AND raised in Central Pennsylvania. While attending college in 1991, he was inspired to join the military at the onset of the first Gulf War, opting to follow a family history of veterans from both World Wars and Vietnam. He spent the majority of the first 27 years of his adult life in service to his nation dispensing freedom at a rate of 3,260 feet per second in 55 grain doses.

As with many Americans his life was profoundly changed following the attacks on 9/11 and he opted to continue to devote his life to the military in lieu of other careers that would have kept him closer to home.

Chad proudly served as an infantryman throughout his time in the Army and has been decorated several times for actions

in combat including several awards for Valor and a few Purple Hearts for wounds received in combat.

Chad is a Life Member of the **Military Order of the Purple Heart**, the **Veteran's of Foreign Wars** and the **National Infantry Association**. He is currently retired and spending time with his family on the central coast of California.

INTERVIEW

MWSA: How long have you been associated with MWSA?

CHAD RICKARD: I am a brand new member of MWSA! I found the organization as I was looking for ways to market my new release, a memoir about my time in Afghanistan as a combat advisor.

MWSA: What did you learn while writing your book?

RICKARD: My book was a memoir about my time embedded into the Afghan Army as a senior infantry advisor. It was my third combat tour and I saw a lot of heavy fighting. What I learned writing the book was I had a lot of healing to do and writing became the absolute best therapy for me. I learned that no amount of doctor visits or medication could come close to the healing that writing provided.

MWSA: How long did it take you to write your book?

RICKARD: It took me nearly a year to complete my book, *Mayhem 337: Memoir of a Combat Advisor in Afghanistan*. I

wrote the book completely on my own, then I scrapped most of it and rewrote it again. After a few Beta readers, I made several more changes and decided to remove nearly all of the acronyms and military jargon to make it easy to read for anyone. What I liked most about the final product was its ease of reading and the fact that you do not need to have spent a single day in the military to understand and follow the story.

MWSA: What writing quirks do you have?

RICKARD: After years in the military, I found I was a perfectionist and I wanted everything to be absolutely perfect and error-free on the first try. This slowed my progress considerably and it took me quite some time to be able to write a “rough draft” and not a perfect copy. Once I was able to free myself from the expectation of perfection on the first try, the story flowed a lot easier and I made progress. I would say it took about two months of struggling and writing before I let go and just wrote a very rough draft.

MWSA: Where do you do most of your writing?

RICKARD: I do all of my writing in my office within my own home. I recently retired after 27 years in the US Army. I have surrounded myself with 27 years of memorabilia, pictures, and reminders of my service. It provided the best inspiration for my first book.

MWSA: Will you write another book?

RICKARD: My initial answer is yes. I am working on the framework of another non-fiction book about my second tour in Iraq with the Army’s 3rd Infantry Division. It was quite a tour with heavy combat and lots of loss. I think the book would focus on the men who made the ultimate sacrifice in an effort to ensure they are never forgotten. I did something similar in *Mayhem 337* because they’re the true heroes and we need to remember them.



WRITING IN THE FACE OF FEAR

Liberty Bell

WHEN YOU CLOSE TOLKIEN'S LORD of the Rings or when you shut the door to the wardrobe and leave Narnia behind, never do you think about the fear that the authors tackled to make those ideas into stories. My first thought after finishing Hope's *The Prisoner of Zenda* was not, "It took a lot of courage to write that."

Before I go further, I want to be clear about my usages of the words *fear*, *courage*, and their synonyms. Especially in the military world, I don't want to undermine the meanings of those words. The insecurities in writing can never compare with the terror of combat, and choosing to write despite those insecurities pales in comparison to the bravery that servicemembers often demonstrate, despite the fear they may face. But it also wouldn't be fair to say that writers are never afraid, or that they are wrong to be afraid. So, as you read, please realize that though I'll be using the same words, I recognize the differences between writing-fear versus combat-fear, as well as writing-courage versus combat-courage.

My friend once told me, "For the first time in years, I've been considering trying to write again. I have pieces of a story now, but most of it is still just in my head. This probably sounds dumb, but I'm actually scared to write it down. I know it won't turn

out perfectly right the first time, and I guess I'm afraid I won't be able to write with... incredible talent."

It's not dumb. Fear is a daily struggle for writers, and I guarantee you there were times that Tolkien, Lewis, and Hope were terrified that what they were about to write was stupid, uninteresting, or that no one would like it.

So much of my procrastination when it comes to writing is that I'm afraid. I know what needs to be put down on the paper, but I don't have the perfect words to say it in. I know what I see in my head, but I don't know how to write it. I know that this chapter is the climax, but I'm afraid that it won't be big enough.

As I wrote to the first critic I ever had, concerning the climax to my first novel, "I



was nervous to write this chapter. I stalled for a while on my first day of writing it, because I was scared that I wouldn't be able to top off my culminating events in a satisfactory way. I wasn't sure if it would be enough of a 'peak' to my book..."

I also told her, "Every chapter of this book was literally prayed over, because there were times—every week, I think—that I didn't think I could do it, or I was stalling, or braindead, or scared, or something."

You know the weird thing? She told me she could relate. She has a novel that she's been writing off-and-on for the past decade, has helped dozens of writers through critiquing, and works for an incredible writing community. She has amazing advice, understands writing in a way that only time and practice can teach, yet she still struggles with fear.

"When I face the desolate impossibility of writing 500 pages, a sick sense of failure falls on me, and I know I can never do it. Then gradually, I write one page and then another. One day's work is all I can permit myself to contemplate." – John Steinbeck

Fear in writing is a real thing. It's a battle. It's not dumb. Maybe you knew all this already, but if you aren't heavily involved in a writing community, it can feel like the struggles you deal with are unique to you. Chances are, they aren't. I know published writers still struggle, because I've had the opportunity to hear them speak and share how they procrastinate, even at 30+ years old and having multiple books in the market.

Fear rules people. The fear to fail. The fear to look dumb in front of someone else. The fear to not do real people justice in our

writing. We live in an imperfect culture that demands perfection. We're expected to get it right, and there's no room for grace.

It's the reason that I hesitated in taking my current job. I work in a financial coaching office, and I was afraid to fail at it. I was afraid to mess up paperwork. I'm still afraid "I won't get it."

My boss told me that he wants me to have the freedom to fail. He wants me to have the freedom to come up with ideas to improve our team, even if some of the ideas are bad ones. In his view, if we come up with nine bad ideas to get one good one, then so be it.

Becoming okay with failure is freeing. Being okay with failure doesn't mean we should stay there, though. Failure is a teacher. We need to be willing to learn from it and try again, even if the next try flops, and the next, and the next. Failure is okay, if you keep working to make it right. We can fear, but we cannot let it rule us.

I don't like the word *fearless*. To me, fearless doesn't exist except in the scope of being God. I prefer the word *courageous*. John Wayne said, "*Courage is being scared to death, but saddling up anyway.*"

So, it's okay to be scared to write, but do it anyway. Think of any book that you've read that has touched your life, made you a better person, or changed you for good permanently. Then remember that the author moved forward through his or her fear to make that story. Don't underestimate your writing. Who might it change if you push through your fear?

"Courage is being scared to death, but saddling up anyway."

