



## Author Biographies

Thank you for listening to the 2024 Mighty Pen Podcast series. This series brings to life the stories of the following veterans. We are honored to be able to share their personal recollections with you.

### **Beth Liehti**

Beth Liehti. U.S. Army veteran. Airborne. Signal Corps. Information Operations. Public Affairs. Global War on Terror (Pentagon, Parks RFTA). Operation Iraqi Freedom (Kuwait). Cold War (South Korea, Ft. Bragg, West Germany). Writer. Editor. Coach. On staff with *Military Experience and the Arts*. Creator of *Launch Your Light*, a journaling class. Her first story was published in the *Mighty Pen Project Anthology 2018*. Her stories and poetry have also been published in *Sisters in Arms: Lessons We've Learned* (anthology), *Line of Advance*, *As You Were: The Military Review (Vol. 17)*, and the *Cactus Wren-dition*.

### **June Forte**

June Forte's short stories, essays and humor pieces have been published in literary journals, magazines and anthologies including *Washington Golf Monthly*, *The Northern Virginia Review*, *The Bay to Ocean Anthology* and the *Virginia Writers Club Centennial Anthology*. Her nonfiction articles have appeared in daily, weekly, and monthly newspapers and magazine as diverse as *Woman's World*, *U.S. Medicine*, and *Aviation Digest*. A Chicago transplant, she currently lives in Woodbridge, Virginia.

### **Larry Meier**

Larry Meier was born at Fort Leonard Wood, MO while his dad was still in the army and then moved to Scotia NY when he was discharged. Later his family moved to Roanoke, VA. Larry graduated from Va Tech in 1967 and then accepted an Army commission as Second Lieutenant in the Field Artillery. After attending Defense Language Institute for Dutch, he served with the Dutch army in the Netherlands. In 1970 he was assigned to the 4th Infantry Division in Ahn Khe as a FO with a 105mm battery. When the 4th Infantry stood down, he was reassigned to the 5th Infantry (Mech) in Quan Tri as the XO of a 155mm battery. The remainder of his seven-year army service was at Fort Lee, VA and then with the 3rd Armor Division in Nuremburg, Germany. After short period travelling in Europe, he moved to Richmond, VA where he met his wife, Vera, and attended Virginia Commonwealth University for post grad studies in accounting. He then accepted a position as a Revenue Agent with the Internal Revenue Service. Following retirement, he became a Financial Crimes Investigator involving money laundering cases with Wachovia (later Wells Fargo). Larry currently resides in Richmond, VA where he mentors two young grandsons on how to get into trouble they never knew existed.

### **Malik Hodari**

Malik Hodari, 76, is a recipient of the Silver Star and Purple Heart for his service in Vietnam, where he served from October 1966 to October 1967. Hodari has used meditation since 1978 to help cope with Vietnam-centric

PTSD and polysubstance abuse. He also has used a vegetarian diet to control his Type 2 diabetes for more than 23 years. Hodari says he sees meditation and vegetarianism as part of the peace paradigm for our communities and humanity." He holds a bachelor's degree from Hams Stowe State Teachers University, a master's from Michigan State University and a law degree from North Carolina Central University. "This is all so healing for me," Hodari says "I hope the story helps others." "Blue Devil" was Hodari's radio call sign in Vietnam, where he volunteered for point-man duty daily. Hodari joined the Mighty Pen Project on the recommendation of his Veterans Affairs' therapist Dr. Brian Meyer. "Blue Devil" covers one chilling day in Vietnam. The essential memories of that day in 1967 were suppressed for 42 years. A VA intake physician triggered the recall when she routinely asked Hodari an obligatory intake question.: "Do you need mental health help?" Face to face with this buried horror, Hodari sunk into a suicidal depression. Immediate intervention and daily sessions resulted in a referral to Dr. Brian Meyer, who helped Hodari recover.

### **Marcy Atwood**

Colonel Atwood joined the Air Force after teaching high school in Oregon. Qualifying as Navigator, she reported to several units as their first female officer aviator. Colonel Atwood achieved Master Navigator status with over 3,100 career flying hours in the KC-135Q, KC-135A, E-4B, RC-135, T-1 and T-39 aircraft. She held several staff positions including: an internship as a young officer on the Air Staff, U.S. Air Force Headquarters; one of ten officers planning the U.S. Strategic Command organizational structure and standup of the Provisional Headquarters; an Air Force Headquarters branch chief establishing a revised Air Force Chemical, Biological, and Nuclear (CBN) policy for surviving enemy attacks on airfields; and Vice Director, Manpower and Personnel, (J-1) Joint Staff, Pentagon. Colonel Atwood commanded US Navy Training Squadron TEN, NAS Pensacola, 1997-1998, the 55th Operations Group, 55th Wing, Offutt AFB, NE, 2002-2004 and deployed as Commander, 398th Air Expeditionary Group, during Operation Iraqi Freedom, 2003. Retiring in 2005, Colonel Atwood has worked as a business manager of a law firm, a consultant and analyst in the defense industry, and is currently the Department of the Air Force Senior Advisor on the Air Force Memorial. She is married to Lieutenant Colonel Neal A. Puckett, USMC (Ret), Esq. and resides in Dallas, TX.

