



By Joe Byerly

The following is an excerpt from the book, [Why I Write: Craft Essays on Writing War](#), scheduled to be published by [Middle West Press](#) in December 2019. The one-of-a-kind anthology from the non-profit [Military Writers Guild](#) features essays from more than 60 leading and emerging writers offering their advice, techniques, and inspirations around themes of war and the military.

In 2013, I sat nervously in front of my laptop with a 600-word idea on the screen. For the

first time in my military career, I had created a short article that would be viewed by thousands of people, but only after I clicked the “Publish” button. It was my very first blog post on what would become *From the Green Notebook*, a website that I had created that same morning. I almost held back from “pushing the button.” I was worried that it would be poorly received. I did not think people would read it. I thought my peers would look down on me.

In the end, however, I pushed the button. I published my ideas, and since then have done so more than a hundred more times. I continue to “press the button,” because it is my way to develop myself and contribute to the profession of arms. Writing helps me to collect and focus my thoughts. The blog serves as a catalyst for professional development. My writings help to start conversations, which may help others improve how they lead and develop themselves. It is also my chance to leave a legacy that will outlast my service.

One of my favorite quotes, attributed to E.M. Forster, is “How do I know what I think until I see what I say?” Seeing our thoughts in ink (or on the screen) can help us better grasp them. When I write, I challenge myself to be clearer in my thoughts and arguments. I find that I achieve a greater level of clarity in my ideas and convictions. Also, by considering a topic from the perspective of a person who might be unfamiliar with an idea, I improve my own fluency.

I carry a notebook with me everywhere, so that if an idea strikes me, I can immediately write it down. Those notes could remain random lines in my notebook, or develop into a 900-word blog post read by thousands. Whenever I get a few moments, I’ll look over the notebook and reflect on its contents. I would have never started this practice, if I never “pressed the button.”

Writing often helps start professional conversations, which may spark change throughout the military. A great example of this can be found during the Interwar Period. In the autumn

of 1919, Maj. Dwight Eisenhower and Lt. Col. George Patton spent a considerable amount of time training, experimenting, and discussing new methods of tank warfare at Camp Meade, Md. They saw the possibility of using tanks to achieve rapid breakthroughs, rather than merely moving in support of the infantry. Eisenhower captured these ideas in writing and published them in a 1920 Infantry Journal article, titled “A Tank Discussion.” At the time, he faced some pressure for publishing his thoughts. In the end, however, it contributed to a professional discussion that eventually led to better doctrine for the inclusion of armor in the fight.

There is also value in contributing to improvements on a smaller scale. Regarding my own blog, I’ve received emails from leaders all over the world, who have used my ideas to drive conversations and changes within their respective organizations.

Finally, I write because it allows me to create a legacy. By sharing my lessons, I can help future leaders not make the same stressful mistakes I did. In 2001, Tony Burgess and Nate Allen wrote the book *Taking the Guidon: Exceptional Leadership at the Company Level*. Even though the authors have since retired, their lessons continue to advise company-level leaders today.

When I “pressed the button” years ago, I had no idea that writing would eventually become part of who I am. I grow as a military professional with each post I write. I’ve started an untold number of conversations around the world that have positively influenced so many different types of leaders and organizations. Finally, I can leave something behind when I hang up the uniform, that future leaders can take and not make the same mistakes I did. I encourage you to do the same. You never know what will happen, once you “press the button.”

*Looking for some inspiration to spark your voice? Check out [Why I Write: Craft Essays on Writing War](#), scheduled to be published by [Middle West Press](#) in December 2019.*

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