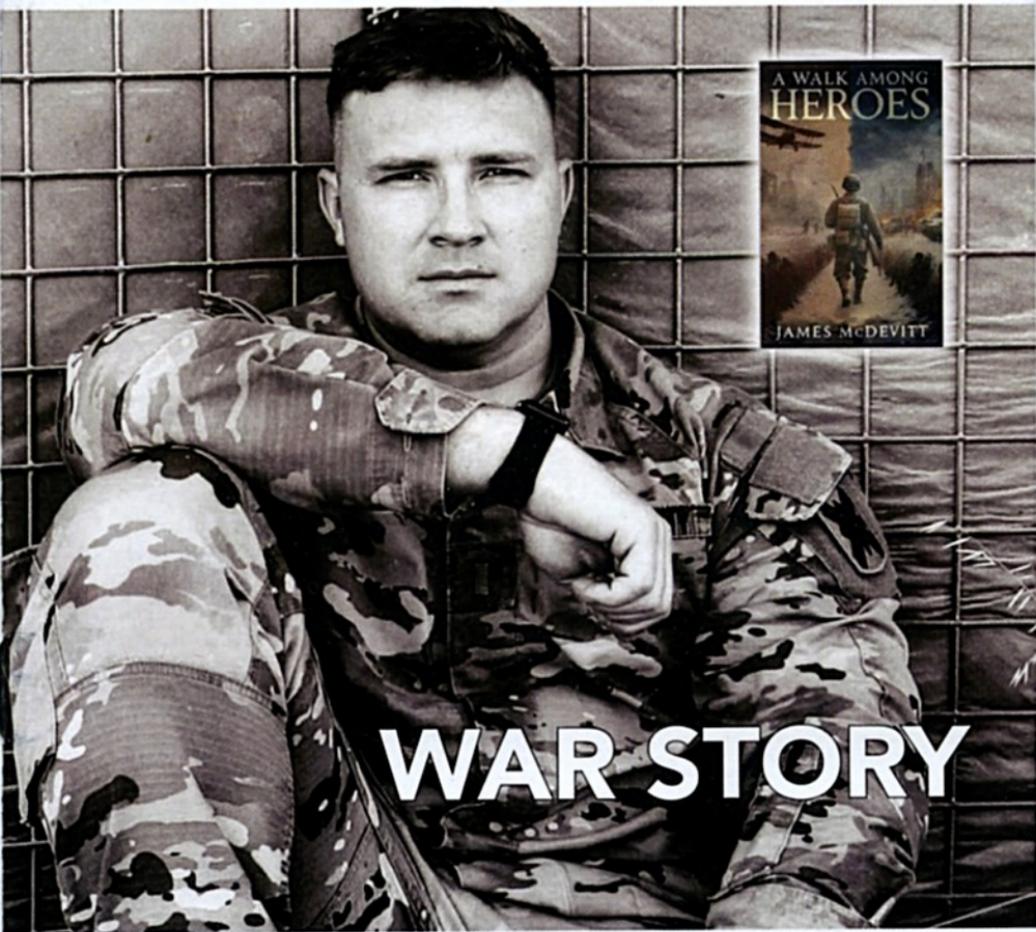


# Salute

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## WAR STORY

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# War Story

Debut novel

*A Walk Among Heroes*

by U.S. Army veteran

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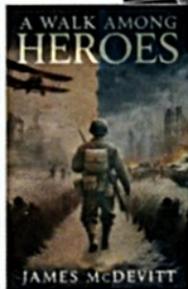
by DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ

A compelling new voice entered the literary scene in 2025 with the publication of *A Walk Among Heroes*, a work of historical fiction that powerfully illustrates the overwhelming impact of war on ordinary men and women.

Inspired by true events, this debut novel by author James McDevitt draws on his more than 20 years of military service as a U.S. Army infantry officer and combat veteran with deployments to Iraq and Syria, as well as more than a decade as a firefighter. McDevitt says he drew upon his personal experience and a lifetime of observing what makes people endure, serve, and matter to craft his fictional account of generational sacrifice and the quiet strength of men shaped by war and love.

"War is inherently romantic," he declares. "We all have vastly different stories, but we feel the same emotions. War is also addicting. It's incredibly hard to be on such a high platform being a part of something bigger than yourself. Then you come home to a broken family, and no one understands. Imagine being on top of an unarmored vehicle behind a .50-caliber machine gun swerving through overpasses so you're not grenade-d in the desert one month, and the next month you're stuck in traffic in the rain by yourself on some lonely road in Alabama."

