

Writing Your Own Memoir

Andy Adkins - January 2020

www.azadkinsiii.com/blog

Part 1 – It’s Really Easy, and... What a Legacy

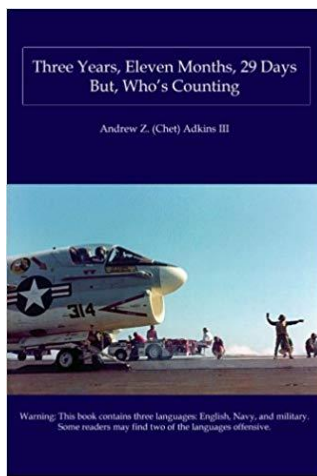
Part 2 – After 30+ Years, I’m Back on the Flight Deck

Part 3 – Publishing Your Memoir

This 3-part series originated as blog posts in January 2020. I had written my memoir, which morphed into a book. I’ve corresponded with many veterans who have great stories to share, but weren’t quite sure how to write them, let alone publish them. Hence, “Writing Your Own Memoir.”

A Veteran’s Journey is a weekly blog written by Andy Adkins.

Part 1 - It’s Really Easy, and... What a Legacy



Three Years, Eleven Months, 29 Days-But Who's Counting

Several years ago, I wrote and self-published a book about my 4 years in the Navy. It initially started out as a simple memoir. But over time, it morphed into a full-size book. I did not write the book to make money. My intention was to *preserve*. My sole purpose was to share my Navy experience with family, friends, and shipmates.

Yes, it is on Amazon. No, I haven’t sold a lot of copies. It’s a friggin’ *memoir*, not a romance novel. I wanted to tell it like it was (for me), “sprinkle” in a few facts and Navy-specific details, and elaborate on a few of my own experiences. There are probably a few spelling and grammar errors (I did not use a professional editor), but I’m okay with that.

When I received the first hard copy “proof” in the mail, I was impressed at just how easy it was. I will tell you this, though. It certainly helped me along in my current writing “journey.”

It’s a “process,” a true labor of love

This blog post is **NOT** about *my* book; it’s about the *process* of writing it—something *you* may want to consider. Think about it... a legacy for your family, your kids, and your grand kids. And while you read through this blog, you may also realize you can help write your father’s, mother’s or grandparent’s memoir. It doesn’t have to be all about you!

The image shows a portion of a DD-214 discharge form. Key information visible includes:

- Service Component: US NAVY
- Component: US NAVY
- Organization: US NAVY
- Occupation: US NAVY
- Service Dates: 1973 to 1977
- Branch: US NAVY
- Component: US NAVY
- Organization: US NAVY
- Occupation: US NAVY
- Service Dates: 1973 to 1977
- Branch: US NAVY
- Component: US NAVY
- Organization: US NAVY
- Occupation: US NAVY
- Service Dates: 1973 to 1977
- Branch: US NAVY

 The form is a standard military discharge document with various fields for personal and service information.

My DD-214; Time in Service

In 1973, I signed up for a four-year stint with the Navy. But, because I went in on a Monday and got out on a Friday, I *almost* made four years. The title of my book is, “**Three Years, Eleven Months, 29 Days—But Who’s Counting.**” I just couldn’t resist that particular title. And if you question my “exact” time in service, I’ve provided a snippet of my DD-214 discharge papers as proof.

Writing my memoir wasn’t difficult at all. Yes, it took some time and I drifted in and out of writing. All in all, it probably took me about a year to write, from the initial outline to the first proof copy. But, it was certainly worthwhile.

You don’t have to have a literary agent or a publisher to write & publish your memoir. I know a lot of men & women, WWII, Vietnam-era, and Global War on Terror veterans, who wrote their memoir either using paper and pen or a computer and only had a few copies printed for their families and friends. For each, it was a most fulfilling experience and I don’t know any that regretted writing it.

There are methods, however, to self-publish, and I’ll share some of those with you later in Part 3. I self-published my book using Amazon’s **CreateSpace** (now known as **Kindle Direct Publishing**), but there are other online self-publishing services. It only cost a few bucks—for the proof copies and for extra copies I ordered for family and friends. More about that later.

