

# Man writes about father's war experiences

**JOHN REYNOLDS**

THE (SPRINGFIELD) STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

SPRINGFIELD — Growing up, Paul McDevitt never knew what his father did during World War II.

About six years ago, all that changed when he was given a box full of old letters that his late father, Joseph B. McDevitt, had written home during the war. The letters revealed a perilous career as the leader of a group of landing boats from the attack transport ship USS Leon. It was the elder McDevitt's job to lead the boats to shore under heavy enemy fire, unload the Marines, and then return to the Leon so the whole process could be repeated.

As McDevitt thumbed through more and more of the letters, he realized that his father had participated in amphibious assaults at Saipan, Palau, Leyte, Luzon and Okinawa.

"My dad was like many of those veterans. He came home from the war, and I think he tried very hard to forget the things he had seen and the things he had done. He never talked to any of my brothers or sisters or to me about the war," McDevitt said. "When I read about the five amphibious assaults he participated in as boat group leader for an attack transport. I was unbelievably stunned."

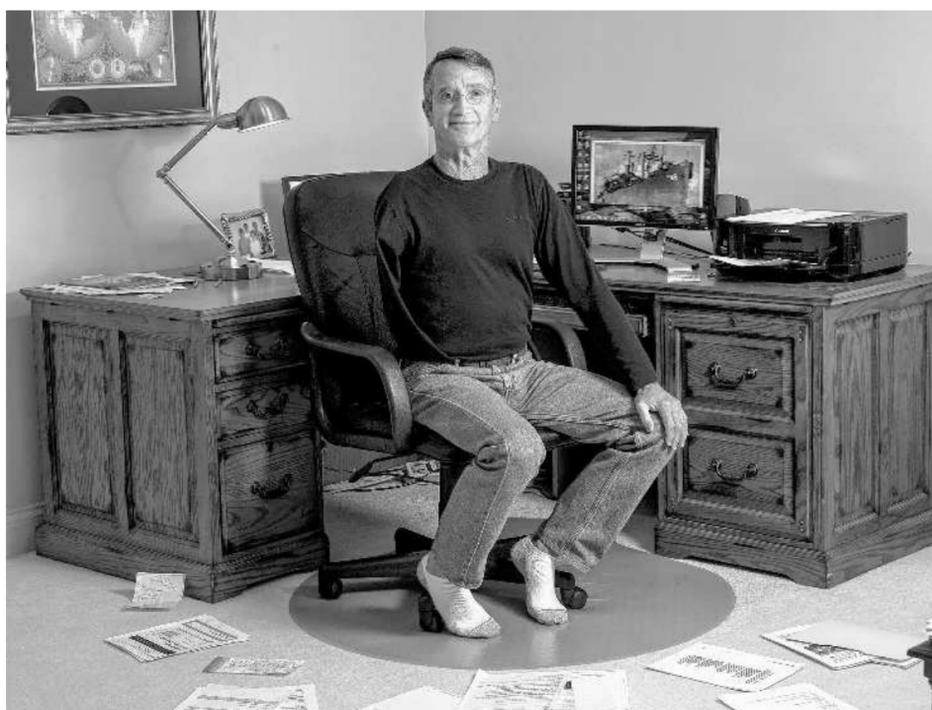
## 'Fell off my chair'

McDevitt, professor emeritus in business administration at the University of Illinois Springfield, was so moved by his father's letters he decided to write a book based on them. "All Came Home" is available online from Amazon and Barnes and Noble Booksellers.

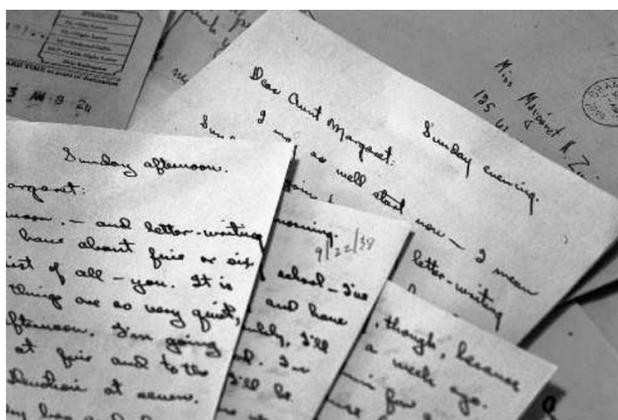
While his father's letters were the main inspiration, McDevitt also did historical research to provide context.

He learned that as boat group commander, it was his dad's job to get all of the boats from the Leon in the proper formation and then lead the first wave of the assault. During his dad's initial assault at Saipan, his boat was hit by enemy fire.

McDevitt said he knew his father had been given the Purple Heart for being injured, but he didn't know any of the details.



Paul McDevitt poses in his office June 15 where he spent five years researching and writing a book about his father, the late Joseph B. McDevitt, after receiving a box full of old letters his father had written during World War II.



Paul McDevitt displays letters June 15 his father, the late Joseph B. McDevitt, had written during World War II.

He got some of those details while doing research at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland.