### **Miko Yoshida**

Bio: Miko Yoshida is a Japanese-American Los Angeles native and is the eldest of seven. As a Marine, he deployed three times to Afghanistan before spending a few years in consulting and financial services in New York. He currently teaches ceramics and boxing in his neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York.

### **Randy Harritan**

I was 22 years old in this picture. I turned 23 in Vietnam (Caption he sent with his photo, included in case you want to mention it in his intro)

I was born and raised in Wilmington, N.C. and went into the Army in 1968. My Dad was a WW II VETERAN and my maternal Grandfather served in WW I. Two of my Great Great Grandfathers fought in the civil war. After returning home from the war I started a Mechanical Contracting firm from which I retired in 2001. I now have four kids and seven grandchildren which I love with all my heart. Life is good.

### **Dustin Dunbar**

Heralded by the prophets, Sharon and Doug Dunbar, Dustin Louis Michael Dunbar stormed into the world during the year of Ferris Bueller (1986). After learning the ways of military service from his Air Force parents, Dustin decided to forge his own path upon surviving ROTC training at the College of William and Mary. He was

commissioned in 2009 as a US Army Logistics Officer and promptly went on to serve as a Platoon Leader and Executive Officer with D Troop, 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. Dustin proudly associated himself with the "Back to Back Champs of Logar Province" through two deployments to Afghanistan. But like all Army-forged relationships, he had to depart his battle buddies for a new assignment: Company Commander of H Company, 2nd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne (Air Assault) Division. Upon a successful return from a third deployment to Afghanistan with the Screaming Eagles, Dustin hung up his jump boots in 2018 after nearly a decade of active duty service. Dustin and his wife, Stephanie Lynch, have found new adventures along the banks of the James River as they family takes root in the River City of Richmond, Virginia. Dustin now works as an Investment Associate for Virginia Venture Partners.

### **Joe Maslanka**

Joe Maslanka has been involved with the Mighty Pen Project since 2017. He has several short stories published on the VCU website for the Mighty Pen and in 2023 his screen play 'Dress Code' was performed in 2023 as part of the 'War in Pieces' series.

Mr. Maslanka is a United States Marine veteran and graduated summa cum laude from Strayer University with a Bachelor of Administration Degree in Business Administration and Human Resources.

He formed the Righteous Outlaws as a non-profit rock and roll band in 2009, they discontinued playing after raising over \$175,000.00 from 2009 through 2019 for several charities; primarily they supported Veteran Organizations and Poverty initiatives.

Joe has worked in the Private Security industry for 30 years and is the Division Vice President for Admiral Security in Richmond, VA. In 2021 he became a Licensed Local Pastor for the United Methodist Church, working half-time for two churches in Hanover County.

He has been married to Holly L. Maslanka since 1987 and has two children, Amber Maslanka- Williams and Anthony Maslanka and two grandchildren (Alec Steven Williams) and (Flora-Jane Maslanka.)

### **David Aldridge**

David M. Aldridge served our nation for 45 years. He retired from the Army after serving as an Infantry soldier and also as a Chief Legal NCO from 1965 to 1988. He went on to serve as a Department of the Army Civilian from 1988 until 2010. He had 3 tours in Viet Nam and was wounded 3 times. He has been a student of the Virginia War Memorial's Mighty Pen Project since 2016 and has written over 100 short stories and one play about his experiences. He is editing his stories at the present time and looking for a publisher. His assignments in the Army covered every job in the Infantry from Grenadier to that of Platoon Leader when he was just a Private First Class. He is still the only NCO to ever prosecute a General Court Martial on behalf of the United States. He met and married Sheila, the love of his life in 1989, and they live in Chester, Virginia.

### **Laura Bender**

Laura Jane Bender is a retired US Navy Chaplain and ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church. She pastored churches in the NY metropolitan area for 13 years before joining the Navy in 1999. Besides providing general pastoral care to Sailors, Marines and their families, she's worked with detainees and migrants in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and with the Marine Corps' Wounded Warrior Regiment in Quantico, VA.

