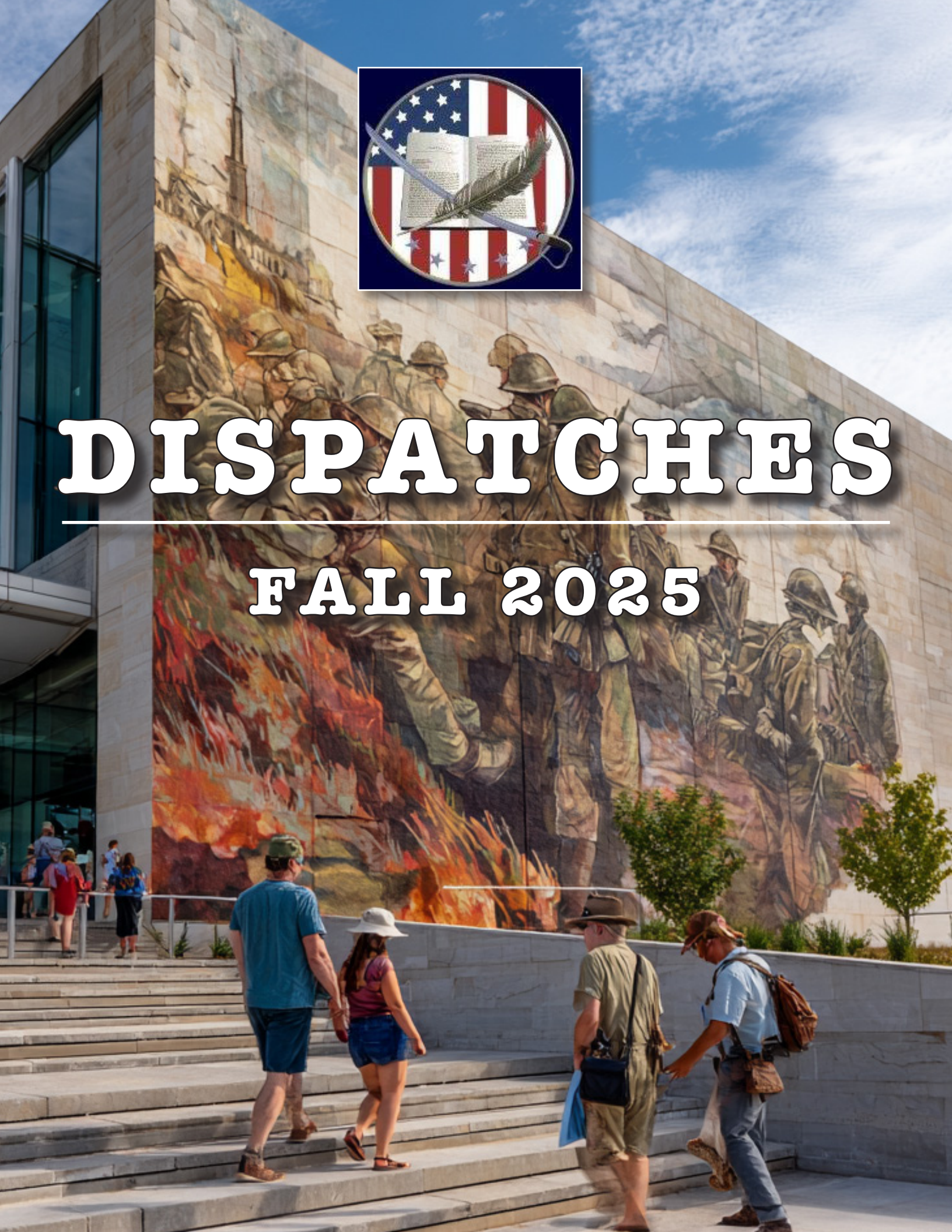




DISPATCHES

FALL 2025





DISPATCHES

Saving History One Story at a Time

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SUBMISSIONS WANTED

Dispatches is looking for submissions from dues-paying members in good standing, from interviews to poetry, photography, artwork, short stories, articles, and book advertisements (for a small fee). We offer this opportunity to be published in a national magazine exclusively to our membership. If you’d like to submit a feature article (1500 words or less, or in multiple parts), please email dispatches@mwsa.co. Additional details can be found on the MWSA website at <https://www.mwsadispatches.com/dispatches-submissions>.

EDITOR'S NOTE

By Valerie Ormond

The fall *Dispatches* issue traditionally focuses on highlights of our annual membership conference and the culmination of our annual awards season. Congratulations to the conference organizers, attendees, and award winners. It was a pleasure to make new friends.

Our Buckaroo Auction this year was once again a fun event and way to recognize MWSA's lifeline—our volunteers. A hearty thank you to those who donated over \$1750 in goods and services to our auction including the following:



AutoCrit

Rob Lofthouse and Storytelling Publishing

James Rosone

John Cathcart

Megan Michelle

Suzanne Bott

MWSA

Sue Rushford Editorial Services

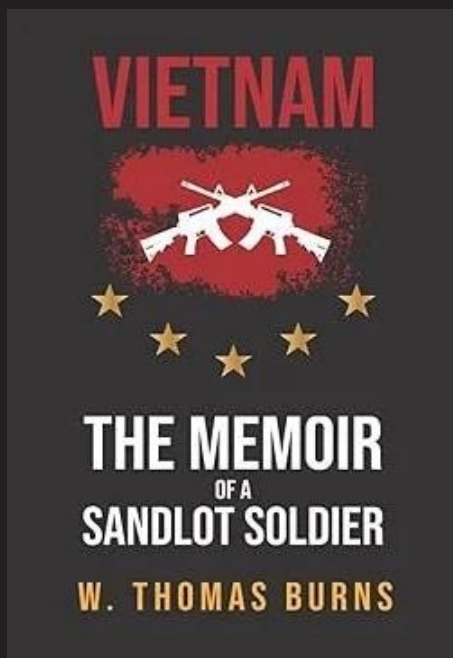
Tom Morrissey

A special thank you also to our Buckaroo Auctioneer Jaime Navarro for making it an entertaining event and bringing the crowd together. I, along with many other members, know that MWSA could not do what it does without our wonderful and dedicated spouses, family members, and partners.

Following the last issue's article on copyrighted lyrics, MWSA member Tom Wing reached out to a fellow author and colleague, Gene Desrochers, who offered a free legal consult to MWSA members. Gene's email for legal work is gened@genedlaw.com and his website is genedlaw.com. Thank you, Tom, for reaching out, and Gene, for your generous offer to support our members!

We have updated news on *Dispatches* ads. Depending on the timeframe over the years, MWSA has offered members either free advertisements or paid advertisements. As the volunteer Editor, I didn't understand the time involved in coordinating those ads with submitters, getting the ads in a decent format, and on to final production. After discussion with MWSA's Board of Directors, our new policy is to offer only paid ads at the current 50% discount rate for members. This is still a good deal and member benefit, for example, a \$25 fee for a quarter-page ad in *Dispatches*. Although fees can vary widely, a quarter-page ad generally would cost \$200 and up in comparable newsletters and magazines.

This *Dispatches* issue is not all about the conference and award winners, although those who were not able to join us in person can do so virtually through the words and photos. Our magazine is highlighting audiobooks based on their rising popularity and in response to member questions on the topic. Our talented members submitted unique feature stories, tips on marketing, a member interview, and more. It is said that autumn is a harvest time, and we hope you enjoy MWSA's latest collection. ■



“Marine veterans from the Vietnam era will relate to this story, as will any infantryman who served in combat.”

~Military Writers Society of America Review by Rob Ballister

Available at:

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1956543066>

PRESIDENTIAL MUSINGS

By John Cathcart



MWSA 2025 Conference in Kansas City: A Celebration of Community and Excellence

MWSA recently concluded our 2025 annual conference in Kansas City, Missouri, and it was nothing short of a resounding success. Over several inspiring days, members came together to learn, share, and celebrate the written word, strengthening the bonds that make our community so unique and enduring.

One of the highlights of this year's conference was meeting members who have recently joined MWSA. They came eager to learn about the publishing world, connect with fellow veterans and military family members, and find inspiration for their own writing journeys. Their fresh perspectives and enthusiasm reminded us why MWSA continues to grow and thrive after more than two decades of service to the veteran writing community.

For long-standing members, the Kansas City gathering offered the perfect opportunity to reconnect with old friends and colleagues. Conversations carried on late into the night, fueled by shared experiences of military life, the challenges of writing, and the joys of storytelling. Our collective bar bills stand as testament to this fact. I'm sure that I'm not the only one who noted that the camaraderie that defines MWSA was on full display, proving once again that this is more than just an organization; we are truly a family.

The conference culminated in the much-anticipated awards banquet, where a new crop of award-winning authors was recognized for their exceptional contributions to literature. From fiction and history to poetry and children's books, the diversity and quality of this year's medal-winning submissions underscored MWSA's mission to

PRESIDENTIAL MUSINGS *continued*

encourage, support, and honor the work of military writers and those connected to the military experience. To see this year's list of medal winners, see page 36 of this issue and visit our website's [2025 season page](#).

As the Kansas City conference drew to a close, members left with renewed inspiration, new friendships, and a deepened commitment to writing. Plans are already underway for next year's gathering, promising even more opportunities to learn, connect, and celebrate the power of storytelling. We'll be gathering in an East Coast city for our 2026 conference, and right now, we're zeroing in on Orlando, Florida. Please stand by for updates in the coming days.

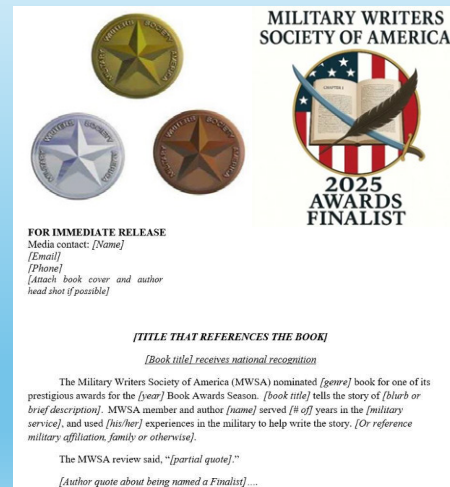
In closing, our 2025 Conference was yet another reminder of what makes this organization special: a community of writers bound together by service, strengthened by friendship, and dedicated to keeping our stories alive for future generations. ■

Did You Know...

MWSA has a page to help members promote their work with awards medal images, template press releases ready for your use, and more?

See:

<https://www.mwsadispatches.com/promo-material>





CRAFT CORNER

MAKING AN AUDIOBOOK

Ruth W. Crocker

Producing an audiobook is both a creative and a technical process. Here's a brief summary of how that process unfolds:

1. First, be sure that either you or your publisher hold the audio rights to the book. If your book is self-published, this is probably not an issue. If you have published your book through a hybrid arrangement with a publisher, they may hold the rights to your book, and you will have to secure their permission.
2. Prepare the manuscript for reading like a script. This might mean removing items that will not be read like long URLs, photos, charts, and tables.
3. Choose a narrator. If your book is a memoir, the best narrator will be you. For most fictional genres, and books with multiple characters, you will probably need to hire professional voice actors. If you choose to try an artificial voice, pay careful attention to the pronunciation of words.
4. You can record in a professional studio or create a home setup with high-quality equipment and soundproofing.
5. During the recording, you will need a sound director to ensure that tone, pacing, and pronunciation are consistent and to catch errors.
6. Following the recording, the editing process removes mistakes, too-long pauses, and background noise.
7. The final step is to balance sound levels and produce a polished and consistent recording.
8. Once your recording is finished, your book cover will need to be resized to comply with the audiobook cover format for downloading.

MAKING AN AUDIOBOOK *continued*

9. Now that you have an audiobook and a cover, the next step is sales and distribution. ACX (Audiobook Creation Exchange) distributes to Audible, Amazon, and iTunes. If you decide to use Audible exclusively, you can earn up to 40% of the sale price. If you choose to have a non-exclusive arrangement with Audible, you will earn about 25% but you can also sell via other platforms like Spotify, Authors Republic, and Kobo Writing Life to increase your earnings.

