

FREEMAN, Gregory A. 1964-

PERSONAL: Born May 24, 1964, in Newnan, GA; married; wife's name Caroline. Education: University of Georgia, Athens, B.A.

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CAREER: Journalist and freelance writer. Worked for the Associated Press in Atlanta, GA, and as an editor with a publishing company.

AWARDS, HONORS: Sigma Delta Chi Award, Society of Professional Journalists, 2001 and a second time subsequently, for excellence.

WRITINGS:

Lay This Body Down: The 1921 Murders of Eleven Plantation Slaves, Lawrence Hill Books (Chicago, IL), 1999.

Sailors to the End: The Deadly Fire on the USS Forrestal and the Heroes Who Fought It, William Morrow (New York, NY), 2002.

The Forgotten 500: The Untold Story of the Men Who Risked All for the Greatest Rescue Mission of World War II, Nal Caliber (New York, NY), 2007.

(With Larry C. James) Fixing Hell: An Army Psychologist Confronts Abu Ghraib, foreword by Philip Zimbardo, Grand Central (New York, NY), 2008.

Troubled Water: Race, Mutiny, and Bravery on the USS Kitty Hawk, Palgrave Macmillan (New York, NY), 2009.

Contributor to periodicals, including Reader's Digest, Rolling Stone, World War II, and American History.

SIDELIGHTS:

Gregory A. Freeman is an American journalist and freelance writer. Born in Newnan, Georgia, on May 24, 1964, he graduated from the University of Georgia, Athens. Freeman worked for the Associated Press in Atlanta and also as an executive editor with a publishing company. His writing has appeared in numerous periodicals, including Reader's Digest, Rolling Stone, World War II, and American History.

<head n="5">Lay This Body Down</head>

Freeman's first book, Lay This Body Down: The 1921 Murders of Eleven Plantation Slaves, is a study of the killing of poor black men who were caught up in a form of modern enslavement half a century after the U.S. Civil War. Library Journal contributor Robert C. Jones wrote that "this moving narrative account is arguably the most complete history of this event available."

John Williams was a Georgia plantation owner who found his help in local jails where they were held for minor crimes like vagrancy, paid their fines, forced them into peonage (a form of illegal bondage), and treated them like slaves. When federal authorities began an investigation of his

practices, Williams had eleven of his peons killed in order to prevent them from testifying. He ordered his black overseer, Clyde Manning, whom he had raised and exploited since childhood, to execute them. Booklist reviewer Vanessa Bush commented that Freeman "explores, to chilling effect, the personalities of Williams and Manning."

Some of the victims were chained together, weighted down with rocks, and thrown from bridges. Others were bludgeoned to death with an axe or shot. Many were forced to dig their own graves. The murders came to light when three corpses surfaced in a nearby river.

The murders were committed in a rural, and for the most part, bigoted community, but even in this environment, the enormity of the crimes could not be ignored. Williams was convicted of first-degree murder and received a life sentence, primarily on Manning's testimony. He was the first Southern white man to be so convicted of killing a black person since 1877. It didn't happen again for another half century. The two trials that resulted gained national attention, and it is the details of these trials that make up the study, including testimonies and FBI evidence.

A Kirkus Reviews contributor wrote that the book "is scrupulously researched, with an eye for the telling detail. A good true-crime story, with far-reaching implications."

<head n="5">Sailors to the End</head>

Freeman drew on official U.S. Navy Files and the eyewitness accounts of twelve survivors in telling the story of the tragic events that occurred on the aircraft carrier USS Forrestal on July 29, 1967. In reviewing Sailors to the End: The Deadly Fire on the USS Forrestal and the Heroes Who Fought It, a Publishers Weekly reviewer wrote that Freeman "easily outclasses many military re-creations in grasping the men's varying experiences."

The disaster occurred as the ship, sailing in the Gulf of Tonkin, prepared for an air strike on North Vietnam and was driven by a series of incidents. First, an F-4 Phantom aircraft's Zuni rocket misfired, striking the fuel tank of an A-4 Skyhawk waiting on the flight deck, a craft whose pilot was John McCain, later Senator John McCain. The thousands of gallons of jet fuel that spilled onto the deck caught fire, setting off other explosions, including those of thousand-pound World War II bombs that had been loaded on aircraft. The deck was riddled with holes, through which the fuel poured below decks into crew quarters, ammunition storage areas, and plane hangars. The carrier did not go down, but before the fireballs of jet fuel were spent, and the shrapnel found its mark, 134 men lay dead and more than 150 were seriously injured. Twenty-one planes were lost, most pushed into the ocean before they could explode, and forty more were damaged, resulting in a material loss of more than seventy-two million dollars.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first six chapters, Freeman describes Navy life, particularly as it is lived on a carrier, where

thousands of men form the ship's crew. The second part consists of eight chapters that document the events.

