

PRESS RELEASE

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CPA, Former Marine, Dedicates Himself to Literary Avocation, Seeks to Enhance Reader Enjoyment of Classic Military Novel

Thomas Hebert has made his living as a Certified Public Accountant. Over the course of his career, he has served as a senior financial executive for several large, not-for-profit organizations. For many years, however, he has also pursued his avocation of writing about the military.

Hebert, 60, a former Marine First Lieutenant who served in Vietnam, has been fascinated with the military since his youth, when his father, William, a World War II Marine sergeant, sang the *Marine Corps Hymn* daily. From 1979 to 1992, Hebert wrote and published the "grass roots" *Vietnam War Newsletter* and operated the mail-order Vietnam Bookstore. In 1999, he discovered a used copy of *Once An Eagle*, by Anton Myrer, a novel widely considered a military classic. A 1,291-page work of some complexity, Hebert read it a second time. He found himself drawn to the literary talents of Myrer, including the novel's hundreds of allusive references, as well as its challenging vocabulary. He also found himself captivated by the inspirational leadership qualities demonstrated by the book's protagonist, Sam Damon, and by the entire cast of richly drawn characters.

Once An Eagle is, essentially, an epic tale of good-versus-evil. The good is embodied in Sam Damon, a soldier's soldier, and a consummate professional, widely admired for his bravery under fire and his dedication to the men who serve under him. On the other hand, Courtney Massengale, Damon's chief adversary, is evil personified. Massengale's dedication is to the advancement of his own career, without regard for the devastation it wreaks on his family, or for the blood shed by those affected by his command decisions. *Once An Eagle* is, therefore, a remarkable study in leadership, and has become a touchstone for military professionals who aspire to emulate Sam Damon.

As Hebert conducted his research, he learned that *Once An Eagle* had been in print for almost its entire thirty-year life; that arrangements had recently been made to keep the book in print in perpetuity; that the novel was required course reading for all West Point cadets; that it was on the Marine Corps Commandant's Professional Reading List; that the book had spawned a highly acclaimed 1976 television miniseries that had since been left on the shelf for more than twenty years; and that the recently deceased Anton Myrer

had, in fact, authored a total of eight novels, three of which had been so highly regarded as to have been made into television miniseries.

Hebert also discovered that the book's critical acclaim was widespread. It came from the media: The New York Times; The Atlantic Monthly; Life; and Harper's Magazine. And, it came from the military elite: General Charles C. Krulak, former Marine Corps Commandant; General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of Operation Desert Storm; retired General John W. Vessey, Jr., former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and General Robert H. Scales, Commandant of the U.S. Army War College.

Hebert eventually came to the realization that the novel's status as a literary classic, as well as its importance to military leaders now and undoubtedly for generations to come, suggested a need for a companion book that would enable readers to maximize the enjoyment and value of the reading experience. He spent nearly every spare moment of the next seven years in dogged pursuit of that goal. When he was unable to enlist a publisher for the completed manuscript, he determined to focus attention on both *Once An Eagle*, the novel, and his own work, *Once An Eagle: A Reader's Companion*, by way of the Internet.

He teamed with Charles Gallagher, a neighbor, U.S. Navy veteran, and retired information systems specialist, to develop a website, *Once-An-Eagle.com*. On the site, Hebert has included both a chapter-by-chapter outline and a narrative. He has profiled each of the novel's nearly one hundred characters. When, somewhat surprisingly, an exhaustive search uncovered no significant biographical profile of the prolific and successful Anton Myrer, Hebert determined to write one.

Finding relatively little available information on the 1944 Harvard graduate, Hebert sought the assistance of his brother-in-law, Dr. William A. Strycharz, also a Harvard alumnus. Dr. Strycharz, accessing Harvard resources, located several *Harvard College: Class of 1944 Anniversary Reports*, as well as other biographical items, that rounded out the writer's profile very nicely. That, too, is on the website. Also included are details on Myrer's seven other novels, three of which remain in print.