10. Successful audiobook sales depend heavily on visibility so you will want to create a sample clip for your website and social media, promote to your followers, and seek audiobook reviewers.

The following articles describe the experiences of two authors who chose very different paths from each other to create their audiobook. They also demonstrate the range of cost to complete the process. We would love to hear your experience, too. ■



THE PROS AND CONS OF CREATING AUDIOBOOKS: ONE WRITER'S EXPERIENCE RECORDING HER OWN NOVEL, AND WHY YOU SHOULD CONSIDER ONE, TOO

By **Miranda Armstadt**

You've finally finished your latest novel. It's up on Amazon at last; sales are starting to come in, and you're on to marketing—and possibly your next saga.

But hold on—not so fast. Have you considered doing an audiobook version of your story?

Not Just for the Trads Anymore

Me, you ask? I'm just a self-published author on a shoestring budget. Audiobooks cost a fortune, and only traditionally published writers undertake those. Right?



Miranda in the recording studio at work. (Photo courtesy of Miranda Armstadt)

Nope.

While it's true that recording and producing an audiobook can be a daunting project on many fronts, don't dismiss the possibility without at least hearing me out here.

It's a Huge and Ever-Growing Market Segment

According to worldwide data-gathering site Statistica.com, the global audiobook market for 2025 is expected to hit just under US\$10 billion. And at its current annual growth trajectory, that same market will

THE PROS AND CONS OF CREATING AUDIOBOOKS *continued*

soar to US\$13 billion before the end of the decade.

Do I have your attention now?

If you're not a fan of statistics, just ask your own friends and co-workers how many prefer audiobooks to plain old-fashioned reading these days. Whether it's too many balls in the air, general exhaustion, ADHD, or a myriad of other reasons, the ability to listen to a book as an option versus reading it is growing exponentially in popularity across the board.

In fact, Statistica asserts that by 2029, the audiobook listening market will be nearing two billion listeners in major markets like the US, Europe, and across Asia. And with major provider Audible—an Amazon-owned platform—offering subscription services that allow readers to contain costs, while accessing a wide range of topics, what's not to love?

Where Do I Even Start?

To bring you back down to Earth for a moment: producing a high-quality audiobook as an independent author is not an inexpensive venture. Costs will vary widely, depending on where you live, how competitive recording studios are in your area, how long your book is, and what kind of talent is required to make it all come to life.

As one who is now midway through producing my own audiobook for my fifty-one-chapter, 93,000-word geopolitical thriller, allow me to share some key considerations before you dive in headfirst.

Budget

I will start here by saying that “budget” to me means “how much available credit I have on my credit cards.” I will add that—given my own background in broadcasting as a TV news anchor once upon a time—skimping on sound quality for a recording of this magnitude is a really bad idea, in my not-very-humble opinion.

Whether you have sound equipment at home, or decide to use a professional studio's services, you're likely looking at a couple of grand at the very least. My own project will be closer to the higher end (about three times a couple of grand), but that's out the door for a finished product ready to upload to ACX (Audible's version of KDP on Amazon).

Where to Spend, Where to Scrimp

This is where you need to be brutally realistic if you are hell-bent on moving ahead with an audiobook project.

I will share my own experience with this—just as an example—and you can

continued

THE PROS AND CONS OF CREATING AUDIOBOOKS *continued*

do your own local research from there, because costs really do vary from market to market and even from genre to genre.

Because of my broadcast/performance background, familiarity and comfort with mics, and the complex and personal nature of my story, I decided to audition myself as possible talent (that's the show biz term for actors, narrators, and anyone who does the "on stage" side of the business) for my own novel.

I called a well-respected, large recording studio in town that I knew of and made an "audition" appointment for myself. They quoted me a rate of \$250 an hour for both recording and post-production (what they do to make everything sound clean and clear and highly listenable)—which is pretty high, but I only booked that one hour.

The studio engineer they gave me was (is) a really cool dude with thirty years of production experience under his belt, so even though he said he personally had never done audiobook production, I wasn't concerned about that. At the end of the day, he's responsible for sound quality and making sure everything is formatted correctly for ACX, and for those two items, he was more than qualified.

Once I heard my "audition" and decided to hire myself as talent, I negotiated with the studio for a much better hourly rate. We got it down to \$85 an hour, which includes

all post-production—but remember, that was based on a large project which would net the studio a nice chunk of change over the course of a year, which is how long my own audiobook project will take to complete.

Bear in mind, too, that with a studio, you are getting all the necessary equipment (including top-grade mics) and a completely soundproof booth to record in. With a sound engineer, you have an objective ear as well, which saves time on "pick-ups" (do-overs) down the road.

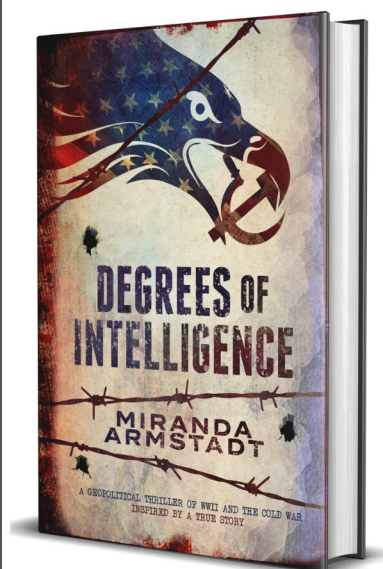
So for me, I splurged on the production end and got the talent for free.

But What About You?

That's very nice, you say, but what is MY audiobook going to run? Let's take a look at some projected costs. To do that, we need to know a few factors, such as:

Production Space: Are you recording in a home studio, or renting space in a professional one? Bear in mind if you go with the first option, you are going to need a boatload of equipment, sound equalizing software (and the knowledge to use it correctly), and a truly soundproof recording area. Personally, I don't think most authors have the recording know-how to pull a home studio off, but either way, you'll be investing a good chunk of capital.

It's 1943, and David Markoff has no clue how he got into Harvard...



Degrees of Intelligence

a new geopolitical thriller of WWII and the Cold War
from author Miranda Armstadt

“If you love a finely tuned literate work of superb storytelling, don’t miss this one.”

—Steven Hartov, New York Times bestselling author

Now available on Amazon everywhere

Final Listening Hours: The length of your book will determine how many listening hours it comes out to. As an example, my fifty-one chapter geopolitical thriller should end up about a ten-hour listen when it's all done and ready to go. Obviously, the more words, the more studio time and post-production required. I strongly recommend you get a realistic estimate of the costs before you dive in.

Talent: There are many aspects to consider when hiring human talent. First, they must understand your story and all its nuances. Second, are they capable of bringing your characters to life, while also parlaying a narrator voice with a

more neutral tone that still holds readers' interest? Third, is their vocal quality itself compelling?

If it doesn't meet ACX's standards, you may have wasted a lot of time and money and have nothing to show for it.

Whether you record your story yourself or bring on a narrator depends on your experience and comfort in front of a mic. If the former, remember, you will likely have to do two takes on every single section, so spread out your recording sessions or your voice will start to crack.

Professional narrators will run you from about \$150 up to \$400 or more per “finished hour,” the industry term for a

continued

THE PROS AND CONS OF CREATING AUDIOBOOKS *continued*

final, polished, ready-to-drop audio file. Audition as many prospects as you need to find the right “feel” and understanding of your saga before you commit.

Post-Production: If you’re familiar with the old vinyl term “mastering,” you will know that once you’re done recording, you’re far from done. You really need a sound engineer, in my opinion, to bring your audiobook up to trad-level standards. They know how to remove any audio imperfections and make everything sound consistent—an important consideration for a project that may take months to complete.

What Does It All Add Up To?

The reality is, to produce a high-level audiobook, you are likely looking at a minimum of several thousand dollars. I believe there are some narrators who will work for partial royalty payout, but that’s above my pay grade. You will need to research that yourself.

My advice is to do your homework before you begin and make sure your genre and style will attract an audiobook listenership. The only thing worse than no one reading your story is no one listening to it.

Audible is by far the most popular audiobook platform, being on Amazon. Take a look at the ACX production requirements before you begin, so you’re not hit with any surprises.

Personally, I don’t think this is a format you want to scrimp on if it affects the final quality. Listen to existing audiobooks in your genre and see what makes for a great experience.

As with everything in life, some of these things are subjective. But a compelling vocal tone, characters that spring to life, and consistent and excellent sound production are the meat and potatoes of a successful audiobook venture. ■

BIKINI BEACH GOES AUDIBLE: A BEHIND-THE- SCENES LOOK AT KDP'S VIRTUAL VOICE

By Butch Maki

Independent publishing has transformed the way authors bring their work to readers. Yet one format has remained stubbornly out of reach for many: the audiobook. Producing a high-quality narration traditionally requires professional voice actors, recording studios, and post-production editing, an investment that can cost thousands of dollars. For independent authors, the price tag often puts audiobooks out of the equation.

That is why Amazon's KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing) Virtual Voice is attracting so much attention. The program promises to democratize audiobook creation by allowing authors to convert their eBooks into Audible-ready



titles in a matter of hours. Recently, I tested the system by converting my novel *Bikini Beach* into an audiobook. The results? Both encouraging and instructive.

From eBook to Audiobook in Hours

It began with an invitation: an email from KDP Kindle offering me a spot in the beta test.

The instructions were straightforward, submit my *Bikini Beach* manuscript, wait for processing, and access the new audiobook tools directly on my KDP dashboard.

The turnaround was astonishing. Within two hours, *Bikini Beach* appeared as a work-in-progress Audible audiobook,

continued

BIKINI BEACH GOES AUDIBLE *continued*

accessible under the familiar Bookshelf tab. From there, I could dive into editing.

Choosing a Voice

The first step in the process was selecting the narrator's voice. Options were limited to four:

- An American female voice
- A British female voice
- Two American male voices (one normal-range, one deep)

While the range of choices is modest compared to professional casting, the quality was higher than expected. For *Bikini Beach*, I opted for the American male with a normal range, which struck the right balance between clarity and warmth.

This decision is crucial: once a voice is selected, it shapes the entire listening experience. A war memoir changing to a post war love story like *Bikini Beach* demands authority without theatrics, something the chosen voice managed well.

Covers, Enrollment, and Pricing

KDP automates the next few steps. The audiobook cover for *Bikini Beach* was auto generated from the existing eBook

artwork. Updates to the eBook cover would automatically carry over to the audiobook, ensuring consistency across formats.

Then came the option of KDP Select enrollment. Since my eBook wasn't enrolled, the audiobook wasn't either. Enrolling in KDP Select expands distribution, making titles available through Audible Plus, Amazon's subscription service for listeners.

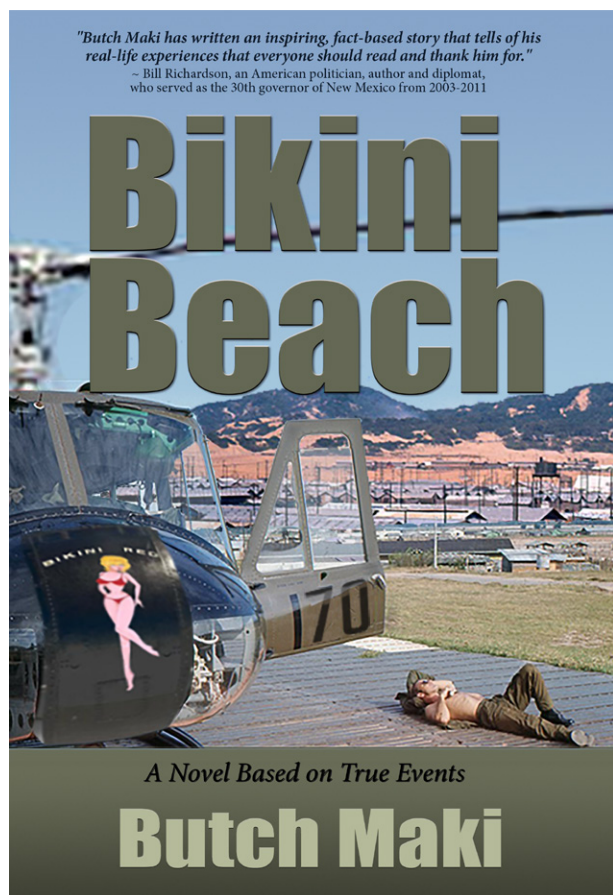
Pricing proved refreshingly simple. With a few clicks, I set *Bikini Beach* at \$3.99, far below the industry average for audiobooks, but perfect for independent authors aiming to attract new listeners.