James E. Hickey, who reviewed Sailors to the End in the Naval War College Review, noted that "these 150 pages are exceptionally engaging and so successful in capturing the stress and emotion of the crisis that they grab readers and leave them emotionally exhausted. In particular, the description of the death of sailor James Blaskis in a remote and inaccessible part of the ship cannot leave a reader unmoved."

The final three chapters address the investigation of the tragedy, the fates of the survivors, and the burials of the dead. Freeman notes that two groups on board the carrier had each bypassed some safety measures, and that the leaky and dangerous obsolete bombs had been transferred to the Forrestal and loaded on the aircraft immediately before the incident.

Captain John Beling was officially reprimanded, but the reprimand was later rescinded and he ended his career at a remote outpost in Iceland. Robert Finn pointed out in a review for Bookreporter.com that the U.S. Navy has also tended to blame the crew for the Forrestal disaster and created their 1973 training film, Trial by Fire based on lessons learned from that tragedy. Finn wrote that Freeman "seems to want to do two things: Praise the crew as the true heroes of the event and lay the blame on old, defective ammunition. &hellip; The ship's ordnance experts were enraged when they were supplied with these ancient, defective, and dangerous bombs the day before the accident--but they were told nothing else was available." Freeman writes that an escalation of the bombing campaign had been ordered by President Lyndon Johnson, even though there was not enough modern ammunition to accomplish the strikes. Finn said that "Freeman claims this factor has been swept under the rug in official assessments of what went wrong that July morning."

A Kirkus Reviews writer called Sailors to the End "a compassionate account of a dramatic incident in modern naval history, told with cinematic immediacy and narrative skill."

<head n="5">The Forgotten 500</head>

In 2007 Freeman published The Forgotten 500: The Untold Story of the Men Who Risked All for the Greatest Rescue Mission of World War II. The account recalls the Operation Halyard rescue mission of American airmen shot down in Nazi-occupied Yugoslavia during World War II. Sheltered by Serbian villagers, the airmen persevered for months before the OSS were able to find and retrieve them.

Reviewing the book on the Curled Up with a Good Book Web site, Annie Laura Smith called the account "riveting." Frieda Murray, writing in Booklist, stated: "Evoking the rescuees' successive desperation, wild hope, and joy, &hellip; Freeman produces a breathtaking popular account." A contributor to the Midwest Book Review found The Forgotten 500 to be "extensively researched," noting that the book "brings the daring true saga to life with compelling detail." Air & Space Power Journal contributor Travis Nels commented that "Freeman shines a spotlight on an often-overlooked aspect of the history of World War II, and the reader

benefits from his account of the deeds of brave men who risked much to return Airmen to the fight against Fascism." Reviewing the book in the New American, James Thornton called the account "a gripping narrative, dramatically brought alive and filled with suspense and excitement. One feels the frustration of men determined to recover the trapped Americans but repeatedly thwarted in their efforts by duplicitous government functionaries, and the elation when the airmen are ultimately brought to safety. The book is enhanced by endnotes and a comprehensive bibliography."

<head n="5">Troubled Water</head>

Freeman published Troubled Water: Race, Mutiny, and Bravery on the USS Kitty Hawk in 2009. Freeman tells the story of race riots on board an American aircraft carrier during the Vietnam War. Tensions were high on board and at home with the turbulence of increased civil rights. The introduction of new and inadequately-trained black seamen to the crew helped to ignite near-mutiny onboard.

Booklist contributor Roland Green called Troubled Water "an altogether fine work," adding that "Freeman does his usual fine job." A contributor to Kirkus Reviews called the story "remarkable" and Freeman's recreation of events "sharp," appending that the author succeeded in "efficiently establishing the ship's atmosphere of seething anger and recounting numerous, racially charged shipboard fights."

#### BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL SOURCES:

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Booklist, September 15, 1999, Vanessa Bush, review of Lay This Body Down: The 1921 Murders of Eleven Plantation Slaves, p. 201; September 1, 2007, Frieda Murray, review of The Forgotten 500, p. 42; September 15, 2009, Roland Green, review of Troubled Water: Race, Mutiny, and Bravery on the USS Kitty Hawk, p. 20.

Kirkus Reviews, September 15, 1999, review of Lay This Body Down, p. 1465; May 15, 2002, review of Sailors to the End: The Deadly Fire on the USS Forrestal and the Heroes Who Fought It, p. 716; August 1, 2009, review of Troubled Water.

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