McDevitt says he wrote the book to give readers "a better understanding of what it's like to put your life



on the line for what you believe in with the people you love. I felt it was important to get across how veterans feel coming home from war. That's been an emphasis and something that's stood out to readers, especially military spouses. Readers have repeatedly told me that they have a newfound respect for veterans and saw things they never even considered."

*A Walk Among Heroes* is set during the unimaginable challenges and extraordinary sacrifices of World War II and centers on the characters of T.J., a young soldier returning from war, and Smitty, a World War I flying ace haunted by the ghosts of his past. "The story weaves a rich tapestry of interconnected lives shaped by war, hope and resilience," states the publisher. "Anchored by a love story that defies time, the novel masterfully bridges two world wars, exploring the bonds of family, the weight of duty, and the ultimate cost of heroism. *A Walk Among Heroes* isn't just a novel—it's a testament to the power of love, memory, and courage in the face of humanity's darkest hours. This beautifully crafted tale will inspire and resonate with readers long after the final page is turned."

A self-described "military brat," McDevitt was born in Hawaii and lived in three different states before his

family moved to Mobile, Alabama, where his father served in the U.S. Coast Guard. "I had to make friends and leave them every other year," he recalls. "I remember crying at goodbyes, but then a new place always felt like a new start. I was the kid from California, so naturally, my teammates called me 'Sunshine.' Mobile is where I played football for the worst high school in the state; football was my first love."

McDevitt pursued his football dream, but because he did not receive a scholarship, he joined the Army Reserves the day after high school as an 88M truck driver; he was in Iraq six months later as an escort gunner. He continued to play football between deployments for the University of Southern Mississippi and the University of Kentucky before giving up on football and focusing on his military career, eventually becoming a captain and the commander of the 1-173rd HHC.

While serving as a platoon leader in Syria, McDevitt met his future wife—7,000 miles away—on a dating app; the couple had their first baby girl in March 2025 and currently have another baby on the way, which made him rethink his priorities. "I've said no to my second command with my favorite company so I can stay home and be a family man," he comments. "A wife and children have always been my biggest dream. It's such an incredible experience to be a father. I'm proud of myself for actually doing it too. It's a hard thing to step away from when it's defined your life—especially when you're offered to be the leader of all the men you've come to love. I thought about all the fathers I've deployed with that had to leave their family behind and realized I had a choice. My commander was understanding with my choice, and I can't thank him enough. They are currently deployed to Egypt now. I think about all the moments I would have missed with my nine-month-old. I'm so grateful for that decision; my wife is too."

The author holds a bachelor's degree from the University of South Alabama and has accrued more than 200 credit hours of continuing education. McDevitt describes himself as a craftsman at heart, and he is an experienced woodworker and builder, known for designing cutting boards and charcuterie boards. He is also an avid athlete, regularly training in jiu-jitsu, swimming, strength conditioning, and endurance.

McDevitt credits his military service with having a profound impact on his life. "It taught me patience, resilience and humility," he points out. "Life is largely taken for granted. I was a kid in the most dangerous job in the Global War on Terrorism, saved only by the

vehicles we were assigned to. I've been shot at, IED'ed, mortared, rocketed, and drone-bombed. All those close encounters, and I'm still here. How incredibly lucky I am to be alive. I transitioned into being a firefighter as a way to mimic the brotherhood and structure. I guess you can say a part of me still tries to help others in their time of need. A lot of my experiences translate over, heavily, in the fire department

"I was recently called a hero by a boy I carried to the ambulance when he hurt his face pretty bad," McDevitt continues. "His grandma took him and his friend to see me at the station. They both had a copy of my book. The boy's reconstructive surgery went well. I was thinking about what it was to be a hero. I cringed. Do I want to be a hero? Absolutely. Every man wants to be a hero and die in some heroic firefight. Do I feel that I am? The answer is no. I don't feel like a hero at all. I have to fight away the tears for all the times I could have been a hero but wasn't—those I could have saved but didn't. Just last month, I couldn't save a five-year-old boy in a house fire. I wasn't a hero that day. God, I wish I had been. I think about it daily."

The author drew heavily upon the men and women he served with in writing the book. "We all share



something most will never share," he muses. "I've made a lot of best friends for life through our time served in Iraq and Syria. It'll be something we reflect on for our whole lives.

"This is what I also tried to convey in my book: A story of two wars that seamlessly come together through the eyes of two veterans," he adds. "It took Smitty (one of the novel's main characters) his whole life to find out he was exactly where he needed to be at all the right moments. Most of the main characters in *A Walk Among Heroes* are my best friends—their personalities personified into the immortality of time." 🇺🇸