The Virtual Voice Studio: Where the Work Happens

The heart of the process is the Virtual Voice Studio. Here, *Bikini Beach* loaded one chapter at a time, with a convenient side panel for navigating between sections. I could press play and hear my words read aloud, adjusting as needed.

This stage revealed both the promise and limitations of the technology. Military terminology, for example, was problematic. KIA (killed in action) came out as "Kia," like the car brand. This was easily fixed. Place names were another stumbling block: "Dak To," a key Vietnamese location in *Bikini Beach*, should be pronounced like "Toe." But correcting

BIKINI BEACH GOES AUDIBLE *continued*



<https://bikinibeach.info/>

“To” triggered hundreds of false edits for everyday phrases like *“I went to the store.”*

Still, the tools impressed me. I could adjust pronunciation, pacing, and pauses. The ability to slow down or insert emphasis proved invaluable. Yet some functions felt unfinished. Pauses automatically inserted by the system couldn’t be removed. And while I wanted to emphasize urgent dialogue, such as *“Duck! They’re shooting!”* the program lacked the finesse to capture that dramatic punch.

Publishing and Going Live

After hours of listening, correcting, and fine-tuning, I hit Publish. Almost immediately, *Bikini Beach* appeared on Audible, available to listeners worldwide.

The finished product was surprisingly strong. The narration carried natural rhythm, and Spanish words, often mishandled by speech engines, were rendered correctly. While not flawless, the audiobook of *Bikini Beach* demonstrated that AI narration is already capable of producing a compelling, listenable experience.

Strengths and Shortcomings

Strengths

- **Speed:** From eBook to audiobook in less than a day.
- **Affordability:** Free which saves thousands on professional production.
- **Ease of use:** A clean, guided process even for first-time authors.
- **Quality:** Clear, consistent narration with correct handling of most languages.

Shortcomings

- **Limited voice options:** Only four narrators, with no customization beyond pitch, speed, and pauses.

continued

BIKINI BEACH GOES AUDIBLE *continued*

- **Editing constraints:** Difficult to correct certain words without triggering false positives.
- **Lack of dramatic control:** Hard to capture emotional emphasis or tension in dialogue-heavy passages.

What This Means for Independent Authors

For independent authors, KDP's Virtual Voice represents a seismic shift. Audiobooks are one of the fastest-growing segments in publishing, with global revenue expected to surpass \$35 billion by 2030. Yet many independent writers remain locked out due to cost barriers.

With *Bikini Beach*, I was able to bring my story to a new format, and a new audience, without outside investment. The process wasn't perfect, but it delivered a professional product at a price point any author can afford. Free.

Final Takeaway

The Virtual Voice is not a replacement for professional voice actors, especially for authors who want rich, emotional performances. But for writers like me, without a big publisher's budget, it is a practical, exciting tool.

Bikini Beach as an audiobook proves that AI-driven narration is already more than "good enough." It's a game-changer, opening doors for independent authors to reach listeners on Audible and beyond. As the technology evolves, it's not hard to imagine a future where authors can create audiobooks as easily as they now self-publish eBooks.

For *Bikini Beach*, this experiment was more than just a beta test, it was proof that storytelling has entered a new era. ■

ORGANIZATION HIGHLIGHTS

2025 MWSA CONFERENCE IN KANSAS CITY, MO

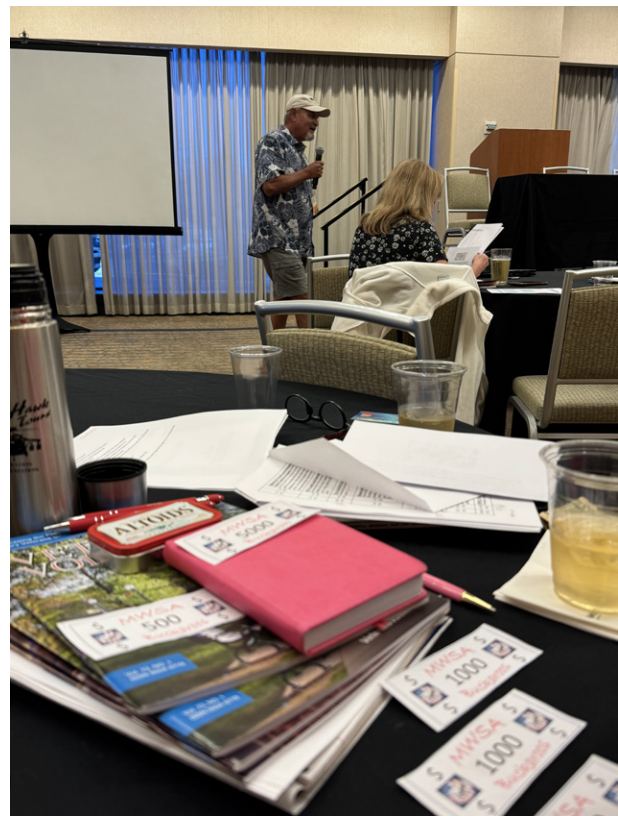
Conference Photos

Thank you to the many photo contributors to help us capture these memories with special thanks to Alice London, Tom Morrissey, Jasmine Tritten, and Hugh Simpson. ■

Dispatches readers can view our full collection of conference photos on this page:

[https://www.mwsadispatches.com/
events/2025-conference#photos](https://www.mwsadispatches.com/events/2025-conference#photos)

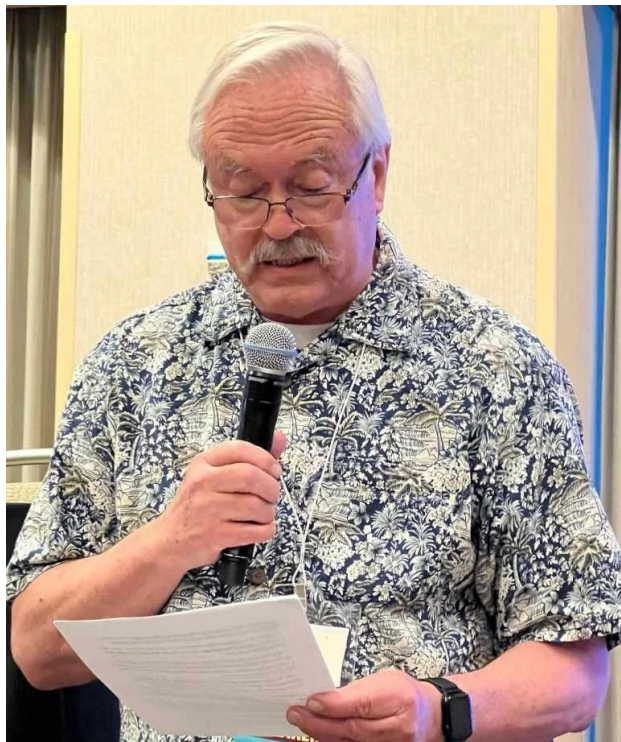
(All images are courtesy of MWSA and members.)



Auctioneer Jaime Navarro calling for bids at the annual Buckaroo Auction



**Jasmine Tritten reading at
Open Mic**



Jim Tritten at Open Mic



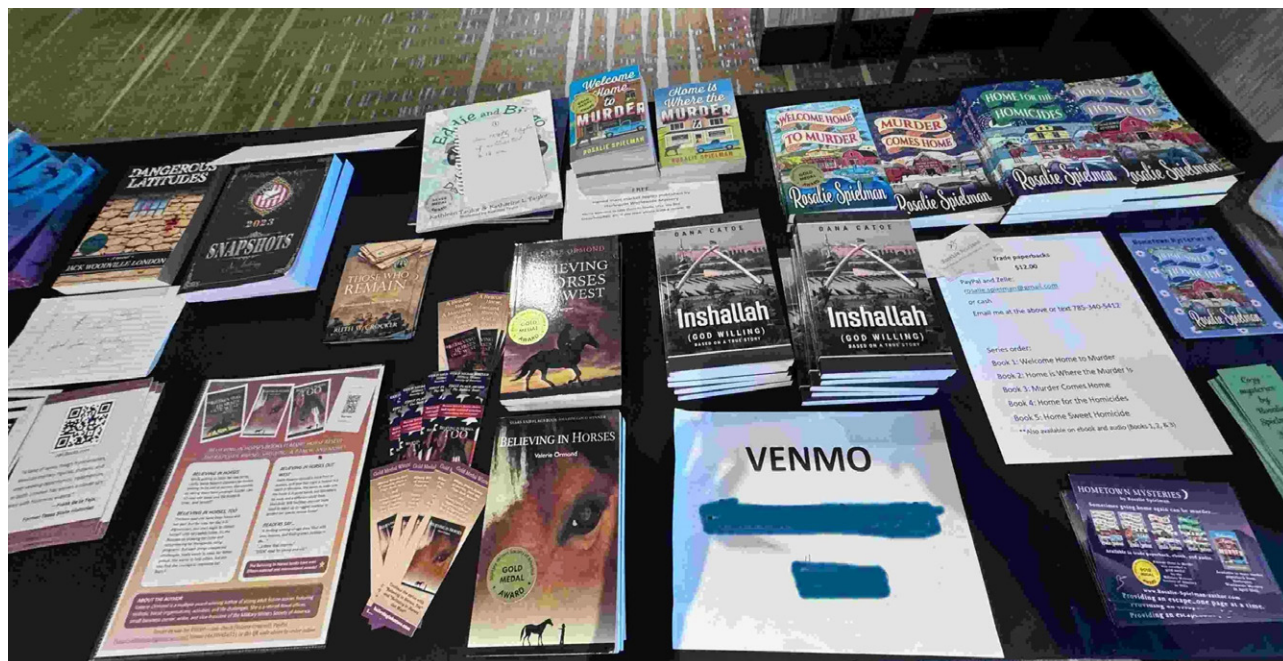
**Author of 220 children's books Tish Rabe
shares her background and the story of her
recent book written for military families -
*Sometimes Apart Always In My Heart***



Jim Tritten moderating the panel on Writing and Storytelling with panelists (L to R) Ruth Crocker, Rosalie Spielman, and Rob Lofthouse



New Mexico award winners (L to R) Jim Tritten, Jasmine Tritten, and Mark Fleisher celebrate their wins in the Westin's open atrium following the awards ceremony



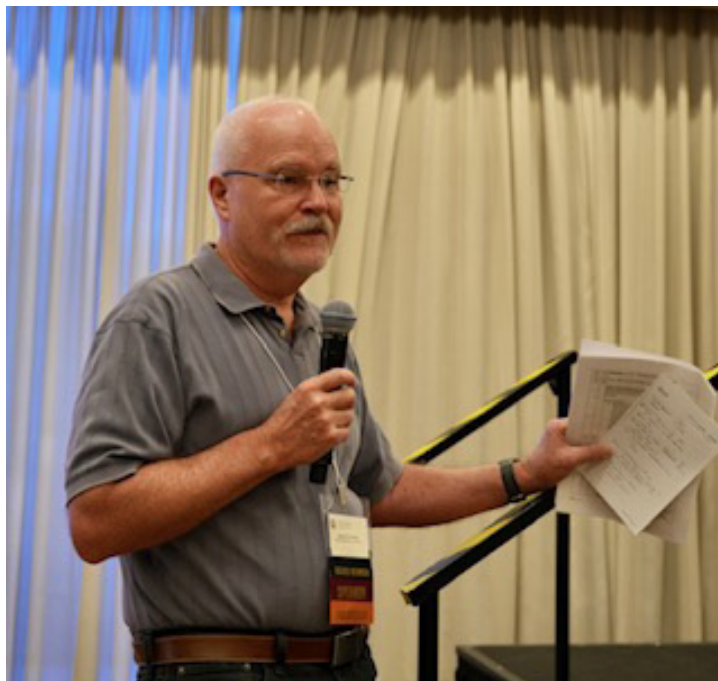
One of the MWSA Book Sale tables



Past President Bob Doerr leading a session on Telling Your Story for MWSA's Write Your Story event



President John Cathcart (L) and the Writers of the Year Panel on stage with Jack London (L to R) Jim Tritten, Bob Doerr, and Buzz Bernard



President John Cathcart addressing the audience



Sheryl Liddle, President of Veterans Voices Writing Project, Inc. spoke to members throughout the conference about their work



Three of the four Writers of the Year sharing laughter during their panel (L to R) Jack London, Bob Doerr, and Jim Tritten

MARKETING AND PUBLISHING

YOUR BOOK IS PUBLISHED! TIME TO RELAX?