ALBERT LAW LETTERS UPDATE

Dwight Jon Zimmerman

IN OCTOBER, I MADE AN appeal to the members. I asked if you could write a short note to my friend and Korean War veteran, Albert Law, who suffers from Alzheimer's and is presently living in an assisted living facility specializing in caring for people with the condition.

Here's an update:

Your response to my appeal was overwhelming! Members from all over the country and overseas enthusiastically stepped up. They included a member who lives in Albert's home county, Rabun County, a member who is now blind and listens to audio books, and one who works in South Korea. Some sent me drafts of their letters for review. This wasn't necessary, but I greatly appreciated the gesture. Those letters were all touching—sharing memories of time in service and how important receiving mail from home was (Albert worked in the mail room in South Korea during the Korean War). Some went a step further by asking permission to post my appeal on their website, blog, or on an organization's site with which they were affiliated, which I gave permission to do so. One member said she'd have her son's second grade class sign a card to Albert. All offered prayers of support to him and daughter, Debbie.

In early November, I was talking to Debbie on the phone and she told me how thrilled she was to see all these unexpected letters to her father. Because so many have arrived, she has taken to reading them

one a day to her father, whom she told me smiles in recognition over some of the things mentioned in the notes and letters. She asked that I give everyone a heartfelt "Thank you!"

In closing, I add my thanks to all of you who took the time to reach out and write. Some of you told me that sending a copy of my book was unnecessary, as writing the letter was reward enough. But if there is anyone out there who didn't get a copy of either *THE VIETNAM WAR, A Graphic History* or *THE HAMMER AND THE ANVIL, Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the End of Slavery in America* please email me at djonzim@gmail.com. Give me your address and let me know which book you want and I'll ship one out.

Again, thank you, members. Well done!

MWSA Dispatches is Seeking Member Submissions.

WE'VE MANY 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, which will be showcased in the *Dispatches* every quarter).

If you'd like to write a featured article, submit a book or you just have questions, please email dispatches@mwsa.co

Thanks for playing.

NEW MEMBER BENEFIT: BETA READER FORUM

John Cathcart

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

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

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

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

PURPOSE

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

SUGGESTIONS

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

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



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

An Interview With MWSA Member

KATHLEEN M. RODGERS

Date of interview: 17 September 2019



BORN AND RAISED IN CLOVIS, NM, **Kathleen M. Rodgers** is a novelist whose stories and essays have appeared in *Family Circle Magazine*, *Military Times*, and in several anthologies. In 2014, Rodgers was named a Distinguished Alumna from Tarrant County College/NE Campus. Three of her aviation poems from the book *Because I Fly* (McGraw-Hill) were featured in an exhibit at the Cradle of Aviation Museum on Long Island, NY. In 2017, the Clovis Municipal School Foundation in Clovis, NM awarded her the Purple Pride Hall of Honor Award under the “Sports and Entertainment” category.

Seven Wings to Glory, Rodgers’ third novel, deals with racism and war and won an Honorable Mention for War & Military in the **2017 Foreword Indies Book of the Year Awards** and was shortlisted for the **2017 Somerset Awards**. Her second

novel, *Johnnie Come Lately*, has garnered multiple awards, including the 2015 Gold Medal for literary fiction from **Military Writers Society of America**. The novel has been featured in *Family Magazine*, *Stars & Stripes*, Fort Worth *Star-Telegram*, *Southern Writers Magazine*, and on “*The Author’s Corner*” on Public Radio. The audio edition is narrated by Grammy-Award-winning vocalist and Broadway actress, Leslie Ellis. **Thorndike Press**, the leading large print publisher in the United States, released *Johnnie Come Lately* and *Seven Wings to Glory* in hardcover large print editions in early 2018.

Rodgers is also the author of the award-winning novel, *The Final Salute*, featured in *USA Today*, *The Associated Press*, and *Military Times*.

She and her husband, Tom, a retired USAF fighter pilot/commercial airline pilot, reside

in North Texas with their two rescue dogs, Denton and Jav. The mother of two grown sons, Thomas and J.P., and grandmother to Reader and Colton, she has recently completed her fourth novel and is at work on her fifth. She is represented by Diane Nine, President of Nine Speakers, Inc.

INTERVIEW

MWSA: How long have you been associated with MWSA?

KATHLEEN M. RODGERS: I've been an active member since 2008. In 2009, I attended my first conference in Orlando, FL. Although I've benefited professionally from the organization, more importantly I've made long-lasting friendships with other writers.

MWSA: What writing projects are you working on these days?

RODGERS: I'm four chapters into my fifth novel, set in eastern New Mexico where I grew up. On my way to the 2019 MWSA/SWW joint conference in Albuquerque, NM, I stopped by an abandoned church I've been passing by my whole life. Until a few months ago, I had no idea this old building would find its way into one of my novels. Let's just say it was a magical moment.

MWSA: Why did you become a writer?

RODGERS: I grew up in a large family with six kids. I'm the third one down. I became a writer to "have a voice."

MWSA: Why do you incorporate military themes into your contemporary fiction?

RODGERS: Back when I was a young military spouse, I was hungry to read articles and books about other service member spouses and families. It didn't matter what branch as long as I was reading about other people

who were living the service member family lifestyle. This was before the days of the internet. In my work as a writer, my mission is to shine the spotlight on service member families and bring them into the mainstream.

MWSA: You attended the 2019 MWSA/SWW Joint Conference. What are the benefits of attending a MWSA conference?



RODGERS: I'm a people person. I love to see old friends and form new bonds with other kindred spirits. We each bring something unique to the organization, regardless of our backgrounds. I believe we can learn from each other. Every time I attend a national conference, I meet new people and my perspective about the world expands. I do not want to live in a vacuum.

MWSA: What do you hope for the future of MWSA?

RODGERS: I hope more people join and get involved. We writers are stronger together. Writing and marketing is hard work and can leave a writer feeling depleted. But when we come together, we can create magic and a place where we have a chance to celebrate each other's achievements and victories.

THE MWSA MILITARY HISTORY TRIVIA QUIZ

Dwight Jon Zimmerman

(Note: captions for all the illustrations are at the end of the article.)

WORLD WAR II



WELCOME TO THE MILITARY WRITERS Society Trivia Quiz! Here's your opportunity to test your knowledge of military history, rank yourself, and impress your friends as a respected fountain of irrelevant information—or maybe just have some fun killing time.

The subject of this quiz is World War II. With this, and future quizzes, the intent is to give a mix of questions that will both challenge the knowledgeable, yet

not overwhelm those with a more general knowledge. And, don't worry, you'll never find yourself having to answer questions on really obscure wars like the Aroostook War (which was more a property dispute between cranky farmers than anything else).

You'll discover that some answers raise questions of their own, and explanations are provided in the answer section found on page 16. Sources for a number of the questions on this quiz are articles inspired by my work as the researcher for *The New York Times Complete World War II*, where I had unlimited access to that newspaper's digital archives and was like a kid in a toy store. I later used the articles I culled as reference in the series of World War II articles I wrote for *Defense Media Network*. In the answer section you'll see links to the various appropriate articles.

Drop me a line at djonzim@gmail.com and let me know what you think, suggestions of how to improve it, and subjects for other quizzes.

Good Luck! (And no cheating going to Google or any other search engine or reference book for answers.)