The *Once An Eagle* television miniseries is a story in itself. This highly acclaimed film, starring Glenn Ford, Sam Elliott, and Darlene Carr, has now remained on the studio's inactive shelf for more than thirty years. Sensing a possible opportunity for introducing the miniseries to a new generation of viewers, Hebert retained an attorney, and his company, O-A-E Enterprises, made a formal proposal to NBC Universal. His offer was rejected, but no reason was given. Hebert says the Army War College Foundation made a similar proposal several years ago, and its offer was also rejected.

Hebert finds these summary rejections bewildering, given the plethora of far less meaningful video offerings that flood the market each year. He believes that the miniseries could serve as an important training tool for young military officers and others. He says he will continue trying to bring the epic film back to the market, and he believes that the launching of his website might influence NBC Universal to do just that. For now,

the website includes a lengthy scene-by-scene narrative, meticulously prepared by Hebert after watching the nine-hour television miniseries a half-dozen times. Also included is a comprehensive "Film Credits" section compiled from several sources.

For his website, Hebert has also culled some 1,250 literary allusions from *Once An Eagle*. He has researched their meanings and relevance, and supported his findings with more than 1,400 footnotes. He has further expanded his research by providing approximately

900 Internet images related to these allusions. Adding the images feature to the website extended the launch date for his website by several months, but Hebert believes these images will both enhance the site visitor's understanding of many of the novel's allusions and increase his overall reading enjoyment. Furthermore, he found that Myrer employed an erudite and challenging vocabulary that lent sophistication to the narrative and authenticated the setting of a novel that spanned approximately the first sixty years of the twentieth century. Hebert, therefore, compiled an extensive vocabulary document of some 900 entries, also supported by footnotes.

In order to make his website still more interesting and useful, Hebert has added a "Readers' Forum," which he has seeded with a number of suggested discussion topics. He also offers a list of hundreds of military-related books that he has personally selected for his primary target audience, *viz.*, military men and women, and veterans. Given the theme of *Once An Eagle*, books on leadership are particularly emphasized. Available military art, statuary, memorabilia, and war games are also identified.

On the site's Home Page, he offers timely and interesting information, such as links to relevant video and music offerings on Youtube.com. Also on the Home Page, Hebert provides advertisers with the opportunity to reach his visitors with appropriate products and services. In addition, Hebert offers a "Links" page, whose goal is to link his website visitors with the websites of other appropriate organizations. Finally, in an "In the News" section, he links his site to web news articles he believes will have relevance to his site and its visitors.

Hebert offers that much of his original manuscript had to be revised and some of it even excised when he was unable to obtain permission to use excerpts from the novel from the book's publisher, HarperCollins. Rather than capitulate, he did what his tour in the Marines had taught him to do: he battled back. He revised the manuscript, deleting every excerpt; this task, too, added months of work. Some very interesting chapters had to be omitted entirely, because they required an extensive use of excerpts.

Hebert believes that Myrer was a literary genius, a master at employing literary devices such as alliteration, metaphors, imagery, and even clichés. Hebert laboriously catalogued many hundreds of examples of these devices, selecting the best for eventual publication. He also devoted an entire chapter to the most meaningful quotations and passages. For now, however, the product of his work in these areas will have to wait.

Besides contacting NBC Universal and HarperCollins, Hebert, through a third party, sought the involvement of Patricia Myrer, Anton Myrer's widow. Unfortunately, his entreaty was rejected out of hand, without any examination of the work he had done.

Eugene Winick, of McIntosh and Otis, Inc., Myrer's former agent, also had no interest in the project. Frustrated at every turn, Hebert was not inclined to abandon seven years of labor, albeit a "labor of love." He turned to the Internet, therefore, as a means of bringing his work to the public, and hopes that this exposure will propel his project onward and upward.

Hebert steadfastly believes in the value of *Once An Eagle*, both the novel and the miniseries. He has set what he believes to be a simple and realistic goal, viz., to "spread the word," far and wide, so that active-duty military, veterans, students, and civilians can all benefit from Anton Myrer's extraordinary tale: a tale that, while anti-war in theme, emphasizes and honors both service to country and heroism. In this difficult time of prolonged war, Hebert believes that the country needs these messages more than ever.