The “Why” of writing your memoir

Serving in the **United States Navy** was one of the most honorable and memorable periods in my life. I find that as I get older, I cherish those memories even more. I am proud to be a veteran. I also have a much higher respect for our men and women in uniform who currently serve than I did back in my day. I don’t know if that’s age or wisdom, but at this point, it really doesn’t matter.

I realize others may *not* feel the same way about their service, and that’s okay. Of course, there were times when I’d complain. But for me, I had many more good times than bad, and that’s what I always try to focus on.

A lot of what I learned in the Navy continues with me today, including some of the **military lingo**. I’m sure there are other veterans who also continue to use some of those “choice” terms and language. Face it, it’s a culture and tradition we want to continue.

I was discharged in 1977. But, I didn’t write this book until 2014 though I had thought about writing it for years. But, you know... life got in the way.

When I did start to actually write it, I was still working full-time. But, I managed to find the time (nights and weekends) to crank it out. Our kids had grown, moved out, and finished

college, so I had a little more “Andy time.” And, the process of “journaling” my service (i.e., writing my book), both good and bad, was for me... both enlightening *and* memorable.

I know some people, including my own father, who felt “closure” after completing their book. I’m not sure I felt “closure”—I wasn’t looking for it. Even though the Vietnam War was winding down when I served, I wasn’t in a war, like my dad. But, I know other veteran authors who were and for them, writing their memoir *did* bring closure to a chapter in their lives.

Writing Your Memoir

I think most memoirs are a “from here to there” type of book—events that happen in chronological order. That’s how I wanted to write mine, plain and simple, from start to finish. It also provided me with a way to “relive” my Navy days. That was fun!

I wanted to write about Boot Camp, “A” school, and my two duty stations, **NAS Agana, Guam** and **USS Kitty Hawk**. And of course, I wanted to write about the **Westpac ’75** cruise. Those topics became my “sections.”

It’s hard to explain to someone what it’s like to be aboard a Navy ship during a 6- to 8-month cruise. In my case, I worked on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier, *USS Kitty Hawk*. But, it was important to me to describe the comradery and friendships that develop when you’re together for that period of time. In my case, it was also the most fun part to reminisce and write about.

I also wanted to include enough details so that someone who had *not* been in the Navy could understand the culture, as well as appreciate what we did on a day-to-day basis. Most of this I knew from experience, but in some cases, I needed to do additional research. Lo and behold, Dr. Google and Mr. Internet.

Because I had written a military book several years earlier—about my father’s World War II experience in Europe—I had an idea of how to tell the story and where to find research materials. For that book, I had also worked with both an editor and a publisher.

But, back then (2005), the self-publishing industry was just ramping up and still had a ways to go. For my **WWII book**, I found a traditional publisher, **Casemate Publishers**, who is still going strong.

For my Navy book, I *knew* I would self-publish—a totally different world. When the time came in 2014, most of the self-publishing industry quirks had been worked out.

Research – My Old Letters and My Photo Albums

A lot of my “research” came from my old photo albums and the letters I had written home—my mother kept all my letters. Those were treasures and provided me with not only the

timing of certain events, but also how my attitude changed as I “matured” into an experienced and seasoned sailor.

Boy, some of those letters I wrote back then really told it like it was. But, I digress...

I know a lot of veterans who have the letters they wrote home to their parents, their wives, their children, and other family members. That’s a great place to start.

Outlining Your Memoir

The first thing I did was to outline my time in the service. As I mentioned above, my main “sections” were:

1. Joining the Navy (the “decision” to join and the Induction Center “experience”).
2. **Boot Camp** (from check-in through graduation).
3. “A” School (Aviation Boatswain’s Mate–Handler; Lakehurst, NJ).
4. NAS Agana, Guam; both on-duty activities as well as off-duty.
5. *USS Kitty Hawk*. I thought it would be useful to not only describe what I did on the ship, but also provide a “tour” of the ship and the flight deck and describe flight operations in detail.
6. Westpac ’75 cruise; what we did during the cruise as well as the ports we visited. Well, at least what I remembered, if you know what I mean.
7. Discharge.