"I was reading a report of the first amphibious assault at Saipan in the Mariana Islands. They talked about boats coming back with 41 wounded Marines and sailors, one of whom was

Lt. j.g. Joseph McDevitt, our boat group commander. I read that and about fell off my chair," McDevitt said.

After the war, McDevitt's father remained in the Navy, where he worked as a lawyer in the judge advocate general's office. He rose through the ranks, and eventually became the judge

advocate general of the Navy with the rank of rear admiral.

"I always knew he was a successful lawyer for the Navy, but I never knew what he did during the war," McDevitt said.

For research, McDevitt got in touch with some of the sailors who served with his father on the Leon. One answered a lot of technical questions and also provided some insight into why his father might not have wanted to talk about his experiences.

The former sailor said that after the Marines secured the beaches, the Navy boat crews helped remove the dead Marines.

"He said that really made a strong impression on them because they were afraid they would see a young Marine they had just put on the beach two days earlier, and here he is floating facedown in the water. ... He said it was a really hard thing to do, but they did it during most of the assaults," McDevitt said.

## Emotional bond

Over the years, McDevitt's

father attended at least five reunions with former shipmates from the Leon. Paul's stepmother said it was clear that the men still had a strong connection.

"Every time they would go to these reunions, the men would hug each other and cry like babies. It was clear there was a strong emotional bond among all those crewmen," McDevitt said.

John Carrigan, president of the World War II Illinois Veterans Memorial board, said it is not unusual for veterans to keep their wartime experiences among themselves.

"Some of the veterans on our board, I don't think we ever knew the full story because they wouldn't really talk about it totally," Carrigan said. "Many families who donated money for a memorial brick said, 'My dad didn't talk about the war.'"

Carrigan noted that his group sponsors an ongoing program in which high schoolers interview veterans about their wartime experiences. In some cases, the stories they tell are a surprise to the vets' families.

"When the kids go out, it is not uncommon for the vet to be talking to that kid, and some of the information is brand new to the family," Carrigan said.

Videos from the classroom project can be viewed here.

McDevitt's father passed away in 2006, about three years before the box of letters was found in the basement of his Charleston, South Carolina, home. Joseph McDevitt wrote the letters to his aunt in Harrisburg.

"His mother died at an early age," McDevitt said. "My dad was raised by his aunt from age 8 to 18."

McDevitt has already started doing some presentations in the Springfield area with his new book. He'd also like to travel to Harrisburg and South Carolina to talk about it.

"I learned in the five years of researching and writing that I did that there are a lot of people in this country who are curious and interested to learn about all things pertaining to World War II. I think a lot of them are baby boomers who like me found out their dad was in the war," McDevitt said.

# Barebones Chopper builds bikes at new shop

**STEPHEN DI BENEDETTO**

THE (CRYSTAL LAKE) NORTHWEST HERALD

CRYSTAL LAKE — Originally starting out of his garage 11 years ago, the man behind Barebones Chopper in Crystal Lake custom builds motorcycles to help riders express their individuality.

Among his clients, owner Andrew Gordon has worked with a psychologist on his edgy alter ego, transforming the psychologist's motorcycle into a dark sequence of colors and numerous sharp points.

A musician also met with Gordon about his three-wheeled motorcycle. After talking with the musician about his interests, Gordon turned his chopper into a bike that represented the Fender Stratocaster guitar the musician liked to play.

"The motorcycle of your dreams should be a part of your personality," Gordon said. "If it's a part of your personality, it has to shine in such a way that it's what you want to portray."

With that guiding principle in mind, Gordon recently moved his business into a new location along Erick Street in Crystal Lake that includes a shop and storefront—a 1,600-square-foot space



Andrew Gordon, owner of BareBones Chopper, works May 9 in his new Crystal Lake shop while hosting an open house.

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**ANDREW GORDON, BAREBONES CHOPPER IN CRYSTAL LAKE**

that allows him to continue building custom motorcycles from scratch.

Nearly 600 people helped Gordon open the new location during an hours-long open house May 9 that featured live music, vendors, motorcycles and cars.

Along with custom-built

motorcycles, Gordon also does specialty repairs and plans to sell merchandise inside the new store.

Gordon also has seen demand for his services grow throughout the past year, as a niche motorcycle market continues to grow in a post-recession economy.

The recent changes to his business come after Gordon started tailoring motorcycles out of his garage near Crystal Lake 11 years ago. He moved the operation to the Wonder Lake area before moving it back to Crystal Lake.

For years, Gordon worked as a project manager in the construction trades, but the work slowly became routine and mundane, Gordon said. He branched into the motorcycle business, as



Andrew Gordon, owner of BareBones Chopper, works May 9 in his new Crystal Lake shop while hosting an open house.

a creative outlet.

He now finds himself meeting with prospective customers, talking over their interests, designing and building motorcycles to their individual interests.

The work, he said, challenges him to overcome problems and tap into his artistic side.

"I custom-make or tailor-make what they want. It's no different than tailoring a suit," Gordon said. "I'm creating that look, that style, that effect, that personality that reflects it to have their custom-made motorcycle from scratch."



Andrew Gordon, owner of BareBones Chopper, maneuvers one of his bikes May 9 in his new Crystal Lake shop while hosting an open house.

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