Think Again!

By Nancy Panko

After ten years of researching, writing, resting, and repeating, my book *Guiding Missal* was published. One of my crowning achievements as a human being and a writer was also one of the most difficult things I'd ever done. I had yet to find out that there was more hard work to come.

Throughout the process I diligently followed the Light Messages "Author Pre-Publication Checklist" to lay a lot of groundwork on which to build. You have probably done the same basic work if you are a published author, but if you haven't, you may want to search



for or create your own checklist. Unfortunately, the checklist I used is no longer online, but I've included an image of it with this article.

Now that you have a book in your hand and many more in cartons of books sitting on your office floor, the job as a businessman or woman is ahead. Where do you begin?

Every self-help publishing site, book or blog emphasizes, "build your platform" and "establish your brand." Confession: I had to research what these things meant. Attending writers' conferences and classes at local universities or community

continued

YOUR BOOK IS PUBLISHED! *continued*



Nancy with MWSA award for *Guiding Missal*
(Photo courtesy of Nancy Panko)

colleges on managing your business as an author or promoting your art are worthwhile endeavors. I found free online webinars hosted by well-known experts with valuable advice and information.

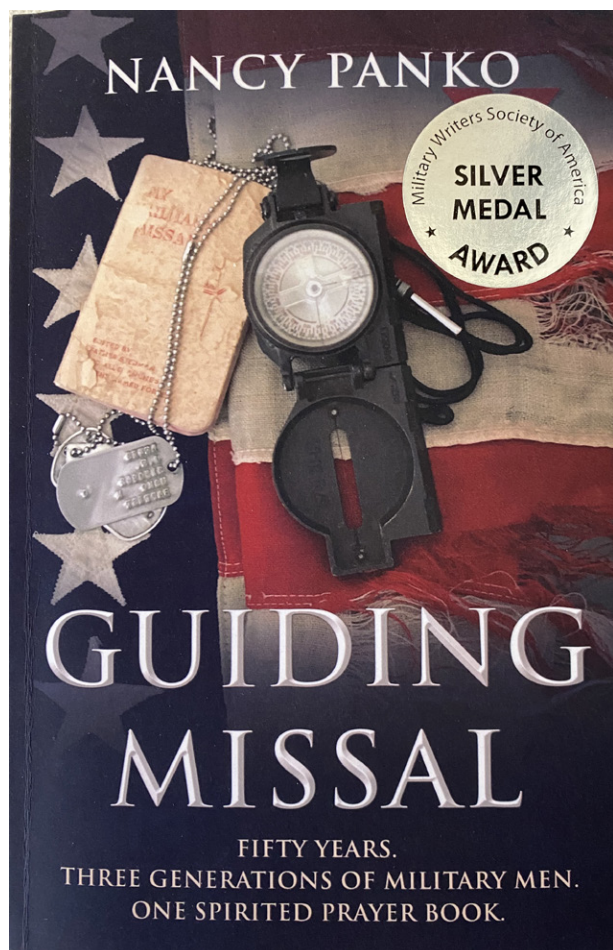
Because my book, *Guiding Missal*, falls into the historical fiction/military/inspirational category, my brand became the American flag and its colors. One of my first expenditures, worth every penny, was a 20 x 40-inch poster of my book cover. Without a doubt that poster makes prospective buyers stop at my table to see what it's all about. At book signings,

I dress in red, white, and blue, including accessories. I designed flag-themed business cards, used my book cover with the tattered battle flag on my bookmarks, postcards, and t-shirts I used for prizes. I had pens made in red, white and blue emblazoned with *Guiding Missal*. Staples and VistaPrint love me!

It's more difficult to build a platform when you're an unknown author. My efforts began with pounding the pavement and my computer keys. With help from a generous Facebook friend, I learned how to do a radio pitch and submitted my complete pitch form to various talk radio shows extolling the advantages of having a guest appeal to a wide, patriotic audience of faith. I searched the websites of local television stations for opportunities to advertise *Guiding Missal* events and book signings. (Sidebar: while on the website of WRAL-TV, I entered a contest and won a year's supply of McDonald's breakfast sandwiches with coffee. My attempts at building a platform were already paying off!)

Networking contacts are a writer's most valuable asset. If you don't already belong to a supportive writers group, please join one ASAP. Ask fellow authors for suggestions on a group. Find one or more that meet your needs and fits with your personality, writing genre, and style. Example: If you write erotic horror books

YOUR BOOK IS PUBLISHED! *continued*



you probably don't want to join a Christian writers group.

Here's where my networking contacts came into play—in speaking with a friend with a popular TV segment. He is also an author. We were having a conversation about how difficult it is to build a platform, and I told him everything I had done to date asking for suggestions on future efforts. He offered to do a segment on the inception and inspiration for my book. Of course I accepted, and the segment was a Godsend! A week later

one of my radio pitch efforts paid off, and with the help of a couple of friends, *Guiding Missal* was one of the featured topics on an hour-long radio program. This a great illustration of the advantages of networking, utilizing the contacts of fellow authors and not being afraid to put yourself out there. After all, the worst a contact can say is, “No.”

Watch for invitations from bloggers to do interviews. They're wonderfully fun to do and get you and your work exposed to a wide audience. I answered an ad in our Sunday paper from a columnist who was looking to interview local authors. She did a fabulous job of explaining my complex book, and I've received opportunities for other events from her article. Find out who your local media people are. Learn their names and send them an email introducing yourself, tell them about your book. Introduce yourself to your local librarians, ask if the library does signings or readings with signings. You never know what will come of it and, again, the worst they can say is, “No.”

I've contacted every social group to which I belong, and others I do not, to offer my services as a speaker, and it has paid off in a big way. Many pay a stipend, many feed you as well (double bonus), and most all will allow you to sell your books after your speaking gig is done.

At signing events, I make it a point
continued

YOUR BOOK IS PUBLISHED! *continued*

to engage with people who walk by. I say hello to everyone, extend my hand, introduce myself, and explain that I'm selling autographs for \$15, the books are free. Laughing ensues, they usually buy a book, and they remember me. There have been events at which I've sold only a few books but scored another event from an attendee who happened to be in charge of obtaining the services of a speaker or, in my case, an author with her pro-military book at a fundraiser for veterans.

Shamelessly promoting my book has become an art form for me. I utilize my regular and author Facebook pages. Note that an author Facebook page is simply that—anything and everything to do with being an author and writing. Twitter/X has finally become my friend and after seeking out like-minded people, other authors, and folks in the publishing and marketing business, I'm building a following. However, I still don't have as many followers as my fifteen-year-old granddaughter Emily.

Building a website was something I started after becoming a frequent contributor to *Chicken Soup for the Soul* and *Guidepost* magazines. I learned as I went along, updating and changing as I found ways to improve. Someday I might be able to hire a professional. (Sidebar: research professional web designers and get references.) It never fails to astound

me—the number of people who actually visit my website.

Sending out press releases or other news on your achievements is important for an author to continue building a platform. Remember people want to know about your successes and where you'll be for the next signing or event. Using a site like Mailchimp®, which is free with up to two thousand subscribers, allows a novice to easily navigate entering information and images in a pleasing format to send a mass mailing. Build your email base by having signups at all of your events. If you attempt to send out a mass mailing on your regular email, it will be screened as spam.

When you look for signing events, target areas where people know you. Your church bazaar, your health club's client appreciation day, a local business looking for a promotional hook to bring in customers. Remember, you have to ask. Have your biography and a book ready to show and tell. Prepare your elevator pitch, a one to two-minute synopsis of your sure-to-be bestseller. At each and every signing, be prepared for questions. People want to know you and how you started writing because they have "always wanted to write a book."

Since my book covers a fifty-year time span in history with various wars and conflicts, I'm acutely aware of anniversaries

YOUR BOOK IS PUBLISHED! *continued*

and special dates that might provide an opportunity for a signing event for *Guiding Missal*. Knowing your material and being able to explain why it is pertinent to the date and the event will land you a gig most of the time. Again, remember, the worst they can say is, “No.”

Writing is a labor of passion and can be rewarding and enriching. The business end of writing is competitive, cut and dried. Inter-twining the two is important to convince the public why they need to have your book on their shelf. Learn to be a shameless promoter! ■

AUTHOR PRE-PUBLICATION CHECKLIST

Done	Task	Note
	12-6 Months Before Publication	
	Create Website/Blog	
	Establish social media presence (FB, Twitter, Goodreads, Pinterest)	
	Begin building contact/email list	
	Find and list similar books	
	Research and list influencers	
	Begin incorporating edits (around month 6)	
	6-4 Months Before Publication	
	Have professional headshot taken	
	Write/update author bio	
	Reach out to potential partners	
	Reach out for testimonials/reviews	
	Increase email list efforts	
	Complete manuscript	
	3 Months Before Publication	
	Write magazine articles for related topics/areas of expertise	
	Plan contests/giveaways	
	2 Months Before Publication	
	Plan email campaign	
	Reach out to reviewers/bloggers	
	Increase presence on social media	
	Setup Google alerts for Title/Author/Topic	
	Start writing guest posts on blogs	
	1 Month Before Publication	
	Start submitting guest posts to blogs	
	Increase social media presence	
	Send out invitations for launch party	
	Reach out to email list/contacts	
	2-3 Weeks Before Publication	
	Reach out to email list/contacts	
	Launch Day	
	Fully engage social media accounts	
	Start blog tour	
	Celebrate!	

Pre-Publication Checklist (Courtesy of Nancy Panko)



POETRY

AWAITING EXFIL

By Anthony J. Rinderer

At last we kneel, like the penitent, in a circle of trust,
First one shadow, then another, in dark concert,
Like so many nights before, as if in homage
To an unseen angel, until someone thinks he hears
The hoof beat of rotors somewhere beyond the horizon,
And the radio breaks squelch, "*one minute*,"
Deep within our headsets, a voice of calm reassurance,
But now the snow is falling with authority. Beyond
The fir and cedar, a rocky crag,
A snow-capped peak, a sliver of stars between
Cloud and ridgeline struggling for survival, enough
Of a gap to pin one's hopes upon, to consider the
Fleeting sanctuary that lingers on the other side,
Like salvation, beckoning to us all. A Moment
Of doubt, then, there it is, a dark apparition,
A churning explosion of wind, fire, and ice
Against which we instinctively brace,
Armed shadows silhouetted against new fallen
Snow. We're up now and moving,
Eyes tearing from the exhaust, lungs struggling
For purchase, our hooded and wrist-bound prisoners

AWAITING EXFIL *continued*

Stumbling in tow. In a
Heartbeat, we are on the ramp, counting our number,
Packing it in tight, smelling each others' sweat,
Leaving nothing behind but footprints, empty shell casings,
Crumpled bodies, a small but irreplaceable fraction
Of our soul. We grow light on the wheels,
Feel the ground evaporate beneath us,
And the machine is suddenly aloft, swirling
Rotors churning cold air into reluctant submission,
Bearing us away from the secrets we've seen,
Unencumbered by the weight of memories
Lodged deep inside of us. ■

Originally from Oak Ridge Tennessee, CW5 (R) Anthony J. Rinderer draws inspiration from a stack of leather-bound, coffee-stained journals that span over 39 years, 75 countries, and multiple tours of duty in Somalia, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Their pages reflect both humorous tales

of collective misfortune and deep, soulful reflections on war, friendship, tragedy, and loss. A former U.S. Army Special Operations Attack Helicopter Pilot, Anthony has always believed that Army Aviation has but one purpose: to support the ground force. This poem is a tribute to them.