Three Years, Eleven Months, 29 Days—But, Who's Counting	
by Andy Adkins	
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(Click to enlarge)

That was pretty much it. Once I had this initial outline, I just started writing, knowing that I would need to “fine-tune” the grammar & spelling at a later time. Several other veteran friends read my early drafts and provided valuable insights and corrections. My wife and my sister helped me with the final editing. I’ve included my *Table of Contents* as a guide that may help.

The secret? **Just start writing** and know that you’re not going to finish this overnight, over a weekend, or within a month. It depends on whether you want to write about your complete Navy experience from start to finish, or if you want to only write about a few things: your choice. Both will be treasures for your family.

I didn’t write from beginning to end. I decided to first focus on certain times or stories, then expanded from there.

Warning: Navy “Language” ahead

As I began to write, I found my “voice,” so to speak. You may not know what that means now, but you will once you start writing. For me, that simply meant that I wanted to not only tell it like it was, but to insert certain **military and Navy terms** along the way, with explanation and definition.

After a while, I realized that I ought to put a disclaimer on the book. So, for a little extra humor, I added in the tagline: “*Warning: this book contains three languages: English, Navy, and Military. Some readers may find two of the languages offensive.*” I even included a glossary of terms, something I thought would be helpful.

Writing Prompts

I know several of you have probably *thought* about writing... *something*... about your time in the service, or perhaps your parents or your grandparents. But, in the same vein, you may also be asking yourself, “How do I begin?”

Here are a few “writing prompts” that may help you get the ball rolling. Simply take one and start writing—plain and simple. And, what’s best? You’ll not only surprise yourself at what you write, but you may also be well on your way to *writing your own memoir*.

While these writing prompts are geared toward the military, you should be able to adapt them to almost any style memoir. I’ll provide three prompts for each of the blogs in this 3-part series:

1. I joined the Navy (Army, USMC, USAF, or USCG) because (*why*).
2. I went to Boot Camp (*where*). The thing I remember most about Boot Camp was (*what*).
3. When I arrived at my first duty station, I thought to myself (*what*).

Next week, I’ll detail some of **my** additional “hands-on” research. I asked the Navy if I could visit and observe Boot Camp; I asked if I could spend time on an active carrier during flight ops. Did they allow me to do those things? Yes, they did! And more...

Part 2 – After 30+ Years, I’m Back on the Flight Deck

While I’m a Navy veteran, my dad was Army (80th Infantry Division) as well as my father-in-law (82nd Airborne Division); both fought in World War II. We had many *interesting* conversations before they passed away. I wrote a book and an oral history about them. That helped me better understand how they dealt with their own war memories.

I also know that my own children *and* their children will now know more about their fathers and grandfathers because of these priceless memoirs.

I encourage you to do the same—***write your own memoir***. If not for you, then for *your* children and *their* children.

You don’t have to be a veteran to write or capture a memoir. What about your parents or grandparents? Even though they may not have served in the military, they’ve still experienced life—in some cases, a long life—and they’ve got a lot to share... in their own words.

Several years ago, my wife conducted an oral history of her mother and learned a few things she didn't know growing up.

My gracious mother-in-law will be 99 years old next month and while her body is not as strong as in past years, her mind is still sharp. When she and her *younger* 90-year-old sister get together, it is a blast to watch and listen to them reminisce about growing up during the depression in Boston. So, it's important to capture those moments *and* that history; you may not get another chance.

Stay with me here. Back to my memoir...

All I had to do was ask

Soon after I started working on my memoir, I had a *brilliant* idea. Since I was in the Navy in the mid-70s, I thought it would be interesting to observe and compare today's recruits and sailors, both during boot camp as well as onboard a ship.

All I had to do was ask.

At the time, there was a **Navy Public Affairs** office located in Manhattan. I happen to be speaking at a legal technology conference in New York, so I made an appointment to meet with one of the Public Affairs officers. I had previously written a letter to them. But, what the hell, a face-to-face meeting certainly couldn't hurt.

I asked for three things:

1. To spend time in boot camp, observing new recruit arrivals, training, inspections, and graduation.
2. To spend time aboard an active aircraft carrier (preferably out of San Diego), to observe flight ops.
3. To land on a carrier and to launch from the carrier.