All photos courtesy of the Library of Congress or the US Navy.

1. WORLD WAR II TRULY WAS A “WORLD WAR.” WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ABOUT IT IS FALSE?

A. Military operations were conducted on every continent except Antarctica.

- B. It was the largest conflict in human history.
- C. It saw the first use of jet fighters and ballistic missiles.
- D. Nazi Germany's chancellor, Adolf Hitler, regarded the war against the Western Allies to be a side-show to the war he waged on the Eastern Front against the Soviet Union.
- E. Of all the major combatants, the United States was the only nation to field a fully mechanized military.

2. THE CACTUS AIR FORCE WAS:

- A. A squadron within the U.S. Army Air Corps.
- B. A squadron within the U.S. Army Air Forces.
- C. A squadron within U.S. Naval Aviation.
- D. A squadron of the combined Arizona-New Mexico Air National Guard.
- E. A cocktail served on Guadalcanal during the campaign whose main ingredient was moonshine made from fermented coconut.
- F. None of the above.

3. DURING WORLD WAR II, ADMIRAL ERNEST KING:

- A. Was Commander, Atlantic Fleet.
- B. Was Chief of Naval Operations.
- C. Was Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet.
- D. Exercised more authority over his branch than Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall.
- E. Was "the most even-tempered man" his daughter knew.



4. PROJECT HABAKKUK WAS A TOP-SECRET PROGRAM INTENDED TO DO WHAT?

- A. Design and build high-altitude balloons capable of carrying bombs that wind currents would push over enemy territory where they would then be released.
- B. The plan to bring top Nazi scientists and



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engineers, like Wernher von Braun, into the United States where they would work for the American military.

C. The original name for the Manhattan Project. It was changed because President Roosevelt had difficulty pronouncing "Habbakuk."

D. The plan to build aircraft carriers out of a mixture of frozen seawater and wood pulp because steel and aluminum were in short supply.

E. The original name of the ship that became famous as the SS *Exodus* which, in 1947, carried Jews, many of them Holocaust survivors, to Palestine, then a British mandate.

5. U.S. NAVY ENSIGN LEONARD "TUCK" SMITH EARNED A FOOTNOTE ROLE IN WORLD WAR II HISTORY FOR WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING?

A. Because President Roosevelt was a former Assistant Secretary of the Navy, he would only allow a naval officer to walk his terrier, Fala. Smith was the aide tapped for the role of dog walker.

B. He was the pilot of a PBY Catalina during the search for the *Bismarck* in late May 1941, a time when the United States was neutral, and was the first person to spot the German battleship, setting the stage for its sinking.

C. He was Adolf Hitler's second cousin.

D. He was one of the flag raisers on Mt. Suribachi.

E. He was the only U.S. Navy pilot to fly a B-25 on the Doolittle Raid.



6. THE U.S. NAVY'S "CORN BELT FLEET" WAS WHAT?

A. The nickname for the Omaha-class cruisers that were named for cities in the Corn Belt.

B. Two Great Lakes cruise ships converted to aircraft carrier training vessels that operated in Lake Michigan off the Chicago coast.

C. Three WWI-era destroyers whose boilers were converted to use corn-based ethanol, part of an experiment to judge the practicality of its use as fuel for Navy warships.

D. A fleet of barges that transported German and Italian prisoners of war from New Orleans up the Mississippi, Ohio, and Missouri Rivers to POW camps in the Corn Belt.

E. None of the above. There was no such thing as a "Corn Belt Fleet."

7. EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY WAS:

A. President Franklin Roosevelt's mistress.

B. A Pulitzer Prize-winning poet who wrote the call-to-arms sonnet "There Are No Islands Anymore" in response to Ann Lindberg's pro-Nazi, pro-Fascist, pro-Communist book *The Wave of the Future*.

C. Joined the Writers' War Board, whose ranks included Rex Stout, Pearl S. Buck, William L. Shirer whose purpose was to provide written materials in support of the allied war effort.

D. Wrote a series of patriotic poems later collected and published in the volume *Make Bright the Arrows*, which was savaged by critics and her peers and is the only volume of her poems that remains out of print.

E. General Dwight Eisenhower's mistress.

F. A, C, and D.

G. B, D, and E.

H. B, C, and D.



9. OPERATION MINCEMEAT WAS:

- A. The code name for the production and shipping of the spiced ham product labeled SPAM.
- B. The top-secret disinformation plan using a human corpse to fool the Germans about the location for Operation Husky.
- C. The code name for a special food convoy to Guadalcanal at the height of the campaign.
- D. The code name for Hitler's Ardennes Offensive that became the Battle of the Bulge.
- E. The code name for the top-secret plan to surrender all German forces in Italy being brokered by Allen Dulles, the OSS station chief based in Bern, Switzerland.

8. IN JULY 1941, THE WAR DEPARTMENT ISSUED A NATIONWIDE CALL FOR BLOND HUMAN HAIR. WHY?

- A. Because Secretary of War Henry Stimson loved blonds so much he issued blond wigs to all female staff members at the Pentagon who weren't blond.
- B. Because blond hair was needed for the cross hairs in the new sniper scope the Army was testing.
- C. It was a test to get the pulse of American patriotism at a time when the country was neutral.
- D. It was a strategic material needed for meteorological and other precision instruments.
- E. None of the above. It was a cock-and-bull story invented by Dr. Josef Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda.



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10. OPERATION CORKSCREW, THE ASSAULT ON THE ITALIAN ISLANDS OF PANTELLERIA AND LAMPEDUSA WAS NOTABLE FOR WHAT?

- A. They were the first defended positions to be defeated solely by air power.
- B. Was the baptism of fire for the 99th Fighter Squadron, the “Tuskegee Airmen.”
- C. Part of Operation Husky, the campaign to capture Sicily.
- D. Inspired a fallacious belief in air war strategy.



MWSA HISTORY QUIZ ANSWERS

1 AND THE ANSWER IS: “A.” They may not have taken potshots at each other on the continent itself, but Antarctic and the waters around it saw a surprisingly significant amount of military activity during the war. In fact, German interest in the Antarctic preceded the war. Germany discovered a large swath of the Antarctic, known as

Queen Maud Land, was unclaimed. Hitler ordered an expedition down there to stake its claim, intending to use it as a base for whaling and commerce raiding. During the war, Germany sent U-boats and commerce raiders, notably the *Komet* and *Pinguin*.

Great Britain had *Operation Tabarin* which developed an old whaling station on Deception Island into a base of operations against U-boats and commerce raiders.

As for the others: “B”... Far and away it remains the largest military conflict in human history. “C”... Wernher von Braun and his team were working on a ballistic missile capable of reaching New York City when the war ended. Regarding “D,” for as much as the West trumpeted its contribution to the war, the fact was that Hitler devoted the bulk of his attention and Nazi Germany’s military resources to fighting the Soviet Union in the Eastern Front. And, as for “E,” while the German Army gets credit for creating the *blitzkrieg* armored attack doctrine, the fact was that it was an army that used mostly horses and mules, about 500,000 at the start of the war and ultimately almost three million by war’s end. The other major powers made extensive use of draft animals. The U.S. did have horses and mules, but in numbers so small as to be more a footnote contributor than anything else.

