

He Exorcised War By Writing About It

BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN
Charles Crawford of Olde Towne was born to be a Marine, and, apparently born to fight in the Korean War, that conflict so easily forgotten by the American public.

A quick trip through its horrors is possible for buffs of military history in Crawford's recent book, *The Four Deuces*, subtitled *A Korean War Story*. In fact, anyone who loves a good story, well told, will appreciate this one, while learning a significant history lesson.

The author struggled with characteristic stubbornness to get to Korea, then exorcised his experiences there by writing about them. His book, published in 1989 by Presidio, is an account praised by other Korean warriors, as well as critics everywhere. It was chosen as a monthly selection by the Military Book Club and came out in paperback by Pocket Books last December.

Crawford, who moved to Brunswick County with his wife Joann last fall, has a deep-seated love for the Marine Corps. "My father was a Marine and I couldn't wait till I was old enough to join," he declared. Now, the impetuous, fast-talking veteran, tattoos on both burly arms, seems to embody all the popular traditions of that branch of the service.

His story-telling ability, applied to the daily life and death on that Asian battlefield, brings the reader into close contact with mud, blood and the weaponry that was the fighting man's close companion.

The 4.2-inch chemical mortar, for instance, gave Crawford's book its name. "The four deuce," as the Marines called it, lobbed chemical

munitions over a high angle trajectory and could also fire high explosive and white phosphorus shells, which were as lethal as a 105 mm howitzer. The four deuce was considered an effective way to keep Chinese and North Koreans out of Allied lines.

Use of this particular mortar is only part of NCO Crawford's war story. He tells of his efforts to get to Korea, the two wounds suffered there and the friends he saw die.

He also brings to life salty career officers, scared greenhorns, the funny and the tragic, all expressed in the colorful language one expects of a Marine.

As another writer, with eight published novels under his belt, wrote to Crawford, "You have written the small, nasty classic book on a small, nasty war."

There is nothing political in this account, either. The book jacket proclaims, in Crawford's words: "I do not have a cause to plead or an ax to grind."

Almost 40 years after the experiences detailed in *The Four Deuces*, Crawford still hears from other participants in the conflict. They tell him, "You told my story."

He is proud of his own participation. "I was credited with killing 84 Chinese or North Korean Communists during that war," he said. Asked how he felt about that, he took a long moment to reply. "The only way I could live with it was to write about it," he said. "Writing is therapy."

This intrepid gentleman has lived a full and courageous life. Born in Pennsylvania, he enlisted in the Marines at age 17. However, he was

21 and into his reenlistment, on the heels of military action in Korea, before he made it to the front lines in 1951.

"I hate to say it, but I was glad when the Korean invasion actually happened," Crawford chuckled. "The economy was so depressed and I'd held four jobs in the last nine months for companies that went broke. Also, I just wanted to go to war."

Aside from combat wounds, Crawford suffered two heart attacks during his time in Korea, both while on Okinawa, and finally received a military discharge in 1969.

"That same day I was hired by the Wilmington Star-News," he said. "They hired me because they read some short stories I wrote during the war."

For the next six years, he served as wire editor and night news editor and covered the police beat. Ill health and bad luck dogged him, however. In 1976, after an operation that removed part of his stomach, an automobile accident just outside the newspaper building, and following a devastating house fire, he left the newspaper.

Crawford owed his college education to a Star-News editor, he said. The late James Wilson told him he needed education beyond high school, so he enrolled in the University of North Carolina at Wilmington and worked his newspaper schedule around classes.

His only other training has been a Famous Writer's Course, but the basis of *The Four Deuces* and all the short stories that came out of the war was a small notebook and daily notations.



STAFF PHOTO BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN
RETIRED MARINE, C.S. Crawford, pursues his writing and carpentry careers from a new home base in Olde Towne.

"All the time in Korea, I kept a little notebook in my shirt pocket," he related, "and every chance I got, I wrote in it about everything that was happening. Then, when an opportunity came to send mail, I tore out the sheets and sent them to my wife. Later I used all those notes in my writing."

He pointed out, however, "I wasn't writing for publication at the time. I just wanted to rid myself of the war."

Crawford was not finished with journalism in 1976. After finishing his education, he worked on a Burlington newspaper for two years. Then he took a building superintendent's job at a Presbyterian church.

"I got a lot of work on houses, then, too," he noted. "I've always like working on houses and restoring furniture."

Nine months into the church job, Crawford came down with mitral valve deficiency. This was the deadliest blow his body had yet suffered.

"I fought just to stay alive," he said, "and the doctor finally had to make me a partially new heart."

Now he's fully retired, building an addition to his Olde Towne residence, restoring antique furniture and writing.

Another side to this crusty ex-Marine is his family life. He and Joann, married 42 years, have six children and six grandchildren, all important to Crawford.

"And I have another book being considered for publication," he said. "It's a novel, *And Only the Losers Win*, about the lives of five men from 1936 to 1964. It's not exactly about war, but these men ARE all Marines and some of their experiences are in combat."

Instead of worrying about his health or brooding over war experiences or book publication, Crawford said he says just two prayers every day. "In the morning, I say, 'Thank you for the night,' and at night, I say, 'Thank you for the day.'"

RAMPAGE REALTY

(919)842-4663

P.O. Box 344, Supply, NC 28462

DEALER **DELTEC HOMES**



Evelyn Bullock, Realtor
 (919)842-3535



SEEING IS BELIEVING. Custom built. Lots of oak, etched glass, skylights, dressing room, giant-relaxing whirlpool, through private gates. Reduced to \$34,900.



SELLER SAYS SELL! 3-BR, 2-bath home with formal and informal areas, deck, fenced yard, garage, office and sitting on a hill. Only \$59,900.

LOTS

River Run Plantation. Private. Zoned for single-wide mobile home. Tennis courts, pool, clubhouse, amenities. \$10,000.
 Hernando's Hideaway, 1.75 acres. \$15,000.



TERRIFIC BUY at \$59,500. Channel Harbor condo on West Ocean Isle Beach. Sleeps 6. Overlooks ocean, ICW and marsh. Furnished.



IF THE RED LIGHT DOESN'T CATCH YOU, less than 5 minutes to the beach. 3-BR, 2-bath home. Affordable at \$29,900.



DELTEC HOMES

A unique and versatile concept in housing for:

- Residences
- Vacation Homes
- Condominium Developments
- Offices
- Churches
- Resort Projects

Watch for our **DELTEC** model coming soon at our office site!

"Just Call Home" — (919)842-HOME



Office located on Hwy. 130, 1/4 mi. from Holden Beach Causeway



Carolina Custom Upholstery

"Quality Craftsmanship and Prompt Service"

- AUTO, BOAT & FURNITURE UPHOLSTERY
- CONVERTIBLE TOPS
- SUNROOFS
- HEADLINERS
- CARPET
- TONNEAU COVERS

579-1228

Intersection of Hwy. 17 & 904, Grissettown