Guess what? The Navy granted all three wishes. There truly is a Navy genie... But, I digress.

Boot Camp, Then and Now

I spent three days at **Great Lakes RTC** and was able to not only observe, but also interview both Recruit Company Commanders and a few recruits. I wanted to compare and contrast today's recruit training to what I went through in the early 70s.

I was able to observe new recruits arriving off the bus (at midnight); receive their sea bags and uniforms; observe inspections and training exercises; and, best of all, attend graduation. I'm a sucker for military traditions and watching these young new recruits graduate was a great experience.



Great Lakes RTC, USS Marlinspike (2009),
Photo by Andy Adkins
(Click to enlarge)

A few things were obviously different. I went through Orlando RTC in '73. At that time, there were three Recruit Training Commands: Great Lakes, Orlando, and San Diego. Now, there is only one: Great Lakes RTC.

My “research” took me to [Great Lakes](#), Illinois in 2009. In the 70s, we had one Company Commander for 80 recruits. When I interviewed CCs at Great Lakes in 2009, there were three Company Commanders assigned to a company of 80 recruits.

Remember the “deck parties” during boot camp? You know, pushups, sit-ups, and those hellacious, “Hello Dollies,” which seemed to last for hours. Aching muscles and sore backs—built character, didn't it?

Well, today's CCs have an “exercise card” they carry with them, indicating the “limit” of daily recruit exercise time. I don't know exactly what those limits are, nor do I really care. But, the fact that there are now *limits* to the amount of PT per person per day is.... Well, I simply won't go there.

Also, while we had female Navy recruits at Orlando RTC, they were berthed and trained in a different part of the facility. The only time we'd see them was during church services, which made for some *interesting* “sermons.”

Now, male and female recruits train together. IMO, that's a good thing, especially because they now serve together onboard ships.

The PAO was gracious and accommodating and I was very appreciative of the time she provided to me, as well as being able to observe almost all activities, especially the graduation ceremonies. I love military traditions and was not disappointed.

Flight Deck Heaven

For those of you who served in the Navy, how many have yearned to go back aboard a ship... at sea... one more time? I know there are many, especially us older veterans. The younger ones? Well, maybe not so much. But, you eventually will. I can almost guarantee it.

While the *USS Midway* (San Diego), the *USS Yorktown* (Charleston, SC), and the *USS Intrepid* (New York) can provide some “experience,” face it – it's just not the same as being underway.

When I was discharged in July '77, all I wanted to do was to put as much distance between me and Kitty Hawk as I could. I was “done” with her and I was “done” with the Navy. But, for the past 25+ years (before writing my memoir), all I wanted to do was to spend one more day with her.

Anyone else feel that way?



*F-18 Hornet launching off USS Ronald Reagan CV-76 (2009)
Photo by Andy Adkins
(Click to enlarge)*

In March 2009, the Navy flew me out on a C-2 Greyhound COD (Carrier On-board Delivery), along with seven other VIPs (why they called us VIPs is beyond me), from NAS North Island (San Diego) to *USS Ronald Reagan*, CV-76. I spent two days aboard.

Let me tell you about it.

First of all, I figured they would let me observe flight deck operations from the Vulture's Row, near the bridge. Nope. My "guide" was a fellow ABH who was the Flight Deck Officer. He gave me a float coat and a cranial helmet and said, "Follow me!"

I was in AB "Hog Heaven."

After 30+ years, I was out on the flight deck again, right next to launching aircraft and right next to the foul line, watching recovering aircraft, just like the "old days." The sights, the sounds, and the smells took me back in time. The cool, clear breeze coming over the bow... just as I remembered.

And yes, I did walk up to the bow, leaned over the safety nets, opened up my jacket and "flew." Just like the old days. What a feeling!

Best of all? I had my camera. There were several areas I was told *not* to photograph, but none of those were of interest to me. I was *focused* (pun intended) on flight operations.



*F-18 Hornet trapping on USS Ronald Reagan, CV-76 (2009)
Photo by Andy Adkins*

The major difference I noticed was that most of the aircraft were various models of the F-18 Hornets. I guess that makes sense for maintenance, parts, mechanic training, pilot training, etc.