2 AND THE ANSWER IS: “F. None of the above.” *Cactus Air Force* was the self-appointed name of the motley collection of Navy, Marine, and Army Air Forces (as it was then called, its name was changed to “Air Force” when it was established as an independent and co-equal branch in 1947) warplanes stationed on Guadalcanal during

the campaign. It got its name from Operation Cactus, the codename for the amphibious assault on the island. As for the other answers, “A” through “D” speak for themselves. As for “E,” evidence of that appears to have sadly been lost to history.

3 THE ANSWER IS: ALL of them. At the beginning of the war, King was the head of the Atlantic Fleet prior to America’s official entry in the war. Following Pearl Harbor, he became Commander-in-Chief U.S. Fleet (changing its acronym from CINCUS, which he said sounded like “sink us,” to COMINCH) and later adding Chief of Naval Operations to his duties. As such he held both administrative and operational command of his branch, which gave him more authority over the Navy than what Marshall had over the Army.

King was notoriously famous for his fiery temper, which caused his daughter to make that comment. More about Admiral King can be found at:

<https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/admirals-ernest-j-king-chester-w-nimitz>

4 THE ANSWER IS “D.” THIS was a pet project of Admiral Louis Mountbatten’s and there’s a rather wild anecdote involving a demonstration of pykrete at the Quebec Conference.

You can find out more at:

<https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/project-habakkuk-breaks-the-ice-at-the-quebec-conference>

Regarding “A,” that was done by the Japanese who launched 9,000 explosive and incendiary bombs into the stratosphere where wind currents carried them to the

United States. One balloon got as far as Maryland. It, and Japanese naval attacks on the West Coast, was the subject of my article for *Defense Media Network* that can be found at:

<https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/japanese-attacks-on-the-american-mainland>

Regarding, “B”—Operation Paperclip, so named because the personnel files were affixed with paperclips. More information can be found at:

<https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/operation-paperclip-a-deal-with-the-devil/2>

As for “C,” no, I didn’t write anything about that for the simple reason it never happened. Brigadier General Leslie Groves, who previously oversaw construction of the Pentagon, when given the command followed Army Corps of Engineers’ custom of naming districts after the city where they were based. Because the project’s original offices were located in Manhattan, it became the Manhattan Engineer District, better known as the *Manhattan Project*. And, finally, with “E” the name of that ship was the passenger steamer *SS President Warfield* which



was used as a station and accommodation ship anchored off Omaha Beach in July 1944.

Continued on page 18

Continued from page 17

5 THE ANSWER IS “B” AND that fascinating story can be found at:

<https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/the-american-who-helped-sink-the-bismarck>

As for the rest, no, they never happened. Interestingly, for decades some of the identities of all the men who raised the second flag at Iwo Jima (that’s the famous flag raising) was not finally confirmed until this year.

6 THE ANSWER IS “B.” MORE about that fun story can be found at:

<https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/the-paddle-wheel-carriers-wolverine-and-sable>

As for the rest, nah, I just made all that up.



7 THE ANSWER TO THAT is: “H.” It was shocking at how poorly she was treated by her peers for her patriotism. The story can be found at:

<https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/edna-st-vincent-millay-paid-the-price-for-patriotism>

As for “A,” that was Lucy Rutherford, Missy LeHand, and Margaret Suckley (not all at once, mind you); and “B,” that’s Kay Summersby.



8 THE ANSWER IS: “D.” This was one of those “what the hell?” moments in my researching for the *New York Times Complete World War II*. The digital archives tantalize with a list of headlines that are the links to the articles. The headline in question stated something to the effect that a girl had donated her blond hair to the War Department.

I clicked on the link and, sure enough, that’s what had happened. Further research resulted in finding out the “why.” The story behind it is at:

<https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/hair-today-gone-tomorrow-all-for-the-war-effort>

As for “A,” hahahahahah! “B” is a “no.” So is “C.” And, while I put nothing past Goebbels when it comes to propaganda, I can’t pin that one on him.

9 THE ANSWER IS “A.” Books have been written about this.

The best one I’ve found is Ben Macintyre’s *Operation Mincemeat*. My contribution to the canon is:

<https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/operation-mincemeat-the-story-behind-the-man-who-never-war-in-operation-husky>

10 THE CORRECT ANSWER IS “all of them.” The account of this operation is overshadowed by Operation Husky. But Operation Corkscrew’s biggest contribution to the war was its impact on allied air power strategy—it cast a shadow that continued well after the war.

The story can be found at:

<https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/tuskegee-airmen-in-operation-corkscrew>

So, how did you do? Tally up your score and find out below what your rank is.

★ *Commander: 10 answers correct. Need I say more?*

★ *Chief of Staff: 7 – 9 correct. You’re smart enough to know your stuff. More importantly, you’re smart enough to not show up your commander.*

★ *Adjutant: 5 – 6 correct. You’re learning.*

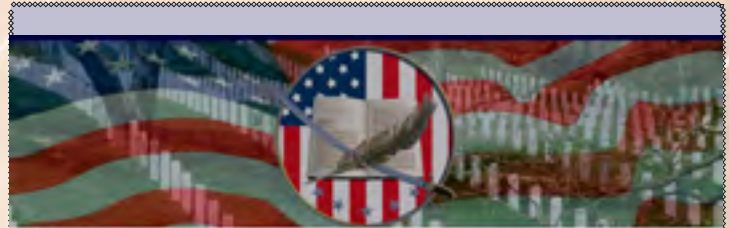
★ *Orderly: 2 – 4 correct. You’re beginning to learn.*

★ *Flag bearer: 1 correct. You know your place.*

★ *Recruit: 0 correct. Welcome aboard. Time to bone up.*

Photo Captions:

1. Poster illustrating the second flag raising at Iwo Jima. Library of Congress
2. The aftermath of a Japanese attack on Henderson Field at Guadalcanal. US Navy
3. Admiral of the Fleet Ernest J. King. US Navy
4. The German battleship **Bismarck**. US Navy
5. Edna St. Vincent Millay. Library of Congress
6. Secretary of War Henry Stimson (left). Library of Congress
7. Lieutenant General George S. Patton Jr. in Sicily during Operation Husky. Library of Congress
8. Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. at an airbase at Ramitelli, Italy, circa 1945. Library of Congress
9. Vice Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten (right) talking to Major General George Patton at Casablanca. Library of Congress
10. The **USS Wolverine**. US Navy
11. From left to right: Soviet Premier Josef Stalin, President Franklin Roosevelt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill at Teheran. Library of Congress



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).

If you'd like to write a feature article or have further questions, please email:

dispatches@mwsa.co

THANKS.



BULL RUN PICNIC

Dennis Maulsby

DÉSIRÉE KNEW SHE WAS IN bed, asleep in her room on the third floor of the family's old Victorian mansion. A small inner voice told her she could not be in this other place, but the vision—the dream—so full of color and sensation.

* * *

A hot July sun illuminated the Virginia countryside. Her other senses engaged the smell of the grass, the feel between her fingers of her Swiss-muslin day dress.

“Have some more fried chicken, my dear?”

Eyes focused, her mind passed completely into the dream. Senator Washburne's wife Adele held out a serving platter.