During the 2003 invasion of Iraq, she worked in a mobile field hospital and with mortuary affairs and was identified by the Marine Corps as the first female chaplain in combat. The first or “plank-owner chaplain” on USS New York, a ship built with WTC steel, she served as liaison to 9/11 families, First Responders, Mayor Bloomberg’s office and US Naval Commissioning committee. A master training specialist, Laura has worked at both the Naval Chaplains School and the Naval Nuclear Power Training Command. She has a Master of Theological Studies in Religion and Conflict Transformation from Boston University School of Theology, a Master of Divinity from Wesley Seminary, Wash. DC and a BA in Religion/Philosophy with a minor in German from West Virginia Wesleyan College. Her Iraq war photos are on permanent display at the Women in Military Service for America Museum, Arlington, VA. In 2004 she received the Navy League of the United States, Captain Winifred Quick Collins Award for Inspirational Leadership, the only chaplain to do so.

A twelfth generation New Yorker, she loves genealogy, and has never really lost her accent. Laura is married to Kenneth Anderson, a retired Naval Reservist and Redford, Michigan Police Officer. They live in West Branch, MI on the top of a hill with a God’s eye view of the surrounding countryside.

### **Dan Barotti**

Daniel joined the Navy on December 9th, 2014 during his final year studying Mechanical Engineering at the University of Maryland, College Park. He commissioned as a Naval Officer through Officer Candidate School in Newport, Rhode Island on September 25th, 2015 as part of 17-15 G Company. His first tour was aboard USS McCampbell (DDG-85), an Arleigh-Burke class destroyer based out of Yokosuka, Japan where he patrolled the geopolitically contested waters of the South China Sea as he served as First Lieutenant. There he would work with the Japanese, South Korean, Philippine, Brunei, and Australian Navies to forge stronger ties with US Allies in the region. He would return to Japan for a second tour, this time aboard USS Patriot (MCM-7), an Avenger class minesweeper based out of Sasebo. On one of the last commissioned wooden warships of the Navy, he would once more patrol the South China Sea, to project US naval power and protect international waters from regional claims. During this tour, while serving as the Assistant Chief Engineer, he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant (O-3). He would once again work with regional allies, to include those from his previous tour as well as Thai, Italian, and French navies to promote international cooperation and stability in the South China Sea. Following his second tour, he separated from active duty on May 1st of 2021 to start a new chapter of life with his wife, Catherine, in Richmond, Virginia.

### **Phil Trezza**

Phil Trezza served medic in the Army and Army Reserve between 2004 and 2018, serving as a platoon medic in Iraq in 2006 and 2007. Phil earned several awards during his career including the Combat Medical Badge for rendering medical care during enemy engagements.

After military service, Phil served Veterans and military families in Virginia by assisting them with gaining employment after service. Phil was instrumental in creating the Military Medics and Corpsmen Program, that focused on employment and education opportunities for medically trained transitioning service members and also served as the Director of Veteran Transition & Employment Programs for the Virginia Department of Veterans Services. He has also contributed to the book, "The Fire Within: Shedding Light on Trauma".

He continues to support Veteran and military spouse hiring within Virginia state government as a Talent Acquisition Consultant at the Virginia Department of Taxation. Phil holds a bachelor's degree in political science and a master of business administration. He loves all things creative, reading, writing, writing and playing music, and spend time with family.

## **Ron Bland**

Ron served in Vietnam from the fall of 1966 to the spring of 1968 with the 4th Infantry Division in an air assault group out of Pleiku, Camp Holloway. He returned home to work in various construction fields and levels. He now resides in Harrisonburg, VA, with his wife Judy and his dog Pinot.

## **Chuck Williamson**

Chuck Williamson is a veteran of the US Army's 10th Mountain Division, serving as an infantryman. He was discharged from active duty due to injuries in 2017. An almost lifelong Virginian and Richmond native, Mr. Williamson holds both a bachelor's and master's degree from the College of William & Mary. Since leaving the military he has been involved in both "The Mighty Pen" and "War In Pieces" programs at the War Memorial and is the author of stories such as 'The Sphere' and the short story turned one act play 'Skyline'.

## **Norman Miller**

Norman Miller was born August 3, 1946, in Alameda, California, the third of four children born to Clemens and Rema Miller (Nee: Sutton). Because his father was a career Air Force Non-Commissioned Officer, Norman and his family traveled extensively. Norman attended thirteen elementary schools, four middle/junior high schools, and five high schools. After graduating high school, Norman enlisted in the Army in July, 1965, intending to be a reporter for the Army Times. However he was selected to attend Infantry Officer Candidate School and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant, at age 19, in July 1966. Norman served eight years in the Army, including two tours in Viet Nam as a Headquarters Company Commander, Rifle Company Commander, Advisor for South Vietnamese Regional and Popular Forces, and a Staff Officer at the USARV Advisory School. He was promoted to Captain in 1968, at age 21, and was discharged from active duty in 1973, due to the Army's Involuntary Reduction in Force. Norman spent 20 years as a probation officer and is now enjoying retirement with the love of his life, his wife, Linda.