But I missed the variety of aircraft from my day: A-7 Corsairs, F-4 Phantoms, F-14 Tomcats, A-6 Intruders, EA-6 Prowlers, S-3 Vikings, A-3 Skywarriors, and A-5 Vigilantes. They were all great aircraft and served a purpose at one time. My favorite back then? The A-7 Corsair.

Since I had been in V-1 Division/Crash & Salvage, another major difference I noticed was the Crash equipment. No longer MB-5s (I wrote about them [earlier](#)). Now, the Crash Crew rides a smaller unit, the **P-25 Mobile Firefighting Unit**. It's smaller and more maneuverable. But, it's still Crash and they still have same motto, "***You Light 'em, We Fight 'em.***"

The Crash Crew even presented me with a custom-made “Crash & Salvage” red jersey. How cool was that?! I followed up with them and sent a few of my books.



Crash & Salvage Crew, USS Ronald Reagan, CV-76 (2009)
Photo by Andy Adkins

One more observation. Back in the mid-70s, there were 27 *active* aircraft carriers in service around the world; we had 14 crew members in Crash. We had to have 11 Crash crew on deck at all times during flight ops. That made for some long hours and at times, double shifts.

In 2009, aboard *USS Ronald Reagan*, I counted 26 crew members in Crash. I also note that the US Navy now only has 11 *active* aircraft carriers. So, more sailors are available for billets? I don't know the numbers, but it seemed more than a coincidence.

Getting There & Back



Andy Adkins, NAS North Island, preparing to embark on C-2 Greyhound to USS Ronald Reagan, CV-76 (2009)
Photo by Andy Adkins

During my 2½ years aboard *USS Kitty Hawk*, I witnessed (up-close) literally thousands of launches and recoveries. I always wondered what it would be like to land on a carrier. And better? To experience a catapult launch.

Well, my wish came true. The landing was cool, but the launch... spectacular!

It wasn't a fighter aircraft or a bomber—it was just the COD. But, to be able to experience a cat launch was something I'll **never forget**.

To this day, I can still “feel” that cat launch (in the COD, passengers face aft). But those two seconds of straining toward the rear of the aircraft, holding your breath, sucking in your chest, and not wanting it to end... and then that “release” ... well, those two seconds still stay with me, even today.

One more thing...

I figured since the Navy granted me *these* three wishes for writing *my* book (Boot Camp, Active Carrier, Land/Launch), I might look at writing another Navy book – this one about the **Blue Angels** [<wide grin>].

Writing Prompts

I mentioned in last week's blog about “writing prompts.” The idea is that **you have a story to tell**, whether it's just a simple, short one-page story about a certain event, a one-

chapter story about a tour of duty, or a start-to-finish memoir. Here's a few more writing prompts for this week:

1. The Navy (or Army, USMC, USAF, or USCG) gave me the ability to (*do what?*).
2. My job in the Navy (or Army, USMC, USAF, USCG) was (*what? Provide the details and what you did on a daily basis*).
3. The most influential veteran I served with in my military service was (*who?*).

Since I've covered the basics of writing and researching your memoir, next week I'll cover the final step: **Publishing your memoir**. In this case, what does it take to self-publish?

Part 3 – Publishing Your Memoir



My "Memoir"

Over the past two weeks, I blogged about the (1) [reasons you may want to write your own memoir](#) as well as how I (2) [asked the Navy to help me with my personal "research."](#) I also provided some simple tips and outlines to help you get started, as well as several "writing prompts."

BTW, I've already received several "*thank you, this is perfect timing*" responses to these posts. I know many of you have thought about writing your own memoir, so hopefully, these posts will also help *you* get started.

In this week's blog post—the final in this 3-part series—I'll provide several ideas on *how to self-publish your memoir*, should you choose to do so.

Step 1: Write

First, you have to write something... *anything* (that's a given). I cannot stress the importance of passing along your legacy, your memories, and your stories to family and friends. Even if it's just a short story or two. And, as I mentioned in the past, you don't have to be a veteran to write a memoir. Think about your parents or your grandparents. They all have wonderful stories, too, both growing up as well as experiences in their own lives. And if you have kids that want to help out, it's also a great way for them to bond with their grandparents.

