



By [LTC Scott Shaw](#)

In a recent [article](#), US Army Major and Strategist Matt Cavanaugh states there are three reasons that military officers do not write and thus do not contribute to our profession: the failure to wield the pen, the failure to wield the mind, and the failure to wield the heart.<sup>[1]</sup> He uses the three characters that Dorothy meets on the Yellow Brick Road, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion as the vehicle to illustrate his argument. It's a very thought provoking piece, however I would like to add a fourth reason using Matt's vehicle - Dorothy herself.

Dorothy, as you likely recall, is moved by tornado to the Land of Oz where she lands on the

Wicked Witch of the East killing her, angering the Wicked Witch of the West, and is directed to the Wizard himself, picking up the three fellows along the way. Further, Dorothy is then captured by (then kills) the Wicked Witch of the East, meets the Wizard, helps solve all the fellows' problems, readies for a balloon ride back to Kansas, and magically is transported back home. Or was she there in the first place? It was a very busy day for Dorothy, who constantly had to adapt to an ever-changing environment while coaching her new friends along the way.

What was missing from Matt's argument is the fourth reason that military officers don't write - a lack of time. I'm a Soldier, a Leader (a Lieutenant Colonel of US Army Infantry currently serving as a battalion commander), a husband with a working spouse, and a father to two kids. With regard to professional military writing, I have published one article, written a book review, and published a document to friends on my lessons learned in command over the past two years. I blog a little, have a Twitter feed, and work the organization's Facebook page with a couple of our Lieutenants. I will acknowledge that I am not living up to my potential as a military officer writer right now. If I want to write and publish, I either have to take time away from the Soldiers I lead or my family.

Many military officers are like Dorothy. As we rise up the ranks, each assignment brings a new environment with a new cast of characters, and new set of problems to solve. Every new job requires us to "figure it out" all over again. It is during these assignments, where we are absorbing a great deal of valuable experience, that officers could benefit from coaching from others on how to be efficient, some muse to inspire them to write, and some top cover to get it done.

A lack of knowledge of where or how to be published is another time consumer for a beginning military officer writer. There are many venues for ideas to be published. You don't have to register your own URL and start blogging, but many quality military officers and others have. All one needs to do is check the blogosphere for a like-minded thinker. If

immediate feedback on published work is not desired, there are many professional bulletins from the US Army that are willing to publish articles from military officers on relevant topics to their audience. From personal experience, those functional branches are not branch parochial about taking articles from authors outside of their branch. *Infantry*, *Armor*, or the *Fires Bulletin* are three such examples.

I applaud the call for military officers to pick up the pen with courage and intellectual rigor. We need to be pushed to write more but I think that coaching others and providing top cover is the effective manner. Military officers are a group of people who sacrifice much in the defense of our Nation. We need some looking after from those who have better time management skills and the ability to provide a shelter or advice during times of business. We could likely also use a muse with some ideas. Matt's idea prompted me to write this. It is my hope that this may further the discussion.

[1] For the purpose of this article, I use "military officer" but this article is aimed at those non-commissioned officers and junior enlisted who write as well.

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