

Make Your Bed

reviewed by Col Eric L. Chase, USMCR(Ret)

After a storied 37-year special operations career, ADM William H. McRaven retired from the Navy in 2014, having served as a SEAL officer, rising to four-star rank to command the U.S. SOCOM (Special Operations Command). Among many notable achievements, he oversaw Operation NEPTUNE SPEAR, the 2011 SEAL mission that ended with the killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

As he approached retirement, ADM McRaven gave a commencement speech at the University of Texas that instantly became a YouTube sensation. At the podium, in uniform, he issued a simple, startling proposition for his audience of new Longhorn graduates:

If you make your bed every morning, you will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride and it will encourage you to do another task and another and another. By the end of the day, that one task completed will have turned into many tasks completed. Making your bed will also reinforce the fact that little things in life matter.

He then proceeded to explain the “ten lessons [he] learned from basic SEAL training that hopefully will be of value.”

Three years later, the Admiral now targets a world audience in *Make Your Bed*, an expansion of his campus oration. Derived entirely from active duty experiences and recollections, he delivers his lesson across 10 short chapters. He shares moving and powerful factual anecdotes that bring to life qualities of excellence and success borne of character, courage, stamina, resilience, integrity, and grit.

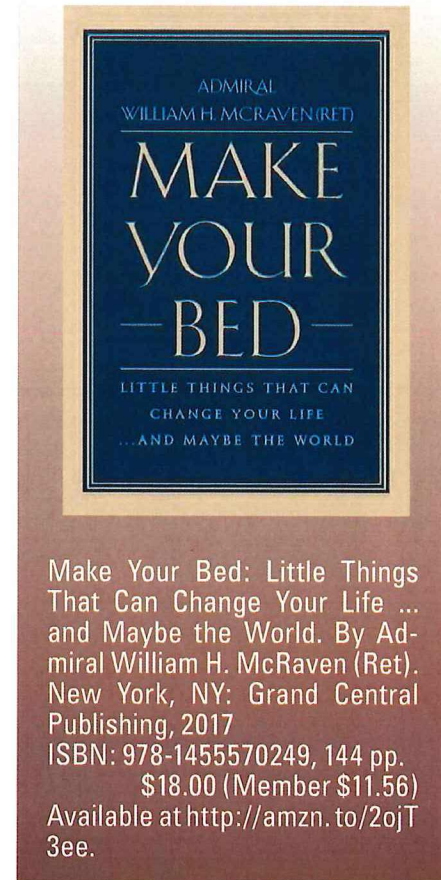
>Col Chase, an attorney in private practice in New Jersey, served as an Infantry Platoon Commander in Vietnam. He retired from the Marine Corps Reserve in 1998 after more than 30 years of active and Reserve service.

Each vignette is a story unto itself, gripping, suspenseful, and heroic. Yet the very different stories are hardly disconnected—they all portray stellar traits and actions of servicemembers that inspire admiration and respect.

ADM McRaven is substantive and persuasive; he illustrates his lessons as he depicts people making hard—often dangerous—choices and accepting risks, sometimes of death or grievous injury. After relating his account of a harrowing, but successful, hostage rescue mission he oversaw in Iraq in 2004, he summarizes that

[a]ssuming risks was typical of our special operations forces ... However, contrary to what outsiders saw, the risk was calculated, thoughtful, and well planned. Even if it was spontaneous, the operators knew their limits but believed in themselves enough to try.

The author’s compact and concise vignettes avoid tiresome platitudes that plague most “motivational” or “inspirational” writings, although he does employ an occasional truism (as in, “If you want to change the world, don’t back down from the sharks,” or, “Start singing when you’re up to your neck in mud”). But his brief, riveting narratives compel bottom-line conclusions that are fitting, not at all trite or tiresome. ADM McRaven mines the stirring realities



Make Your Bed: Little Things That Can Change Your Life ... and Maybe the World. By Admiral William H. McRaven (Ret). New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2017. ISBN: 978-1455570249, 144 pp. \$18.00 (Member \$11.56) Available at <http://amzn.to/2ojT3ee>.

of combat or training events alongside the heroic and dedicated people that personify the “lessons.” His literary strategy works. He knows how, in small capsules, to tell engrossing, suspenseful stories that happen to be true, and he teaches by example, not by preaching.

The first-person accounts excite, move, and often surprise the reader who will quickly identify with him and an extraordinary cast of characters. Some descriptions are poignantly sad, but also infused with hope, compassion, and dignity, as when ADM McRaven and then-LtGen John Kelly (now Secretary, Department of Homeland Security) comforted the families of 38 Navy SEALs and others who perished in a helicopter shot down in Afghanistan. LtGen Kelly, ADM McRaven recalls, had lost his Marine son, 1stLt Robert Kelly, who was killed in Afghanistan, and he was there to relate to grieving families in a way few others, if any, could.