Second, realize that once you start writing, you may want to end it after the first story/chapter/section. That's okay. You can always pick it up later. No one is forcing you to write this, so you're your own boss.

Lord knows how many times I said to myself, “*Self...* Screw it! (or some other *choice* Navy term) I can’t do this right now.” But, I’d pick it up a little while later and continue writing. Mine started out as a simple memoir, but morphed into a whole book, taking about a year, from start to finish. I didn’t know that at the time when I started.

Third, once you’ve written something, what’s your next step? *That* is the real question that only *you* can answer.

Examples of memoirs

Let me share with you some things I’ve learned over the past 20 years of working closely with veterans and their personal histories.

My dad (80th Infantry Division) kept a diary during the war—a day-to-day journal of his experiences during World War II. He started writing while he was laid up in a hospital for two months in England recovering from a wound. I wrote about this and my own WWII “journey” [earlier](#).

After my dad passed away in 1989, I started working on his diary and eventually turned it into a book: [***You Can’t Get Much Closer Than This—Combat with Company H, 317th Infantry Regiment, 80th Division***](#). It was published in October 2005 by [Casemate Publishers](#) and the following month, November 2005, it was selected as the *Book of the Month* for the [Military Book Club](#).

It’s now in its second printing. I *never* thought...

Dr. Rufus K. Broadaway			
Oral History Transcript			
August 27, 2019 - December 9, 2019			
Author: J. Adkins			
Location: Florida			
1.	August 26, 2019	National Guard in Europe (Overview)	4
2.	August 26, 2019	Early Childhood, College, War	10
3.	September 9, 2019	Crossing the Atlantic, Normandy Invasion	21
4.	September 23, 2019	12 Days, Normandy Jump	45
5.	October 15, 2019	First New State of Combat	61
6.	October 23, 2019	Left Big Company, Back to England	80
7.	November 22, 2019	Advanced School (Chief Physical Instructor, Airborne Camp, Market Garden)	91
8.	November 22, 2019	Death of the Bridge	104
9.	December 9, 2019	Writing DPM, Using Home	118

Oral History TOC of Dr. Rufus K. Broadaway (Click to enlarge)

My father-in-law, **Dr. Rufus K. Broadaway**, was an officer in the **82nd Airborne Division** and dropped into Normandy early in the morning on June 6, 1944. He was involved in the bloody battle for the La Fiere Causeway, just a short distance from Ste. Mere-Eglise. And, for a while, he was the *aide-de-camp* to General James Gavin, commander of the 82nd Airborne.

Rufus wrote several stories, not only about his airborne days, but also about his days as a surgeon in Miami. I also had an opportunity to conduct an extensive oral history of his time before and during the war.

In my work with the **80th Infantry Division**, I have read dozens of personal accounts by WWII veterans, many of which are available on the [80th Division website](#). Several memoirs eventually turned into books (www.80thdivision.com/books.html), most of which were

written by the individual veterans’ kids (like me).

Journaling to help heal

Memoirs do not need to be published works. Most of the time, they are memories that are personal and kept within the family. I also know many Post WWII, Vietnam, & GWOT veterans who write primarily to “get it out of their minds,” to “put pen to paper,” or to “let go of the past.”

Whatever the reason, writing things down (often called “journaling”) can help you clear your mind. That’s what many psychologists recommend for their patients, too.

It helps. It works. Journaling is *not* for everyone, but it *is* for anyone.

My point is this: if you have several pages, you can simply use your computer to print out copies, or you can take it to a copy/print shop (e.g., Kinko’s or Office Max). You may only want to share with family and friends. You may want to just send an email. Whatever works for you, it will be the right thing to do.

On the other hand, if you have a hundred pages or more (or less), maybe you *might* want to self-publish it using one of the many online “print-on-demand” services. That’s what I did. And that’s what I want to share with you now.

Self-publishing Services

There are literally dozens of self-publishing platforms and services online; more than when I self-published a few years ago in 2014. Just Google “self publishing” to find a list. While there are many, the following are what I would consider the top five.

