

Librarian's Shelf by Jill Owens

CHS grad featured in book

Many people know that nonfiction can be an even more gripping read than fiction. Evidence of this is the book, "The Only Thing Worth Dying For" featuring 1973 Columbus High grad, Lieutenant Colonel Steve Hadley, a physician and pilot who flies to the rescue of his Green Beret friends.

The book not only offers an historical perspective about the U.S.A.'s initial involvement in Afghanistan, it is full of riveting David and Goliath battles as the Green Beret team works its way through dangerous territory with the then little known Hamid Karzai. While the large Northern Alliance makes headway in the northern part of the country, this lone small team is secretly inserted in the south to wage unconventional warfare. It's definitely a "page turner." I had trouble putting it down.

As noted in the book, it is not pro-war or anti-war, it just tells what happened.

The author, Eric Blehm relied on nearly all first-hand accounts to the point that he held off on publishing the book until he could confirm details with Karzi himself just a few years ago. This is not a book published with rumors and hearsay.

During the action-packed journey, readers learn about the difficulties and dangers of discerning whether the locals were friendly or enemies, misunderstandings caused by cultural differences, working with untrained and unpredictable guerrillas, language barriers, and extreme terrain.

Readers also learn how cerebral these warriors are. The detailed planning, the mental and emotional strength, the high tech equipment, and the on-the-spot analyzing and reacting when confronted with sudden and unpredictable situations is even more impressive than holding up so well under the physical hardships gone through day after day.

At every moment of the team's progress readers realize that air superiority is critical to the team's success. Air support comes in the form of transport, supplies drops, reconnaissance, cover, attacks, and rescue. Tragically, the air also brought an "errant bomb."

It is difficult to write about this book without giving away what happens, but you should know that Hadley flies into a situation he had every reason to believe he may not survive, and saves lives. When speaking with his mother, I learned that Hadley, who graduated from West Point in 1977, led an interesting, impressive, and varied career.

Readers can't get a better story than one that really happened, or better fleshed-out characters than people who actually exist. I've never had such emotional involvement in a work of fiction as I had when reading this much acclaimed nonfiction book. So give nonfiction a try, and start with "The Only Thing Worth Dying For."

Recent memorials given to the Columbus Library Foundation were received from W. M. Ferguson in memory of Norman Kummetz, and Stan and Dianne Musil in memory of Margaret "Peg" Schmit. Lloyd and Kay Castner donated in honor of King Ferdinand/Fred Bellum and Queen Isabella/Judy Trautwein.