THE MAJOR FAILURE I WILL TAKE TO MY GRAVE

By Phyllis Zimbler Miller

On July 31, 2025, *The Wall Street Journal* featured an investigative article by Shalini Ramachandran and Betsy McKay titled “Combat Cocktail: How America Overmedicates Veterans.” I immediately knew two things: a) these reporters were going for a Pulitzer Prize in investigative journalism, and b) even if they won the prize, this issue would go nowhere.

The article, besides pointing out that veterans have twice the suicide rate of the U.S. population, includes the following statement.

“Prescribing cocktails of such drugs is one of the VA’s most common treatments for veterans with PTSD, and the number of veterans on multiple psychiatric drugs is a growing concern at the agency.”

And why won’t this investigative article of the VA handing out bunches of psychiatric drugs make any difference?

Because this has been reported, including by *The Wall Street Journal*, for many, many years with no obvious changes.

I have been trying for the same number of years to bring this to the public’s attention in a novel way – a fictional TV series called *Solomon’s Justice* about the real-life Veterans Court in Los Angeles. This is a court that could be set up anywhere in the U.S. if the option were more widely known.

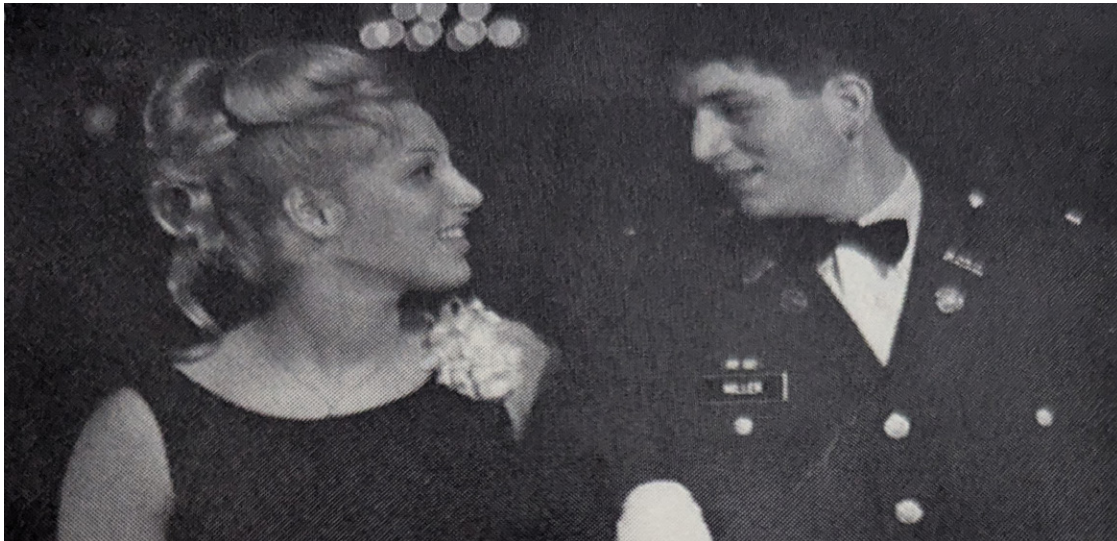
The court requires that veterans first plead guilty and then go to Veterans Court for sentencing. And what a difference this can make: Sentencing means the two opposing attorneys working with the judge and social workers to get appropriate treatment for the veteran.

My TV pilot script *Solomon’s Justice* consists almost entirely of actual situations – no matter how outrageous these may seem – of actual people.

The fear, for example, that a wife has that her husband might harm her and her young child or the sleepwalking that a veteran can’t even remember undertaking.

Why now? Why does this issue mean so much to me at this exact moment in time?

THE MAJOR FAILURE I WILL TAKE TO MY GRAVE *continued*



Phyllis Zimbler and Mitchell Miller at the Coronation Ball at Michigan State University on November 18, 1967. (Photo Courtesy of Phyllis Zimbler Miller)

Because I'm dying of an aggressive malignant brain tumor

In the early hours of April 26, 2025, I learned that the CT scan just administered to me in the ER showed an aggressive malignant brain tumor known as a Glioblastoma. Although surgically removed, there is no cure – it's only a possible prolonging of life for a few months.

I'm 77 years old, and dying doesn't scare me. Yet what does scare me is the realization that I never got my fictional TV series *Solomon's Justice* produced.

The pain of not accomplishing this one project haunts me. Why? Because a fictional TV series is a very effective medium to engage viewers with diverse fictional characters and their problems. (Think of any major TV series and you'll

hear viewers talking about those characters as if they were real people.)

Let's rewind for a moment and explain why this project means so much to me.

In the spring of 1967, on my third date with my future husband who I met on the editorial staff of the *State News* at Michigan State, he told me he was an ROTC cadet and going to Vietnam when he graduated. In the end, the Army stationed him in Munich, and he didn't go to Vietnam. I will admit that, if by some miracle he had come home in one piece physically, he would never have been the same mentally.

Now let's fast forward to the spring of 2008, when I self-published my novel *Mrs. Lieutenant* inspired by my husband and my nine weeks at Ft. Knox, Kentucky, for the Army Armor Officers Basic School.

continued

THE MAJOR FAILURE I WILL TAKE TO MY GRAVE *continued*

A former female Marine on the other side of the country reached out to me and asked me to co-host with her a Blog-TalkRadio show about the military. We interviewed veterans and active duty personnel for a year. And that's when I first became aware of the high rate of suicide among veterans and what is now called the "combat cocktail."

As one of my personal responses to this horrifying situation, I created the website www.InSupportOfOurTroops.com that includes suicide help information. Then, after I published *Mrs. Lieutenant*, I learned about an amazing military court – called Veterans' Courts – and that one existed in Los Angeles.

I attended a court session and could not believe the difference in the treatment of vets who had pled guilty to non-violent crimes. The opposing lawyers worked together to get help for the veteran, and the judge had those who "slipped" write 500-word essays on their backsliding! I also learned that such courts could legally be set up across the U.S.

I started blogging about this option and got invited to participate on the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable. I then moved on to writing a pilot TV script inspired by this court – *Solomon's Justice*. I wrote and rewrote this script based on critiques from professional TV

writers until it deserved a shot at prime time.

And I pitched the TV series project, except no one was interested. One person told me that a courtroom drama had to have new court cases. Others didn't get it, that it was not a courtroom drama. It is a drama about veterans who appear in veterans courts. Almost everything in the pilot script, no matter how outrageous it may seem, was actually based on someone's experience.

Hoping to get more interest in this TV project, I adapted the TV pilot script into a short story available on Amazon. That story has done well in short story competitions. (The opening of the short story *Solomon's Justice* is different than the opening of the TV pilot script due to the parameters of writing for TV.)

Yet I have come to accept that this script will not be produced even though the subplot of PTSD, TBI, and drug addiction has figured occasionally in TV series such as *Blue Bloods* with the Danny Reagan character and PTSD and *Seal Team* with the Jason Hayes character and TBI.

So imagine how I felt when I saw *The Wall Street Journal* investigative article about the rampant "combat cocktail" overdosing of veterans. I knew this issue would go nowhere.

THE MAJOR FAILURE I WILL TAKE TO MY GRAVE *continued*

I knew this because investigative newspaper articles didn't get much traction or action.

However, fictional stories often do get traction. Think, for example, of Upton Sinclair's 1906 muckraking novel *The Jungle*, an exposé of the appalling and unsanitary conditions in the meat-packing industry.

Besides Veterans Courts, there are many experimental treatment programs for PTSD and TBI that can wean active duty and veterans off combat cocktails. Without investing in fictional characters who struggle with these issues, the public's empathy has little chance to be engaged. This is especially true due to the

small percentage of the U.S. population today with any connection to military personnel.

The TV series *Solomon's Justice* could make the difference in the same way that Upton Sinclair's novel did. Yet I now have to accept that I will die without ever getting this fictional TV series produced.

It is the one major failure I will carry to my grave. ■

Phyllis Zimbler Miller is a former Department of the Army civilian in counterintelligence and now a screenwriter and author based in Los Angeles. Her website is at www.MillerMosaicLLC.com



ORGANIZATION HIGHLIGHTS

MWSA 2025 AWARD WINNERS

Thank you to MWSA Treasurer Hugh Simpson for being the duty Awards Banquet photographer and to others who sent in photos for this collection. Vice President Valerie Ormond is presenting medals and certificates to winners on behalf of President

John Cathcart, Co-Awards Director and Master of Ceremonies of the Awards Banquet and Ceremony on September 27, 2025. ■

(All images are courtesy of MWSA and members.)



Conference attendee award winners (L to R)
Rosalie Speilman, Galen D. Peterson, Johnny J. Moyer, Dana Catoe, Robert H. Bradley III, Megan Michelle, H.W. Buzz Bernard, Tish Rabe, A.L. Zeine, Mark Fleisher, Pat Pernicano, James Bultema, Jim Tritten, Jasmine Tritten, Valerie Ormond, Ernest Snowden, and Thomas M. Wing.

2025 MEDAL WINNERS LIST

Chapter Book

Bronze

- *Chloe the "Military Brat"* — A.L. Zeine

Historical Fiction

Gold

- *An Absence of Faith: A Tale of Afghanistan* — Craig Trebilcock
- *Brothers Bound* — Bruce K. Berger
- *Degrees of Intelligence* — Miranda Armstadt
- *Rescue Run: Capt. Jake Rogers' Daring Return to Occupied Europe* — John Winn Miller
- *Until Our Time Comes: A Novel of WWII Poland* — Nicole M. Miller
- *What the Silent Say* — Emerson Ford
- *When Heroes Flew: Where the Dawn Comes Up Like Thunder* — H. W. "Buzz" Bernard

Silver

- *Finding His Own Way, A Marine Novel* — Gerald Gillis
- *In Harm's Way* — Thomas M. Wing
- *Smoke on the Water* — Jack Bartley

Bronze

- *One of Four* — Travis Davis

History

Gold

- *Berkshire Heroes in WWII-With Courage and Honor* — Dennis G. Pregent
- *Crucible 1972: The War for Peace in Vietnam* — J. Keith Saliba
- *Task Force Hogan* — William R Hogan
- *The Fight of Their Lives: A 21st Century Primer on World War II* — Andy Kutler

Silver

- *A Nation Born – A Homeland Lost: Native Americans and the Revolutionary War Era* — George J. Bryjak
- *Elements of War* — Gray Rinehart

2025 MEDAL WINNERS LIST

- *Never a Dull Moment: The 80th Airborne Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion in World War II* — Arthur "Ben" Powers
- *Why Vietnam: Reflections on the Effect of War* — Margaret Colbert Brown

Bronze

- *Women Warriors - The Hidden Spies of WWII* — Donna Pedace

How to/Business/Self Help

Bronze

- *Healing Veteran Moral Injury: Using Metaphor and Story to Foster Hope and Connection* — Pat Pernicano and Kerry Haynes

Literary Fiction

Bronze

- *Playing Army* — Nancy Stroer
- *Skylark* — Megan Michelle

Memoir/Biography

Gold

- *Around the World in 80 Years* — Jasmine Tritten and Jim Tritten
- *Downriver: Memoir of a Warrior Poet* — Ryan McDermott
- *Nothing Here Worth Dying For: Task Force Lion in Iraq* — Col Seth W.B. Folsom, USMC (Ret)
- *Running Towards Gunfire: Courage and Brotherhood in Ramadi* — Jason Angell

Silver

- *Pennies from Vietnam: A Sister at home, a Brother at war* — Tracy Smith and Larry Smith (deceased)
- *Swift Boat Skipper* — Robert H. Bradley III
- *The Master Chief's Sea Stories: Volume I USS Manitowoc (LST 1180)* — Johnny J Moye

Bronze

- *Inshallah (God Willing)* — Dana Catoe
- *When Tough Cookies Crumble: A True Story of Friendship, Murder, and Healing* — Eva Nevarez St. John