My disclaimers are: a) I Googled these self-publishing companies myself, but I was already aware of these and b) I used CreateSpace to publish my Navy book and the six 80th Infantry Division books (written by Robert Murrell, past historian of the 80th Division). I recently ported them over to Kindle Direct Publishing.

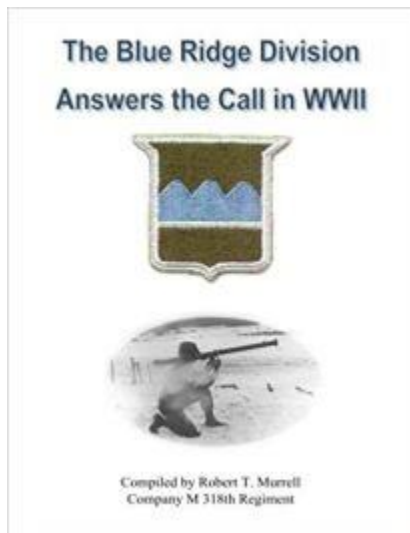
- [Kindle Direct Publishing](#) (Amazon)
- [iBooks](#) (Apple)
- [IngramSpark](#)
- [Smashwords](#)
- [Bookbaby](#)

It might be advisable to spend a little time researching these various services. While Amazon KDP holds the market share, the other self-publishing services may have more benefits that are closer to your own needs.

Book Publishing Templates

The two most common book template sizes are 8½” x 11” and 6” x 9”. I’ve used both and let me tell you why.

For my own Navy book, I chose the 6” x 9” because IMO, that’s the most common size paperback book. Most of the books I get from the library (both hard cover and paperback) are this size. It really works well for self-publishing.



Example of 8”x11” format
(Click to enlarge)

For Bob Murrell’s [80th Infantry Division series of books](#), I chose the 8½” x 11” size because, well, that’s what Bob used. For many (*many*) years, Bob had his books copied and bound (plastic spine) to ship to customers. But, copy prices went up and profits went down.

A couple of years before Bob passed away, he allowed me to digitize his books and put them on Amazon KDP to order and “print on demand.” The primary reason was to keep the legacy and the memories alive, and to *not* lose this valuable history. All proceeds for Bob’s books continue to go to the 80th Division Veterans Association.

Amazon CreateSpace (and the other self-publishing services) all have ready-made templates (Microsoft Word, PDF, etc.) in different sizes (e.g., 6”x9”, 8½”x11”) for you to simply download and use for your memoir. Whichever template size you choose, I don’t think you can go wrong.

Voila! You’re almost there.

You can create your own book cover, too. I used my own photos (or the public domain Navy PR photos) for my Navy book. Bob Murrell had already created the “logos” for the covers of his 80th Division books, so I simply used those that already existed.

There are tools to not only help you with the formatting & cover creation, but also to automatically review the uploaded book. There is a “preview tool” that lets you “see” how your book will print. These tools exist for color or black & white, for hard cover or paperback, and for electronic book readers.

And, if you want, **name your price** for your memoir.

A quick word about ISBNs

Keep in mind when you use an application like Amazon KDP, they will require you to have an ISBN number; it’s free and can be assigned automatically, but the ISBN number is assigned to the “publisher.” That might be you (it was for *my* Navy book), or it could be for a service provider/consultant. That’s fine, nothing wrong with it. But, it may limit you in the

future should you want to publish it with a traditional publisher. If you want, you can purchase your own ISBN number.

Without going into details about ISBNs, here's a link to an excellent short tutorial from **Self-Publishing School** about ISBNs and how to order your own. <https://self-publishingschool.com/isbn/>

It really is that easy!

I'll admit, I'm a computer guy and pretty comfortable with these types of tools. But, if you need help, there are several self-help "tutorials" as well as a vast online community forum. And, if you want someone to help with along the way, there are also consultants, both directly with Amazon as well as independent companies.

What about eBook formats?

If you want to make your book available electronically, there are several different formats. Of course, you can leave it in MS Word format or convert it to PDF format—that's fairly easy and I know a lot of people who do that. If you want to convert to an eReader format, Amazon KDP has an online tool for that.

I've also used an application called [*Calibre*](#), which I find very helpful. Using *Calibre*, I can convert my book into a number of different eBook formats. This is helpful when I want to share my book(s) with people that use a Kindle or Nook (or other eReaders).