“Uh, no thank you.” She looked down at her plate, containing the remains of chicken, deviled oysters, cole slaw, and succotash.

“Able,” Mrs. Washburne waved at a servant. “You may serve the apple pan dowdy and peppermint cake now.”



The Right Honorable Senator from Illinois,

Elihu Benjamin Washburne held up a bottle of wine, “More of the red, Madame de Gracie? Oh, and save room for champagne when our men have driven the rebels off.”

The Washburne party was one of many hundreds spread over some poor farmer's pasture that July 21st morning. Earlier in the week, the crowd had watched the troops march out of the capital, centipede legs of the long blue-clad columns lifting and falling.

Everyone in the cheering throng, except for the thick sprinkling of Southern spies, believed the Union troops would route the secessionist Rebels and end the war in this one glorious battle.

Invitations to parties and balls had already been delivered. Huge quantities of wine, beer, liquor, and food had been stockpiled awaiting the return of their victorious army. The troops camped in the field for six days before contact between the two armies became imminent. Mixed parties of civilians had flocked out after hearing telegraphed reports that battle would soon commence.

The thirty-mile drive by carriage over backcountry roads left passengers disheveled and bruised. The thirty-five-thousand-man Federal army with all its marching feet, field artillery with its trailing caissons, hooped cavalry, and high-wheeled supply wagons had cratered and potholed the road. The general feeling among civilians forming the ragtag crowd of observers—the discomfort was bearable

in order to witness firsthand the historic whipping the rebels were about to receive.

Désirée pulled a lace hanky from her sleeve and dabbed her forehead, then adjusted her parasol. The last five days had been unseasonably warm. The rumble of muskets and thump of cannon drew all eyes. Men raised telescopes. The crowd broke into cheers and hat waving.

“I see black powder smoke. It is on! It is on!” the Senator shouted. “Those damn secessionist bastards will pay the price now.”



“Eli, stop your cussing. There are ladies present.”

Ignoring his wife’s admonition, he babbled, “General McDowell will advance in three columns, two to hold the rebels by the nose while the third advances around their right flank.”

More rolling thunder raced up from Bull Run and vibrated the air among the watchers.

“Whoopee!” shouted the Senator, “Give them hell, boys.”

The original Désirée in the dream remembered that her husband, Lieutenant

Charles Louis de Gracie would be in the thick of it. He had rushed off after hearing of the attack on Ft. Sumter and joined the 14th New York State Militia.

He looked dashing handsome in the unit’s distinctive uniform, modeled after a French ‘chasseur’ outfit, consisting of ashy red trousers, white leggings, a blue jacket, scarlet chevrons, and gold shoulder knots. A French style kepi with blue band, red above with blue top, covered his light brown curls.

Désirée gasped. The hillside picnic faded. She was thrust into hellfire and brimstone. A small frightened hitchhiker in the back of her dream husband’s mind, she watched him rallying his men for a charge up Henry Hill.

Only hours earlier, the 14th New York, along with the 11th New York, and the 1st Minnesota had advanced with orders to protect two batteries of cannon, and to assault if an opening provided itself.

The troops were green but eager—their three months training inadequate to establish much military discipline. On the march, men had straggled to pick blackberries, smoke pipes, and talk with civilians. In spite of these deficiencies, they initially performed well when the fighting began.

The lieutenant had learned what the expression *the fog of war* meant. Advancing rebels in blue uniforms had been mistaken for friendly troops and in the ensuing confusion had captured the Union guns. His men had charged and pushed them back, volleys of *buck and ball* from the unit’s smoothbores nearly buckled the

Continued on page 22

Continued from page 21

enemy flank. But their opponent's forces had rallied and been reinforced.

This would be his unit's fourth charge—the men were tired and they would need to pick their way through the dead and wounded carpeting the hill, slowing their movement. Charles' knees shook—not from fear, he hoped. He tried to shout, but words came out only as a croak, his capability of speech lost after so much strain.

No water remained to wet dry throats. A sergeant handed him a grit-covered, sulfur-tasting pebble to suck on. With no voice, example would have to do. He raised his sword, managed an incoherent scream, and charged up the hill.

The Virginia unit at the top fired a ragged volley. He heard the silken whisper of lead balls fly past, the thunk as some hit flesh and generated surprised groans. The rebels ran before his men could engage them. On top, among the recaptured cannon, he noticed new Confederates poised to counterattack. They raised muskets.

“Down, boys. On your faces.”

A rattling flurry of explosions announced the beginning of the renewed rebel attack. Soft lead bullets deformed from hitting cannon barrels hummed and buzzed—a cloud of angry hornets. Those hitting the wooden wheels and carriages of the Napoleon guns released fans of splinters. One three-inch needle of oak pierced the wool of his uniform and stuck in his right bicep.

The rebels dropped their muskets. Pulled eight-inch long Bowie knives, and charged. They would regret that, Charles thought,

the 14th, while in their first real battle, were veteran street fighters, having put down numerous New York City riots.

His soldiers leaped up. Those with charged weapons fired. The two mobs crashed together. Charles' saber chopped down, taking off a hand holding a knife. The bayonets on the muskets of his men gave them extended reach. Attackers groaned and screamed as long gun-mounted seventeen-inch bayonets pierced chests and stomachs. One man broke off the butt stock of his musket smashing the head of his rebel opponent. Blood and brains sprayed over the lieutenant—fragments entered his open, gasping mouth. He spit, repressed the urge to vomit, and vowed to keep his mouth closed in the future.



The rebel crowd thinned and disappeared. A pile of entwined twitching bodies lay in tattered heaps in front of the regiment. The survivors drew in huge, shuddering breaths. The men on either side of him dropped to their knees. The iron-and-shit stink of torn bodies assaulted his nostrils.

A dagger of repressed pain went through his right arm. He tried to move his sword

to his left hand. His fingers, molded into a death grip on the hilt, would not obey his command to let loose. The muscles were too cramped and the coating of dried blood acted as glue.

His corporal used spit to loosen the blood-bond, and helped pry Charles' fingers loose from the grip. The splinter removed from his arm, the wound was bound by a Havelock removed from a dead soldier's cap. The men found the long piece of cloth attached to the back of the kepis did little to cool the neck as its design intended. It was more useful as a bandage.

Charles blew his nose into a handkerchief. The linen cloth caught a wad of thick red-black mucilage, formed from inhaling a reek of black powder discharge, dust, and blood splatter—its composition a chemical microcosm of the battlefield. Staring at the substance, he wondered what the insides of his lungs looked like.

The order came to retreat. Survivors formed up and marched out. On the road back to Washington, Charles almost wept over the extent of their defeat. Dazed and confounded, he watched Federal soldiers abandon rifles and equipment, steal horses, and fight over seats on wagons. Things grew worse when the Confederates managed to put artillery fire on the bridge over Cub Run.

A Union wagon overturned, blocking the mob behind. Ambulances, horses, cannon, and men piled up in one confused mess. Shells landed and exploded, flinging disconnected torsos, arms, and legs among the panicked.

The 14th Regiment ignored the incoming fire, moved off the road, and waded the

stream. Once across, they resumed their long walk—the litter of rifles, cartridge boxes, broken-axle wagons, packs and bags so thick on its mucked-up surface, the men could've walked the thirty miles back to Washington without their feet once touching dirt.

