

# A Tale of Battle and a Leader

reviewed by Scott Laidig

If you don't know BGen Bill Weise very well, you need to read *One Magnificent Bastard*. If you only know about the Battle of Dai Do and think that is the Bill Weise story, you need to read *One Magnificent Bastard*. If you only know Bill Weise as a Marine, you need to read *One Magnificent Bastard*.

Many Marines know that the men of 2d Battalion, 4th Marines (2/4), are commonly referred to as the "Magnificent Bastards." LtCol "Bull" Fisher, 2/4's commanding officer (CO), gave his men that moniker shortly after they landed in Vietnam in 1965. LtCol Gene Bench, the CO from 1966–67, formally adopted the name in 1966. By the time then-LtCol William Weise assumed command of the battalion in September 1967, the Magnificent Bastards had seen lots

**>Mr. Laidig was a platoon leader with 2/4 from 1966–67. He is the author of *Al Gray, Marine* (Potomac Institute Press, 2012).**

*One Magnificent Bastard* is the biography of a fighting Marine general, and seldom has a book been more aptly titled. Bill Weise's entire life built toward his assumption of command of 2/4. A scrapper from Philadelphia, he enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1951, though he was quickly commissioned after graduating from Parris Island. His time as a junior officer reflected not only the professionalism with which he approached his life's work, but also the bond that he established with his officers and men. He truly is one of

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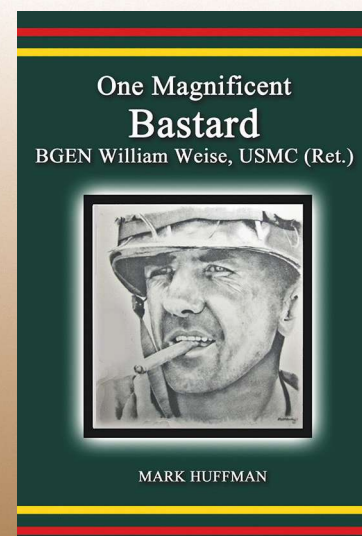
**. . . the victorious result of the action was the product of dedicated warriors led by superb men, from fire team leaders up.**

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of action. Reflecting the 13-month individual rotation policy in effect during the Vietnam War, 2/4's "veterans" had seen a couple months of combat service, but very few had extended their tours. Personnel change was constant, exacerbated in 1967 by constant fighting in and around the Demilitarized Zone, fighting that produced many casualties—including Bill Weise's predecessor as CO.

the officers who took to heart John A. Lejeune's admonition regarding the relationship between the officer and enlisted Marine as being one of teacher and scholar.

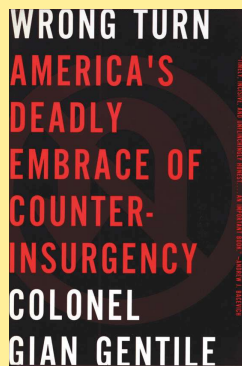
While the Battle of Dai Do defined Bill Weise's time as a Marine and served as the seminal event in the lives of many, many of his officers and men, the victorious result of the action was the product of dedicated warriors led by



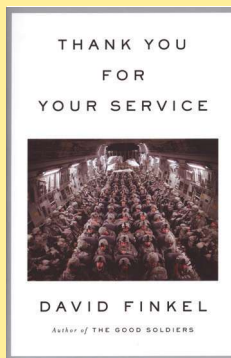
**ONE MAGNIFICENT BASTARD.**  
By Mark Huffman. R.H. Rositzke & Associates, LLC, 2013  
ISBN 149276944, 200 pp.  
\$20.00 (Member \$18.00)