What about the costs?

If you self-publish and do the work yourself (write, edit, and upload to a self-publishing service), the cost is zero-nilch-null-zip; at least, it is on Amazon KDP.

The *only* costs for my Navy book were for the printed copies I ordered, both for the proofs and for the extra copies for family and friends. The cost was about \$5 each (my book is 246 pages, black & white print, color covers). If you print your entire book in color, the costs will understandably be a bit higher.

And, to answer your next question, I do have photos in my Navy book, but I chose to print them in black & white to save money.

Yeah... I'll use Amazon KDP again.

Writing Your Own Memoir – Step-by-Step

So with all that behind us, how do you write and publish *your* memoir? Here is Andy's *simple* step-by-step instruction:

1. Organize your memoir into “sections.” For example (Navy), Boot Camp, “A” school, duty station(s). This is often called “outlining” your book.
2. Gather your letters, photos albums, and other memorabilia to help remember people, places, duty stations, and dates.
3. If you want to elaborate, provide further details for each section. For example, I wrote about what I did while on duty as well as what I did while off-duty. Well, at least those things that I felt I could publicly share [*(wide grin)*].
4. Write, edit, re-write, and then edit again. Give it some time—memories often trigger more memories. And, you may find yourself wanting to include more.
5. Have someone else read what you wrote for two purposes: one, readability (this is how the story flows); and two, accuracy (you want to make sure the facts are correct).
6. Then, find a way to publish or self-publish. There are several self-publishing avenues. I used Amazon CreateSpace, now known as Kindle Direct Publishing.
7. Order some copies and pass them along to your family, friends, and shipmates. You don't know how much they will appreciate this gesture.

If I can inspire one or two of you to memorialize your “journey,” then my task has been successful.

Writing Prompts

The past couple of blog posts, I've provided several writing prompts—the purpose is to help you get started in writing your own memoir. When you start working on your memoir, you may feel overwhelmed. Some of you spent an entire lifetime career in the military; others may have only spent two years. But, you've still got stories to share. Here are a few more prompts:

1. When I left the service, walking off the ship / out the main gate for the last time, I felt like (*what?*).
2. When I got home, knowing I would not have to go back, I wanted to (*what?*).
3. When I think back on my time in the service (how many years ago), the thing that stands out most in my mind is (*what?*).

When you're done, or if you've already completed your memoir, drop me a line. I'd love to know who else had written a book about their service.

About the Author

I'm actually in my fifth (or is it sixth?) career. I spent four years in the U.S. Navy during the 70s, most of which was on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier as a Crash & Salvage firefighter ("Red Shirt") and an aircraft director ("Yellow Shirt").

After my honorable discharge, I became a firefighter with the City of Gainesville, Florida while attending the local community college, full-time.

By education and training, I have a couple of degrees in electronics engineering (BSEE '82, ME '89) from the University of Florida (Go Gators!) and spent five years designing and developing microprocessor-based computer systems in the 80s.

I then turned to consulting, working with lawyers all over the country as an independent legal technology consultant (Adkins Consulting Group, LLC).

I had an opportunity to create the Legal Technology Institute at the University of Florida Levin College of Law, where I continued to provide technology consulting to the legal profession. I was also the law school IT director for a few years as well as an adjunct professor, teaching Law Practice Management to 2Ls and 3Ls. I left UFLaw in June 2010 with a main goal of "slowing down." I privatized the Legal Technology Institute and continued to consult with lawyers around the country.

Just when I thought I was "slowing down," a previous consulting client called, asking if I would come work with him as the Chief Information Officer for a large law firm. We moved to West Virginia for four years and I was able to help the firm grow from 220 attorneys and 10 offices to 350 attorneys and 15 offices in six states. We loved our time in West Virginia; though, being a lifelong "Gator," it was a little hard to get used to saying, "Go 'Eers." After four years, we needed to move back to Florida for family reasons.

Just when I thought I was "slowing down" (again), a previous employer called, asking if I would be interested in helping with a software startup company. I spent a couple of years working with a great group of folks.

I hope I'm slowing down.

But then, I now have the "writing bug."

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