* * *

The modern Désirée woke with a start. The floor of the old house creaked and seemed to talk to her as she walked barefoot to the bathroom.

The manse had been in her family since 1860, its substance full-up with the dreams and nightmares of its inhabitants. Named after her great-great grandmother, Désirée had inherited the woman's diaries, antique tintypes, and old-fashioned necklaces and broaches.

She shivered and replayed the dream in her mind. Evidently, the inheritance consisted of more than just the material.

The End





WELCOME TO THE MWSA ~ WHO WE ARE

John Cathcart

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

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

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

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

SAVING HISTORY ONE STORY AT A TIME

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John Cathcart

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THIS IS FOR SUBMITTING YOUR book to the MWSA library only.

MWSA will **NOT** review your book, nor will it be considered for award using this option.

Members in good standing may submit one book per year cost-free (as a member benefit) for inclusion in our online library.

If you'd like to add additional book(s), please chose the "Extra Book" option (cost \$5.00 per book).

MWSA will add your book as quickly as we can... but it may take some time (depending on webmaster workload).

We are limiting submissions to 50 for each option to make sure we can handle the workload and get your book included on our website in a timely manner.

If an option is listed as "Sold Out," please check back later or contact the MWSA Awards Directors... we may be able to include your book once we've cleared any backlog.

MWSA's online library will include your book for at least one calendar year after it's added and will remain online until and unless MWSA transitions to a new/different website.

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BITS & PIECES

Bob Doerr ~ MWSA President

HAPPY NEW YEAR EVERYONE! 2019 was a busy year and hopefully a good one for all of you. Hold on to your hats, we think 2020 will be even busier and better.

2020 CONFERENCE

We have firmed up our plans to hold our general membership conference next September in New London, CT. We've kept costs down at both the hotel and with the conference to make this year's conference one of the most affordable in years. At the same time, planning is already taking place to ensure it will be productive and enjoyable. More specific information is available on our website:

<https://www.mwsadispatches.com/events/2020-conference>

While you're visiting our conference page, you can also reserve and pay for a conference slot for you and your guest(s). As long as you're visiting that conference page, you might as well take advantage of early-bird conference rates, which will be in effect until the end of May.

If you have any questions or need any help, please contact our conference organizers, jim greenwald and Phil Keith at NewLondon@mwsa.co.

ELECTIONS 2020

No, not that election—Our MWSA election of board members. We'll be issuing a call for any MWSA member who would like to run for office or to become a director-at-large.

We'll need a slate of candidates by next spring, so don't be shy.

We'll be posting details on our website, but if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to let me know. I'd be happy to describe the duties, term of office, or any other aspect of our MWSA leadership positions.

REVIEWS & AWARDS

Our 2020 season kicked off on January 15th, with the opening of our book submission window. We're looking forward to having a look at our members' work, so get submitted. Our submission window will stay open until June 15, which gives us enough time to read, score, and review all books in time for our announcement of awards finalists on or about August 15.

As always, we're expecting a very busy season. If you're interested in helping out as an MWSA reviewer, we'd love to have you join our reviewer force.

Click here:

<https://www.mwsadispatches.com/awards> to learn more or to sign up for reviewer training. You can work as much... or as little as you want, and the training is now done online at your own pace. Please join us!

VOLUNTEERS

We are still in need of volunteers to help in a variety of ways. If you would like to

be a book reviewer, help us maintain our website, work on one of our social media outlets, or be an MWSA Ambassador, please let us know. Information on these programs can be found on our website.

COOKIE MONSTERS AND MWSA WEBSITES

For a host of reasons (technical and otherwise), MWSA uses two websites.

Our main website is the one almost everyone visits to see what's going on and where members can take advantage of all our offerings and member benefits:

<https://www.mwsadispatches.com>

Our second website deals with all our membership activities and online payment of dues. Because it handles secure online payments and member contact information, this website is secure and relies on "cookies" to be sure it's keeping track of YOU and your information after you sign in.

We've tried to simplify your navigation through our websites by combining the two websites into a seamless experience for our members. Unfortunately, the integration doesn't always work as well as we'd wish. Sometimes, the Cookie Monster gets in the way.

If your computer gives you a warning about cookies (telling you that they're required or disabled), you should click on the nearby link that says "Click here to go to our membership website." That should take care of your "Cookie Monster" problem. If that doesn't work—or if you have any problem you can't solve on your own—please don't hesitate to email our membership team (if

you're trying to pay dues or update any of your membership contact information) or our event coordinators (if you're trying to register for the conference).

MWSA SOCIAL MEDIA CONNECTIONS

[Facebook](#) | [Goodreads](#) | [Twitter](#) | [YouTube](#)
[LinkedIn](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Tumblr](#) | [Blogger](#)

PLEASE HELP US SPREAD THE word about MWSA programs and initiatives. Friend us, like our various pages, read and make comments, re-tweet our messages, and engage with other authors.

FACEBOOK

- ★ [MWSA Public Facebook Page](#)
- ★ *MWSA main website news stories updated here.*
- ★ *Open to everyone.*
- ★ *Members-only section coming in the future.*

GOODREADS

- ★ [MWSA Goodreads Page](#)
- ★ *Includes books from the 2015 season until now.*
- ★ *All our reviews copied here, and are subsequently mirrored in our dedicated [MWSA Blogger Page](#).*
- ★ *If you're interested in managing (or monitoring) this page, please contact us.*

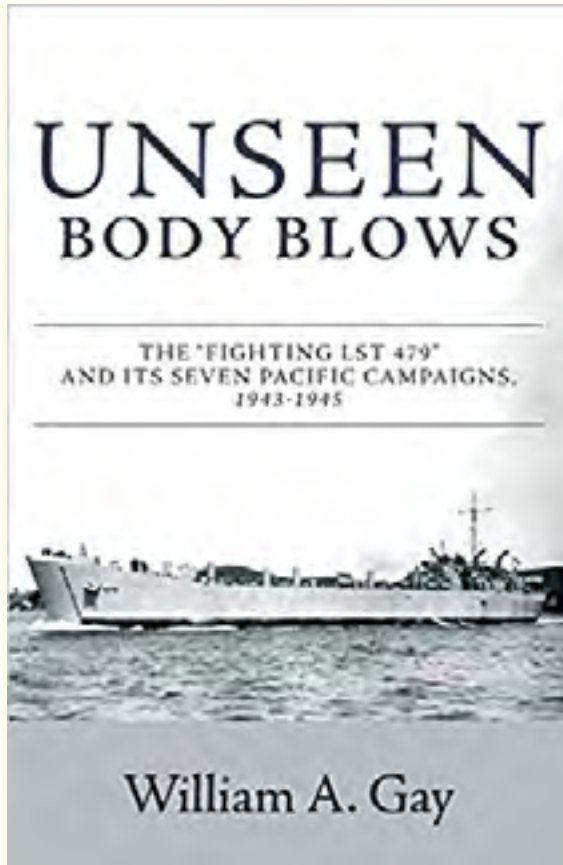
TWITTER

- ★ [MWSA Twitter Feed](#)
- ★ *Our Twitter page gets all books and reviews added to our library.*
- ★ *Other items are posted on an ad hoc basis.*
- ★ *Are you a Twitter addict? Please help us out.*

INSTAGRAM

- ★ [MWSA Instagram Feed](#)
- ★ *At this moment, our library books are not automatically syndicated to this social media outlet.*
- ★ *We'll be using it for future advertising and book marketing efforts.*

Let us know if you'd like to help out.