2025 MEDAL WINNERS LIST

Mystery/Thriller/Crime

Gold

- *Chasing Money: A Marty and Bo Thriller* — Michael Balter
- *Heroic Measures* — Joel Shulkin, MD
- *Murder Comes Home* — Rosalie Spielman
- *The Black Raven's Song* — Macklin Grey
- *The Spear and the Sentinel* — J. L. Hancock

Silver

- *Home is Where the Murder Is* — Rosalie Spielman
- *Monroe Doctrine: A Post-War Novel* — James Rosone

Bronze

- *Lightning Six* — Galen D. Peterson
- *Red Lines* — James Bultema
- *Redcon One* — Galen D. Peterson
- *The China Factor* — Timothy Trainer
- *The Very Last War* — WH Hawthorne

Pictorial/Coffee Table

Silver

- *F4U Corsair* — Ernest M. Snowden

Picture Book

Gold

- *Finally Home* — Cortney Cino
- *Sometimes Apart Always in My Heart* — Tish Rabe

Poetry Book



2025 MEDAL WINNERS LIST

Reference

Silver

- *Unknowable Minds: Philosophical Insights on AI and Autonomous Weapons* — Mark Bailey

Bronze

- *Revive the American Dream* — Edward Corcoran

Religious/Spiritual

Silver

- *A Church More Like Christ* — Gray Rinehart
- *Government in the Gospels: Daily Reflections for Government Officials* — Rev. Jonathan M. Craig

Bronze

- *Redeeming Warriors: Veteran Suicide, Grieving, and the Fight for Faith* — Joshua D. Holler

Young Adult (fiction or non-fiction)

Gold

- *The Tear of Tybaleth, A Fellowship of the Flame Novel (Book 1)* — A. R. Silverberry

Silver

- *The Treasure of Trenalon: A Fellowship of the Flame Novel, Book 2* — A. R. Silverberry



Dana Catoe's win for *Inshallah (God Willing)*



Ernest M. Snowden award winner for *F4U Corsair*



Galen Peterson receiving two awards for *Redcon One* and *Lighting Six*



H.W. Buzz Bernard MWSA 2025 Writer of the Year also awarded for his latest novel *When Heroes Flew: Where the Dawn Comes Up Like Thunder*



Jasmine Tritten and Jim Tritten celebrating their medals for *Around the World in 80 Years*



James Bultema receiving his award for *Red Lines*



Johnny J. Moyer enjoying his win for *The Master Chief's Sea Stories: Volume I USS Manitowoc (LST 1180)*



Mark Fleisher awarded for *Incidental Moments New and Selected Poems*



Megan Michelle receiving her award for *Skylark*



Pat Pernicano winning award for *Healing Veteran Moral Injury: Using Metaphor and Story to Foster Hope and Connection*



2025 President's Award Winners Betsy Beard and Valerie Ormond



Robert H. Bradley III award winner for *Swift Boat Skipper*



Thomas M. Wing awarded for *In Harm's Way*



Tish Rabe winning award for *Sometimes Apart Always In My Heart*



Valerie Ormond surprised by the President's Award from John Cathcart

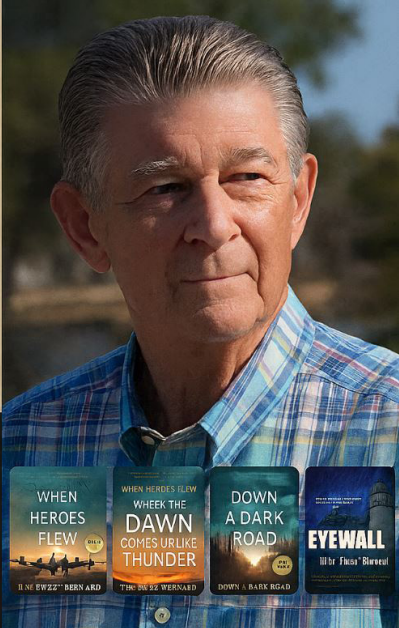


H.W. Buzz Bernard MWSA 2025 Writer of the Year

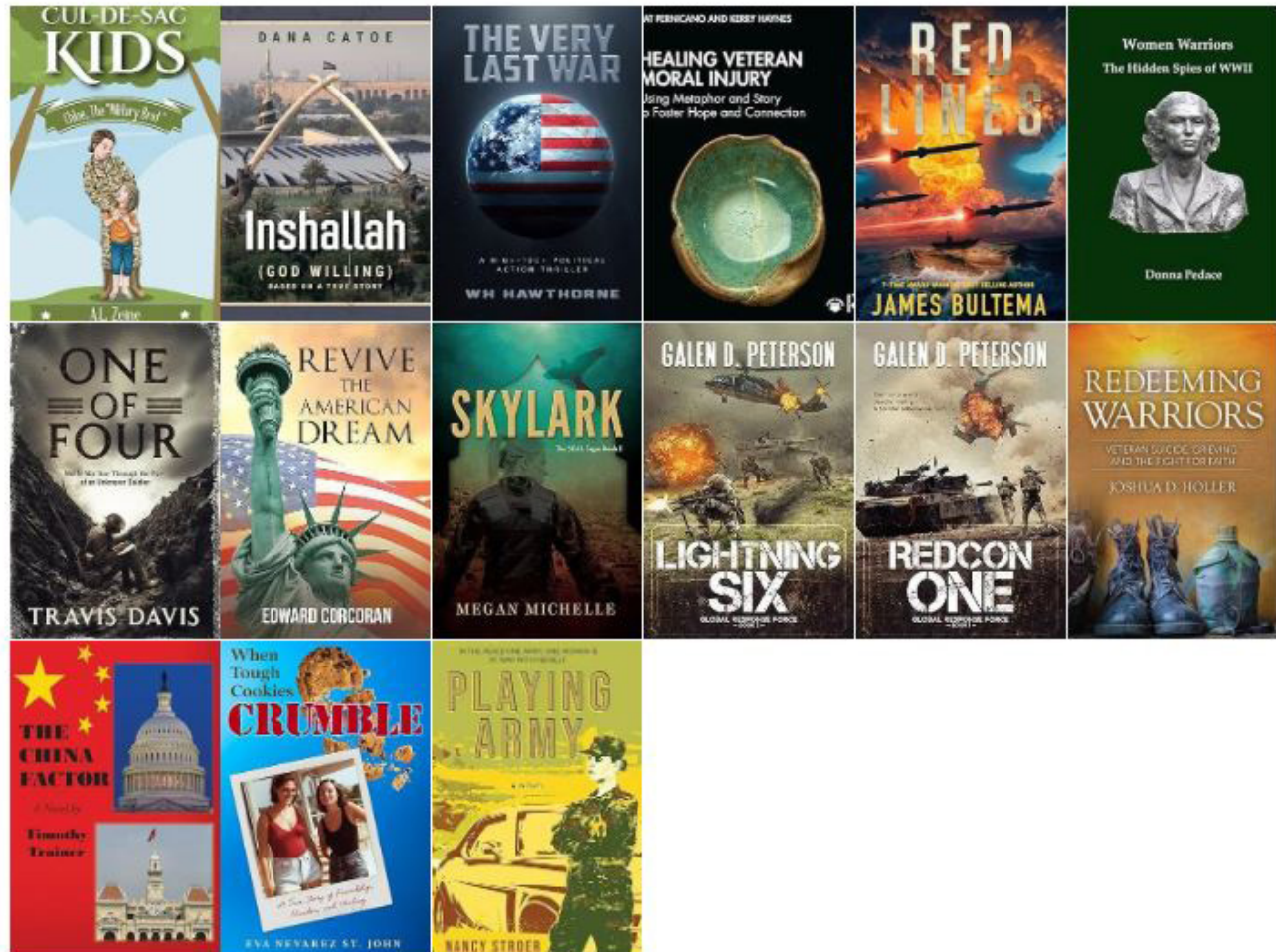
**MILITARY WRITERS
SOCIETY OF AMERICA**



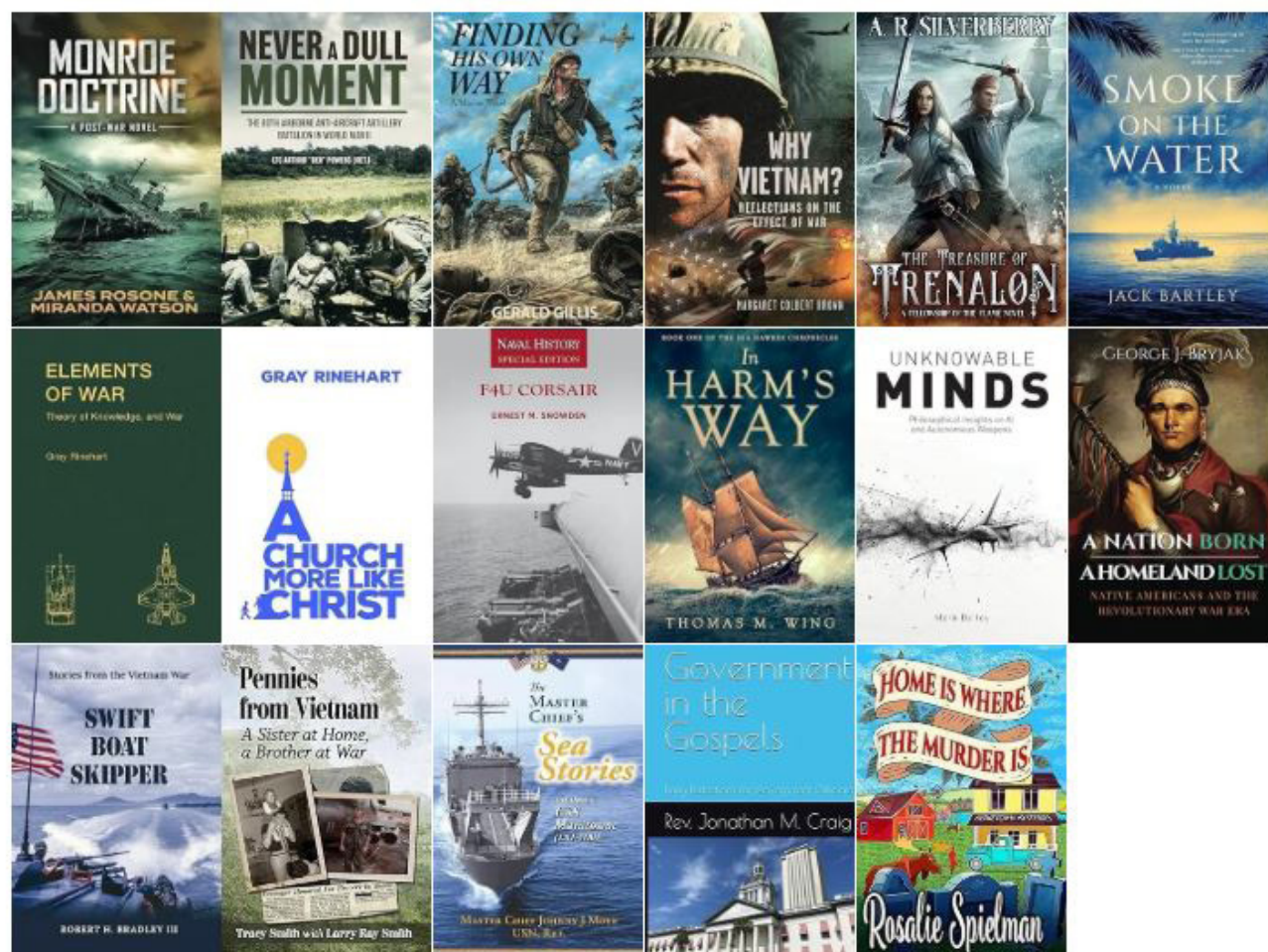
**H.W. 'BUZZ' BERNARD
WRITER OF THE YEAR
2025**



Bronze Medals



Silver Medals



Gold Medals





POETRY

OCEAN GIFTS

by Mark Fleisher

A beach is but a beach
when eyes see only expanses
of sand and water.
A beach is more when
rocks jaggedly carved
and whittled by infinite waves
millennium after millennium
rise from the crashing tide.
A beach is more
when stone cliffs
plunge to the sea;
when headlands majestically
oversee their domain;
when winged sentinels
remain silent except
for warning alarms
should interlopers
disturb their roost.

