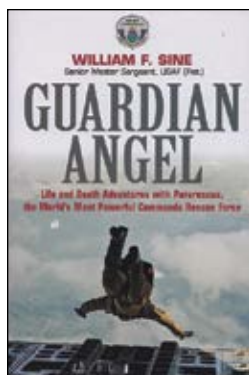


Guardian Angel: Life and Death Adventures with  
Pararescue, the World's Most Powerful Commando Rescue Force

William F. Sine

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Review by R. Alan Hester



In 1969, Robert Burt Smith, a member of the famed Band of Brothers during World War II and a CIA operative in Laos during the Vietnam War, wrote his daughter a poignant letter that captures the temperament of many servicemembers. In response to her angst regarding the violent turmoil both within and without the United States, he wrote: “Someday there may

be no need for my kind of person—the experts in violence—and the world will be a better place when that day comes. I will be the first to shout welcome to that happy time, but in the meantime there are tigers in the jungle, and the defenseless must be defended—which means killing tigers.” It is this conscious shouldering of the burden of the responsibility for the welfare of others that imbues SMSgt (Ret.) William F. Sine’s memoir *Guardian Angel: Life and Death Adventures with Pararescue, the World’s Most Powerful Commando Rescue Force*.

The author begins his reflection on a long career with a story that captures at once the attention of the reader and the essence of the book. His first chapter, “*Into the Valley*,” recounts a challenging rescue mission in Afghanistan. After stepping on a landmine, a member of a five-man Australian Special Air Service (SAS) team required evacuation. Not only would the pararescue (PJ) team have to land near a minefield, which added to the complexity of the mission, it was a night jump in an active

combat zone, into which commanders are reluctant to deploy PJs. These conditions required the author to call on his more than two decades of training and experience to plan for and lead the first mission in pararescue history in which a “PJ team has ever parachuted to a patient during a combat engagement.”

The remainder of the book chronicles the author’s experiences from volunteering — to becoming a pararescuer — to life after retirement. In doing so, he elucidates stories of courage, both his and others. From unpublicized recovery missions in Ethiopia to challenges faced after the infamous Khobar Towers bombing, the author explores in great detail his memories of trying times that exemplify the mission of a PJ. He also shares the challenges of rearing a child as a single parent in an occupation that requires lengthy separation, which allows readers to understand the totality of experiences. The most far-reaching aspect of his work is that it focuses on the missions that define the ways in which PJs are different from other Special Operations Forces.

In the end, his work is a fine memoir that provides insight into the world of a career PJ. His stories of adventures are equitable in attention paid to both his and his comrades’ accomplishments. His style of storytelling has a touch of bravado that is engaging; yet it does not venture into the realm of hyperbole. Moreover, he is not reserved in his stated efforts of attracting America’s best into this “gratifying career choice” and that he feels “like a born-again proselytizer, obligated to spread the joyous word.” *Guardian Angel* is successful testimonial.