UNSEEN BODY BLOWS

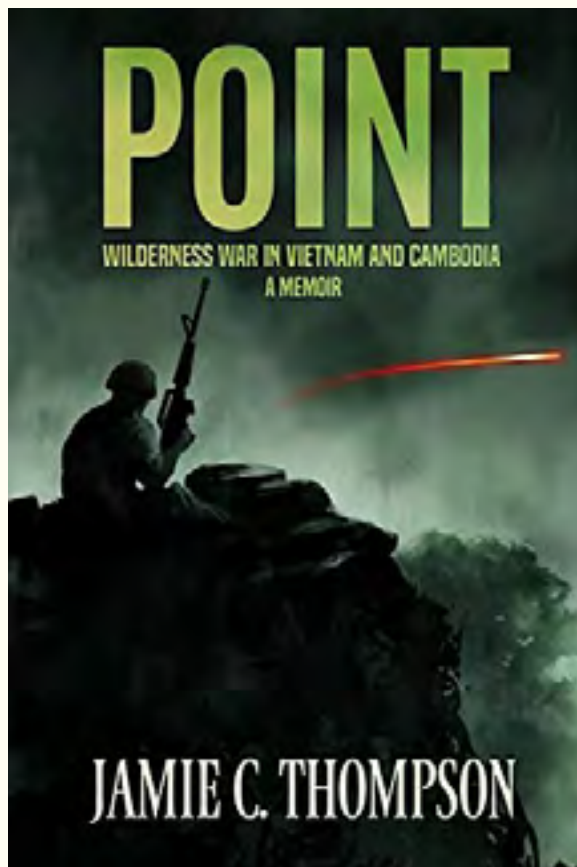
by **William A. Gay**

Genre(s): Nonfiction, History

Format(s): Hard cover, Soft cover, Kindle, ePub/iBook

ISBN/ASIN: 978-1-5255-3833-9, 978-1-5255-3834-6, 978-1-5255-3835-3

In gripping, meticulously researched, “you are there” fashion, author William A. Gay, recounts the fascinating history of the 479’s seven Pacific campaigns; from the day-to-day life of the men aboard her to their terrifying encounters in battle as they delivered “unseen body blows” to the enemy that helped win the war in the Pacific. *Unseen Body Blows* is listed on the suggested reading list page of Navsource.org.



POINT: Wilderness War in Vietnam and Cambodia

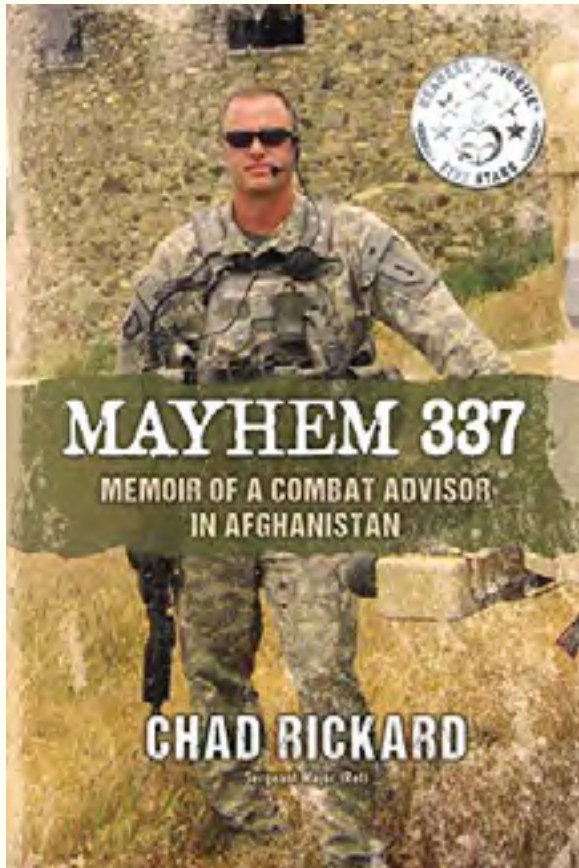
by **Jamie C. Thompson**

ISBN: 9781692848842, ASIN: 1692848844

Book Format(s): Soft cover, Kindle

Review Genre: Nonfiction—Memoir/Biography

POINT is a firsthand account of daily life for grunts in the field in Vietnam and Cambodia in 1970. It’s a memoir of the author’s service as an infantry sergeant, squad leader and point man in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War.



MAYHEM 337: Memoir of a Combat Advisor in Afghanistan

by Chad Rickard

Genre(s): Nonfiction, History, Memoir

Format(s): Kindle

ISBN/ASIN: B07YZRPQXH

In *Mayhem 337*, Rickard powerfully recounts his experiences during a nine month period of intense combat deep in the mountains of Eastern Afghanistan. His graphic account guides you through intense combat from the streets of Khost City, to deadly mountain warfare while based at an austere combat outpost. He vividly describes the sights and sounds of battle as well as the heartbreaking aftermath of fallen comrades. From IED laden roads to air assault missions and hostage standoffs, Rickard's story leaves nothing to the imagination. His riveting memoir brings recognition and honor to the Embedded Transition Team legacy that is but a footnote in U.S. military history.

THINGS YOU NEVER KNEW YOU NEVER KNEW

...about the MWSA Website.

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

<http://www.mwsadispatches.com/membership>
(3rd bullet under "New Members" section)

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

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

★ *MWSA Blasts can be found here:*

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

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

An Interview With MWSA Member

BILL RILEY

Date of interview: 27 October 2019



BILL RILEY IS A WRITER and retired US Air Force lieutenant colonel with interests in space exploration, coffee roasting, global communication, intelligence activities, and ancient ruins. Bill was an intelligence analyst during the Cold War. Later, he specialized in strategy and communications. During his career, he's worked with intelligence and special operations professionals from every service, virtually every intelligence agency, and several friendly foreign governments.

Bill's deployments took him through combat zones across the Middle East where he played significant roles in Kuwait and Iraq, supported joint coalition operations,

and helped nations rebuild after wars. He was the first US electronic warfare officer in Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom, he led the air force's largest network operations and security center, and he was the first cyberspace operations officer to receive the Air Force Combat Action Medal.

He holds degrees in literature, public administration, and strategic leadership, and he's a graduate of Air Command and Staff College and the Air Force Space Command VIGILANT LOOK program.

Bill lives in Idaho, just outside Boise, with his wife and two sons.

Find him at billrileyauthor.com

Look for him on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter at *billrileyauthor*

INTERVIEW

MWSA: How has MWSA helped your writing and/or marketing skills?

BILL RILEY: I've been a member for less than a year, and MWSA has already directly helped me in two ways. The biggest is networking. In a short time, I've had the opportunity to meet many writers willing to answer my questions and discuss both the art of writing and the struggle to make writing a career. Very well established authors have been generous with their time and advice, and both new and experienced writers have shared valuable tools, perspectives, and approaches with me.