superb men, from fire team leaders up. The infectious, demanding, aggressive leadership of Bill Weise set the tone for the battalion. The officers, many of whom were decorated as a result of the action (including two Medals of Honor and numerous several Silver Stars), were as fine a group as was ever assembled within a Marine battalion. The SNCOs, led by the incomparable SgtMaj John Malnar, were equally professional. The quality and steadfastness of the Marines in the ranks was unquestionably superior. However, the man who orchestrated the music, who set the tone and the temperament, who demanded excellence, dedication, and service to each other, and who imbued a fighting spirit throughout the battalion, was "Wild Bill" Weise. Before receiving a serious wound, Weise's actions at Dai Do earned him a Navy Cross. More than 80 of his men were not so fortunate and paid the ultimate price, but 2/4 and its supporting units had shattered a well-equipped and committed North Vietnamese Army

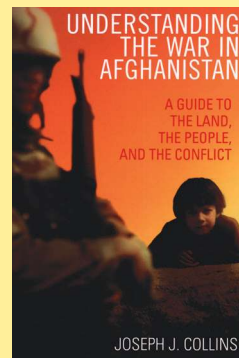
## For Further Reading



**WRONGTURN: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency.** By COL Gian Gentile, USA. Having done extensive research on counterinsurgency, the author, who was a battalion commander in Iraq and a professor at West Point, takes a contrarian view of the strategy's efficacy as the overriding doctrine applied in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. His is a cautionary tale of institutional embrace of doctrine without rigorous examination as to what we want to achieve and the means to reach those ends. The New Press, New York, 2013 ISBN 9781595588746, 188 pp. To order, go to: <http://amzn.to/1dvXjcw>



**THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE.** By David Finkel. After being embedded with them in war, this Pulitzer Prize-winning author follows up with the soldiers of 2–16th Infantry after they return home. Although the book details an Army unit, the trials, tribulations, challenges, and adjustment issues faced by these warriors are the same as they are for Marines. Sarah Crichton Books, New York, 2013 ISBN 9780374180669, 256 pp. To order, go to: <http://amzn.to/1c3Eotl>



**UNDERSTANDING WAR IN AFGHANISTAN: A Guide to the Land, the People, and the Conflict.** By Joseph J. Collins. A retired Army colonel and professor of strategy at the National War College, the author provides a primer on America's longest war and the complexity of the endeavor. Every war is fought against a backdrop of the enemy, the land, and the people, and Dr. Collins' illuminating work makes the Rubik's Cube of Afghanistan more understandable. Skyhorse Publishing, New York, 2013 ISBN 1098765432, 137 pp. To order, go to: <http://amzn.to/19020bw>

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division, sending it back into North Vietnam.

After Vietnam, Bill Weise was widely recognized as a superior Marine officer, and he was elevated to general officer rank. That hardly changed Bill Weise. He remained committed to trying to improve the lives of his Marines and the quality of the weaponry used in the Service, having remained the source of enthusiasm and professionalism in each assignment.

Like many of us, Bill Weise was not without personal issues, but he put away those demons like he met the enemy—directly and without hesitation. With his blessing, the book openly discusses his personal devils—yet another measure of the quality of this fine warrior.

*One Magnificent Bastard* is an easy read; it's full of illustrations and leaves the reader filled with admiration for this fine man. Weise was a great Marine, and he is an even better person. Interestingly, his accomplishments in retirement are every bit equal to those from his time

on active duty; for example, Weise was one of the stalwarts whose vision and tireless work led to the creation of the National Museum of the Marine Corps.

Bill remains very active to this day and continues to put Marines ahead of himself. His current project (benefitted by proceeds from the book) is the placement of a commemorative brick at Semper Fidelis Park for each 2/4 Marine killed in action in every war. In 2009, the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines Association, spearheaded by Bill Weise, placed a beautiful monument to the battalion at that same park, just down the hill from the Semper Fidelis Chapel. The bricks will be placed around the base of the monument. This project has been driven by BGen Weise's energy, commitment, and hands-on attention, and his love and respect for the Marines who gave their all.

While there have been many, clearly Bill Weise is *One Magnificent Bastard*.