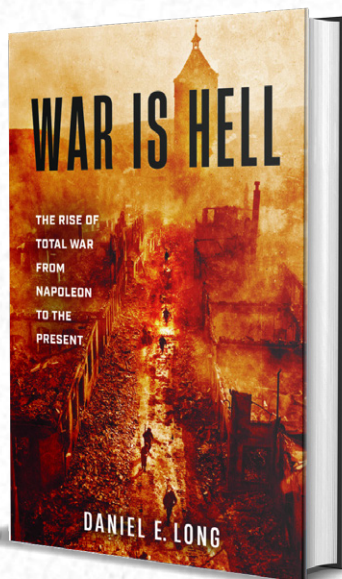
What did the eye see
10,000 years before?
What may the eye see
10,000 years ahead?

A generation past,
a loved one since taken.
Now the water suctions
remorse and regret
from the soul, transfusing
renewal and rebirth
into welcoming veins,
lubricating heartstrings,
nourishing memory.
Loving once more,
breathing anew
when a beach is more
than a beach. ■

FROM NAPOLEON TO NUCLEAR WAR,

WAR IS HELL

UNRAVELS THE BRUTAL RISE OF TOTAL WAR AND ITS
DEVASTATING IMPACT ON SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS ALIKE.



978-0-8117-7758-2
November 18, 2025 • Hardback

6" x 9" • 352 Pages
35 B&W Images • 4 Tables • \$44.95

General William Tecumseh Sherman said it best during the American Civil War: “War is hell” – for soldiers as well as for civilians. As a pioneer and practitioner of total war, Sherman knew better than most what warfare had become by the middle of the nineteenth century, how it had become a devastating, all-consuming affair that aimed not only at armies, but also at societies and economies in order to undermine a country’s will to fight. Indeed, this is the central story of warfare during the past two hundred years, from Napoleon’s massive armies tearing through Europe and Sherman’s march through Georgia to the fire bombings of World War II and the threat of nuclear annihilation.

In *War Is Hell*, Daniel Long tracks the rise of total war across two centuries of bloody warfare and pays special attention to the impact on civilians as they become more deeply enmeshed in armed conflict and as war becomes ever more lethal. Total war rose from roots in ancient times but gained speed as the world industrialized at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is the story of Napoleon and Sherman, the Indian Wars on the American Plains, the Rape of Belgium in World War I and the Rape of Nanking in 1937, and the bombings of Japanese and German cities during World War II. In the years since 1945, large-scale war has declined, but the small wars that have proliferated in its place have enmeshed civilians just as thoroughly, just as devastatingly. Vietnam, Cambodia, the Iran-Iraq War, Bosnia and Kosovo, Rwanda, and Ukraine remind us that warfare remains total, the human cost high.

War Is Hell is essential reading for understanding the past as well as a present.



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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

MWSA INTERVIEW WITH DIRK PLANTINGA

Dirk Plantinga is a Navy brat turned journalist with a passion for veterans' stories. He's dedicated to preserving the oral histories of military veterans through interviews, archival research, and writing about military history. Connect with Dirk online at IntruderLegacy.org or at the YouTube channel A-6 Intruder TV.

MWSA: How did you find out about MWSA?

Dirk Plantinga: A Navy veteran, author, and member of MWSA gifted me a membership.

MWSA: What were your first few years of life like being a Navy brat?

Dirk Plantinga: I was born at NAS Pensacola in 1967, while my dad, Terrell S. Plantinga was training to become a Bombardier/Navigator in the A-6A Intruder. The sound of Navy jet engines buzzed through my brain on day one. To this day, when I hear that sound, I can't help looking up in excitement.

It was just me and my supremely brave Mom for most of my first two years, as my Dad and his pilot flew those Intruders in and out of danger. My earliest memory is from the flight deck of USS *Independence* (CV-62), where my Dad carried me up the boarding ladder and lowered me into the BN's seat of an A-6 Intruder. Those few moments were my catapult shot into a passion for Naval Aviation that continues to grow.

After my parents' death, I obtained my Dad's Navy service record and found details I had never imagined. Research and data made the legacy even more interesting. And then, everything changed when I started to really listen to living, breathing veterans.

MWSA: What is your background in journalism?

Dirk Plantinga: It was the next chapter in my family's journey. After the Navy, my Dad had a career with CBS News, directing the network's coverage in other

MWSA INTERVIEW WITH DIRK PLATINGA *continued*



MWSA Member Dirk Platinga (*Photo courtesy of Dick Platinga*)

areas of conflict and war. Growing up knowing Walter Cronkite, Diane Sawyer, and Susan Zirinsky should make anyone want to be a journalist.

And I did. I got a Journalism degree at The American University. Then I wore many hats working in local TV newsrooms from California to Tennessee.

The ability to interview people has always come naturally to me, I don't use a list of questions. I'm deeply curious about a person's life story and let that guide the telling of a veteran's story.

MWSA: What's a favorite article you've written?

Dirk Platinga: I wrote a piece about two Navy photojournalists who both held the title "Military Photographer of the Year," albeit about 50 years apart. One is a Vietnam/Cold War era Navy veteran who photographed the commissioning of USS *Nimitz* (CVN-68) in 1975. The other is a modern-day "MC" (Mass Communication Specialist) sailor in the digital age, earning her recognition for the images she captured of the same aircraft carrier 50 years later. Their stories were separated by decades, but deeply connected by the ship, the craft of storytelling, and the mission of military photojournalism.

continued



Aviation inspired Dirk from a young age. (Photo courtesy of Dick Platinga)

What moved me was that both knew their images would tell the story of USS *Nimitz* long after there's nothing left of her to photograph.

MWSA: What drives your efforts to preserve the stories of Vietnam War era Navy veterans?

Dirk Plantinga: The drive is difficult, but necessary. We're now more than 50 years removed from the end of the Vietnam War. The original Navy and Marine veterans of the A-6 Intruder community are leaving us quickly. I feel a sense of urgency to preserve their stories in their

own voice.

I also believe in standing up for Vietnam-era veterans. As a kindergartener, I remember sensing veterans like my Dad were not loved by some. Later, of course, I realized that many of these veterans were mistreated, disrespected, or worse. I want to do my best to recognize and honor veterans of the Vietnam War right now. I mean to punctuate the bravery, resilience, and sacrifice it still requires to be a military family from that era.

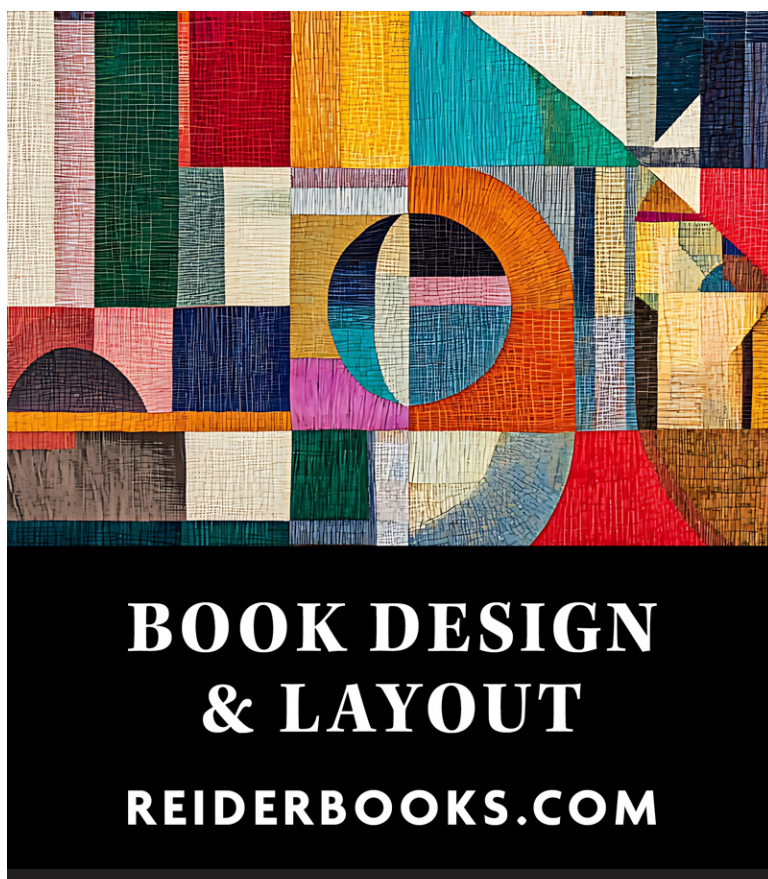
MWSA: Do you have a book coming out in 2026?

MWSA INTERVIEW WITH DIRK PLANTINGA *continued*

Dirk Plantinga: I've recorded hundreds of hours of interviews, scanned thousands of photographs, and researched a wide range of documents and data over the years. In 2026, I'll finish the full squadron history of VA-65. It's long overdue. The book will celebrate the stories, imagery, and professionalism of everyone who served in VA-65 from its formation through Vietnam and Desert Storm, right up to its decommissioning and the retirement of the Intruder.

It won't be a technical history. It's about the sailors and their families, the airplanes, the carriers, and the action.

If you're reading this and you served in the Intruder community—whether with VA-65 or another squadron—I would love to hear from you. Your story matters. It matters to me, and it matters to the history of the United States Navy. ■





THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE

By Tom Crowley

The phrase “thank you for your service” is so frequently spoken that it often loses its impact. Yet for many combat veterans, having someone take a moment to recognize your service is much appreciated, except when one needs action in addition to gratitude.

Stan Teller is a Navy veteran of the war in the Pacific in World War II. He was 101 years old as of October 11, 2025. Stan is a member of the same Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) chapter I belong to, VFW Post 5633 in Potomac, Maryland.

Stan, from the Bronx, New York, was drafted into the Navy in March 1943 at the age of nineteen. After eight months of training in the U.S. as a radio man and twenty-eight days on a fast troop transport from Treasure Island, California, he arrived at Espiritu Santos Island, to the northwest of Australia, in February 1944. There, he was assigned to the USS *Fayette* (APA-43), an attack transport designed to transport invading forces, in this case, U.S. Marines and soldiers ashore.

The attack transports carried about 1,000 troops who climbed down rope nets on the side of the ship to board the LCVPs, (landing craft vehicles & personnel), the craft used for their journeys to assault the beaches. Typically, there would be about twenty-five troops in the landing craft on these dangerous missions.

Once the troops were in their landing craft, a landing craft control (LCC) was positioned to guide the larger LCVP boats ashore. Stan was assigned to a ten-man crew on one of those LCCs, positioned to guide the LCVP boats ashore. Stan revealed that the Navy learned of the need for control landing craft during the ill-fated landing on the island of Tarawa in 1943. Shallow reefs left the LCVP boats stranded hundreds of yards offshore and forced the Marines to wade through murderous fire to get to the beaches and the limited protection of the sea wall.

Stan’s fifty-six-foot-long LCC was equipped with depth gauges and radar

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE *continued*



Stan Teller on the left, with Tom Crowley on the right at Stan's home in Rockville, Md.
(Photo courtesy of Tom Crowley)

to avoid being stranded offshore. Stan operated a radio room reporting on the landings and conditions on the beaches. He said his guide boat would be hoisted into the water first to wait until eight or nine landing craft were ready to be led ashore. The LCC returned to the attack transport repeatedly to shepherd more landing craft to the beaches. The LCC had three mounts for dual fifty-caliber machine guns, which provided cover fire in this process. The LCC ventured into the vortex of enemy artillery and mortar fire time and again in its support for operations. Stan suffered significant hearing loss as a result of his proximity to the gunfire from his own boat, and his hearing impairment got progressively worse over time.

Stan's attack transport, the USS *Fayette*, conducted landing operations, and

Stan's LCC performed in four major campaigns: the invasion landings on Guam in July 1944, Peleliu in September 1944, Leyte in the Philippines in October 1944, and Luzon in the Philippines in January 1945. The USS *Fayette* fought off air attacks in each campaign and was narrowly missed by a kamikaze attack during the landings on Luzon.