The second benefit has been feedback and recognition. These go hand-in-hand, and the

review process MWSA offers is phenomenal. The volunteers who conduct book reviews are professional, constructively critical, and provide notes that provide feedback on what worked and didn't. This dovetails into the MWSA Awards program, which represents the genre of Military Writing in the United States. It judges each submission against professional literary criteria, not against the books submitted in a given year. This means we compete against the best standards of writing and storytelling, not each other.

Baghdaddy won the 2019 MWSA Founders Medal and Gold Medal for Memoir, and I was blown away. It was exciting and humbling. As a writer, it was a moment I'll never forget. Now, being able to market *Baghdaddy* as an award-winning author has opened up speaking and media gigs that were difficult to get before. So please submit your work, the feedback is excellent, and you never know what'll happen.

MWSA: *Baghdaddy* is an intensely personal sharing of your life's journey. At what point and how did you decide it needed to be written?

RILEY: I witnessed the effects of Saddam's rape of Kuwait and his failure to honor the terms of his surrender. Later, I was stationed in Iraq and experienced the unique challenges of trying to rebuild that country while some of its people were trying to kill me.

My father tried to prepare me for the worst that life could throw at me. He taught me hard lessons that often hurt, and I resented them. After he passed away, I tried to put things in perspective. I realized that there wasn't a lot of difference between the

skills I needed to survive my childhood, be a father, and go to war. I met some amazing people along the way, and connecting those dots brought me to *Baghdaddy*.

MWSA: What attracted you to intelligence and national security?

RILEY: I wish I could say I had a noble purpose or a higher calling, but I didn't. I was the stereotypical enlistee, in a bad situation without other good options, and the air force offered me a way out, an opportunity to prove myself, and a fresh start. Funny story: I entered the air force without a guaranteed job. I was an 'open general' recruit, which is another name for "whatever the air force needs most." A.K.A my recruiter Jedi-mind-tricked me into meeting his quota.

Halfway through Basic, our military training instructor lined us up and said, "I have to send five volunteers to the new special ops pre-qualification course. Who thinks they have what it takes?" You'd think everyone would want in, but no. He got four volunteers, and I was "voluntold" to be the fifth. I was annoyed. It was just one more thing I had to do. But I said, "YES, SERGEANT," on cue. I figured it would be obvious I wasn't into it, nature would take its course, and I'd be out. The thing was, it wasn't bad. Yeah, it was chaotic and exhausting, but there was no yelling, I ran and swam, and avoided the most tedious aspects of basic training. Our ability to observe and improvise was tested, and we wrote short essays to answer unanswerable morality questions as our group got smaller and smaller.

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When there were five of us left, we were given our final task: Dive in the water, reach the other side of the pool, pick up a mask from the bottom of the deep end, clear it, put it on, and swim back to where we started—all underwater, all in one breath.

Problem was, when I'd almost gotten to my mask, some asshole with a padded stick hit me and knocked the mask away. I grabbed it, but another stick knocked me in the head, and I let go. I was running out of air, but surface and you lose, and I was pissed. I swam to the wall just above the mask, and the sticks came at me again. This time I grabbed both and kicked off the wall as hard as I could. One stick came free in my hand, and there was a big splash. I grabbed my mask, cleared and donned it, and swam to the finish line. When I broke the surface to gasp for air, a hand the size of a ham grabbed my head and hauled me out of the pool. It was a huge, unhappy sergeant in soaking wet fatigues. I figured I'd screwed up. I just hoped they'd let me finish Basic.

They congratulated me. I finished first in that class and was offered a spec ops class slot. But there were only two slots, and there were three of us. In the pit of my stomach I knew I wasn't the right man for the job. I didn't want it like the other candidates did, and I figured their passion had to mean something. I declined the pararescue slot I was offered, got yelled at by a major, for what seemed like a long time, then the big sergeant I dunked in the pool came in. He told the major that while he questioned my decision-making skills for not going in the program, I had integrity and grit and he recommended me for an intelligence job that just felt right. No one had ever told me I had grit or integrity before.

I stayed because there's a sense of community in the military that, for me, was like family.

MWSA: Your book's cover art elicits strong reactions. What were your thoughts behind it?

RILEY: The *Baghdaddy* cover is polarizing, and I love it. I wanted it to cut to the heart of my story, and with one glance it does. I wish we lived in a world where there weren't child soldiers, but we don't, and they're a part of this story. The art also captures the warlike aspects of my upbringing, and it feels personal. My father once said, "One definition of adult is surviving your childhood" and I never forgot it. Each story element meets on this cover. You know the moment you pick it up.

MWSA: *Baghdaddy* provides a first-hand view of war. What are the most common misconceptions held by many Americans?

RILEY: We see war mostly in snapshots, and not everything gets the coverage or the

attention or focus it deserves. There's been a terrible war in Yemen for years, but the media barely covers it. The same was true of the atrocities of Saddam's occupation of Kuwait and the campaign of rape and terror employed by Slobodan Milošević during the Bosnian War. Few were interested in investigating and reporting until the world couldn't look away anymore.

The first time I was in Iraq was just after President Bush declared victory. We absolutely met and exceeded the first phase objectives of the war, but even at the highest levels of power, there were misconceptions over what "victory" meant, and unfortunately, an agenda often drives what gets reported and what the public sees.

I was with an army signals unit on the outskirts of Karbala, about fifty-five miles southwest of Baghdad. There was a friendly village just off the major supply route, and we encountered a news crew at the burnt and twisted remains of a blown-up semi-tractor trailer.

People from the village were rummaging through the blast field, looking for salvageable spoils. We waved, the Iraqis waved back, and the reporters were busy setting up their shot.

We pulled over, and I went to touch base with the news crew just as they were assembling a group of men and boys with slung Kalashnikov rifles in front of the still-smoking vehicle for a picture. Back then, if a supply truck fell out of a convoy along the route, the driver detonated the vehicle and cargo so it wouldn't fall into enemy hands. The vehicle in front of me, and the reporters was one of those. We knew it, they knew it.

The title that ran on the picture in a scathing news story was, 'Insurgents Destroy Military Supplies.' It was a good picture, and insurgents did destroy military supplies, just not that time. If you look closely at the picture, you can see all the boys smiling for the camera.

Don't get me wrong, there is still great reporting. Unfortunately, we've also reached a point of manufactured and skewed news saturation. The difficulty in separating the truth from the lies has, more than anything, led to misconceptions.

MWSA: You're currently writing a YA series. What can you share about the series, and does it have a connection at all to *Baghdaddy*?

RILEY: Absolutely, it does. Thank's for asking about this, I just finished the first book in my new Cypher series. In it, I draw on my military background and time in secret organizations, and while I was raising boys when I was often away doing things I couldn't talk about. I'll take readers to places they haven't seen before in Young Adult Fiction, and it will be a wild and surprisingly moving ride.

The first book is called *Ashur's Tears*. In it, near-future technology collides with magic in a vibrant world where the government has much to hide. An apocalypse-class artifact has been stolen, powerful factions have emerged, and demons are poised to invade the world if a disgraced temple guardian and the three Cypher children can't find their father and stop it.

I love this story, and I can't wait to share it, probably late 2020/early 2021. You can check out billrileyauthor.com for updates and events.

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