In February 1945, the USS *Fayette* was in Guam preparing for the invasion of Iwo Jima when Stan received word that he had completed his overseas tour of duty. He was transferred back to the U.S. on the cruiser USS *New Orleans* to separate from the service as a Petty Officer First Class Radio Man.

Stan was awarded battle ribbons for his participation in all of the above campaigns, as well as the Bronze Star medal for valor in action during the landings at Peleliu. After his LCC had finished guiding the Marines who landed on the beaches, he and his crew remained offshore to rescue wounded Marines from the water while under relentless fire from the enemy. They transported the wounded to the *Fayette*, which eventually transported approximately 800 wounded Marines to the hospital ship USS *Solace* or on to medical care on Manus.

In recent years, Stan's hearing has diminished. He contacted the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE *continued*



Image of the USS Fayette (Courtesy of the Naval History and Heritage Command and the National Archives)

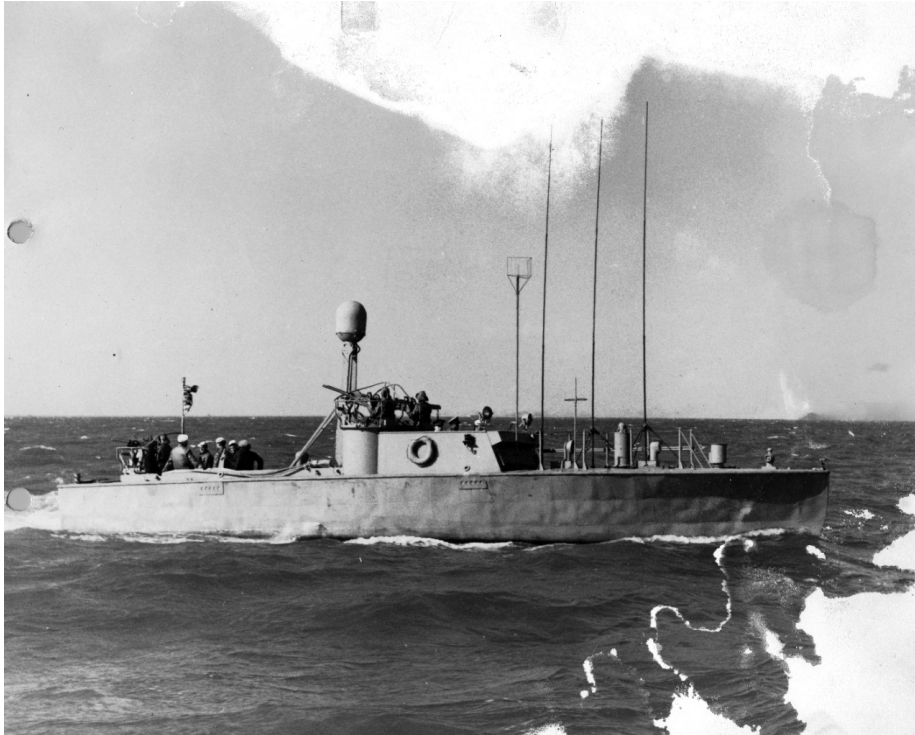
asking for a medical exam and help to get hearing aids. It would seem that, after his valiant service, Stan should be entitled to recognition by the VA.

The folks at the VA informed Stan that he didn't have the necessary papers to prove his time in service. This was a roadblock he never expected. Stan needed a DD214. However, this form was not even used until 1950. The VA, in its infinite wisdom, persisted in telling Stan

that they couldn't help him. The VA did not recognize that Stan served in WWII in the 1940s, before the DD214 was used. The VA did not recognize Stan's documentation of his service on a form used by the Navy in WWII, the (NAVPERS 553) NOTICE OF SEPARATION FROM U.S. NAVAL SERVICE.*

It seemed to some at the VA, WWII never happened. Every phone call Stan would make to plead his case would end

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE *continued*



**Image of a WWII
Landing Craft, Control
craft (Courtesy of U.S.
Navy)**

up with a clerk telling him he had the wrong documentation, and they couldn't help him.

Naturally, Stan was upset. When the person on the other end of the phone at the VA said, "Thank you for your service," that upset Stan even more.

He asked me, "Saying thank you is nice, but why won't people do something to show their appreciation and get the system to understand that this matter needs to be fixed?"

He just wanted his service recognized. He had friends who received military burial honors, and he wanted to receive the same show of respect for his time in service.

Members of Stan's VFW post are working on Stan's behalf to get the VA, which should be an advocate for veterans, to solve this problem. Stan's worry is that he doesn't have much time left.

It's nice to say thank you for your service to those who have served in our wars. It would be much better to be ready to lend a helping hand to thank them for their service. The VA should be the leader in this regard. ■

*Research the naval separation from service document NAVPERS 533 at the National Archives, National Personnel Records Center.

[https://www.archives.gov/
personnel-records-center/dd-214](https://www.archives.gov/personnel-records-center/dd-214)

POSTAGE

A Work of Creative Nonfiction

By Michael Lund

The elderly woman might have had bedroom slippers on her feet as far as Porter could tell from their soft, fluffy look, though she was wearing a nice, flowered dress and a wide brown hat to shield herself from the sun. But here in the post office parking lot, she was taking such a long time and making such a great effort to get up from behind the wheel and out of the car that he uncharacteristically asked, “Could you use some help, ma’am?”

She said, “Well, yes, I believe I could.”

She was holding a slim cane in one hand and a large purse in the other, so Porter stepped around her and said, “Let me just steady you a bit from this side,” putting a hand under her elbow. Together, in a slow but steady shuffle, they moved toward the entrance.



He had come to the post office to mail a political contribution and encountered the woman on his way out.

The doors were not more than twenty-five feet from the handicapped parking place where her car sat, a low, dark, sleek sedan. His own SUV was around

the corner on the side of the building.

Having recently turned eighty, he understood how challenging it was for seniors to get in and out of such a car. He was also conscious of the concrete sidewalk on which they walked and the potentially debilitating injury that could occur should either slip or fall. Carefully placing each foot in front of the other, Porter noticed a man, perhaps in his forties, walk past them with a package to mail under one arm. He wore a cap with an insignia above the bill, but Porter was unable to read it.

POSTAGE *continued*

They were in a small Virginia town west of Richmond, where even in 2025, the cost of having resisted integration seventy years earlier still lingered. Porter, a white Midwesterner, felt privileged to be part of a community that had begun to acknowledge its past and restructure its identity.

In fact, the night before, a candidate for governor held a crowded rally at what had been the black high school, now a civil rights museum. She addressed an enthusiastic crowd, insisting that she was “glad to be here,” a standard part of any political stump speech. But, repeating the statement, she pointed to the stage under her feet and stressed the word, “*Here!*”

From this spot, she reminded her listeners, from this very stage, “kids” had risen up and demanded better schools. They marched to the courthouse in the center of town and protested the inferior facilities, comparing their aging building and limited resources to the segregated white public schools. It was a courageous act.

Porter might have helped any older woman making an exceptional effort to get to the post office, but the fact that she was Black brought history to the scene. He recalled the political speaker from the night before, a white woman in her forties, and admired her insistence that she knew where she stood in place and time—“*Here!*”

As Porter and his new acquaintance walked, they exchanged conventional remarks about the first real warm spell of the summer. “I’m glad we don’t have too far to go in this heat,” he offered.

She replied. “It comes every summer, you know.”

At the entrance, the man who had passed by them earlier was holding the door open. Porter could read the insignia on his cap, “Operation Desert Storm,” and nodded his thanks.

“Army or Navy?” he asked over his shoulder as he passed.

“Navy,” the man said.

Porter responded, “I was Army, though a long time ago.” He suspected his very short time in the military was far less than this man’s service, although a bond existed and was acknowledged.

The Navy vet noted that “a lot of Army choppers brought wounded to our hospital ship.”

Porter said, “Those chopper pilots are absolutely crazy. They’ll go anywhere to get the guys out!” A member of his church had been one of those fearless flyers. A lot of veterans had retired to this area, where land was cheap and traffic was light.

Inside, there was no one in the queue, so Porter’s companion skipped the U-turn line and went directly to the first clerk. “I need to send some money to my grandson in New York.” From her purse,

continued

POSTAGE *continued*

she pulled out a letter-sized envelope, the address handwritten, and another smaller envelope, which Porter recognized as the kind they give you at the bank to hold your cash. “I want this to get there tomorrow,” she concluded.

The clerk frowned. “We don’t do that anymore. This is a small post office, and we can’t handle it. Now, you can go up to the package store on Main. They might be able to do it, but,” he added, “it’ll cost you an arm and a leg.”

She asked, “Can you get it there by Saturday?”

He looked at the computer screen and said, “Priority Express likely would work.”

She pushed the envelopes across the counter and opened a small change purse. Porter wondered if she even knew about the new package store in the town.

“You need to fill out the address on this form,” said the clerk, sliding it across the counter.

It was one with carbon that made several copies, approximately 5 x 7 inches in size. They pull apart; one is pasted on a folder-sized heavy cardboard envelope, one is given to the customer, and one is filed away. Why couldn’t they either use her envelope and stamp it “Priority Express” or scan it somehow?

But his companion pulled a pen out of her purse and began carefully printing the return address, and then

her grandson’s address in the appropriate boxes. Porter noticed her cane leaned against the counter at a precarious angle and grabbed it, so it wouldn’t clatter to the floor as she labored.

After a few minutes, she handed back the form and watched as the clerk took the already addressed letter-sized envelope and put it inside the larger envelope. Porter held up a hand. “Doesn’t that go, too?” pointing to the smaller envelope, which Porter assumed held a cashier’s check or some other form of payment.

The clerk frowned, “I already sealed this,” holding up the folder-sized envelope. But he got out a pair of scissors and cut open the package so he could slide the smaller envelope inside.

“\$31.40,” he announced, picking up a roll of tape to reseal the package.

Porter was startled. “*That’s an arm and a leg!*” he said to himself.

People generally don’t mail cash, and Porter hoped that wasn’t what she was doing, but he felt he would be pushing himself forward too much to say more.

He took her elbow again as they began the return trip to her parking spot. “That’s my new car,” she told him. “Got it for my birthday.”

“So,” he joked, “you must be, what? Fifty-five?”

“Turned 100 on Valentine’s Day.”

“Whoa! Congratulations.”

POSTAGE *continued*

Wondering how far she would have to drive, he asked, “You live here in town?”

“Oh, yes. Came here when I was fourteen to take care of a boy.” She chuckled. “He was fourteen, and I was, too. But he was a boy who needed taking care of. Later, I went to New York City, worked there for forty-two years. When I retired, I came back first thing to Virginia—1985 it was. It’s my home, you see.”

Porter did the math in his head: born in 1925, Jim Crow days; came to Virginia in 1939 to work (late in the Depression); returned in ‘85, so left maybe in 1942 (WW II); retired after the integration of the ‘70s, Civil Rights progress. She had seen history. She had overcome odds, paying, he was sure, extra postage along the way.

He wanted to ask about her grandson—well, her children, too. Had they prospered? Risen in society? Found

happiness? Did they have the purpose and perseverance of this one hundred-year-old in fuzzy shoes, a sunhat, and with a shiny new car? But he just asked, “You okay to drive home?”

She smiled. “Of course.”

He didn’t want to be condescending and watch her leave, so he returned to his car and resumed his errands. But, an hour later, he drove by the post office to be sure at least that she had made it out of the parking lot and was on her way again. He smiled to see the handicapped spot occupied by a different vehicle. ■

Michael Lund is the author of novels inspired by Route 66, America’s Mother Road. He is currently working on a novel series set in a small coastal Carolina village. He directs Home and Abroad, a free writing program for military personnel, veterans, and their families in rural central Virginia.



OUT OF STEP

A MEMOIR OF THE VIETNAM WAR PART ONE

ARDF: During the Vietnam War Airborne Radio Direction Finding was the most effective method of locating enemy units. This SIGINT began with three man crews in primitive bush planes flying circles over the Mekong Delta to locate VC. This is an insider's account of the 156Th Aviation Company (RR)'s mission after the Tet Offensive.



FRANCIS HAMIT