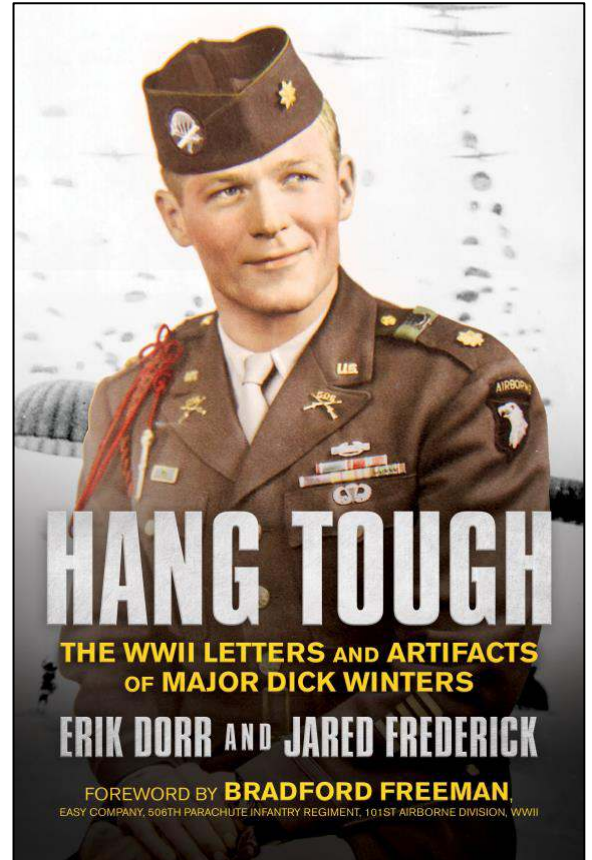


HANG TOUGH: The WWII Letters and Artifacts of Major Dick Winters by Erik Dorr and Jared Frederick

Major Dick Winters of the 101st Airborne gained international acclaim when the tale of he and his men were depicted in the celebrated book and miniseries *Band of Brothers*. Hoisted as a modest hero who spurned adulation, Winters epitomized the notion of dignified leadership. His iconic World War II exploits have since been depicted in art and commemorated with monuments.

Beneath this marble image of a reserved officer is the story of a common Pennsylvanian tested by the daily trials and tribulations of military duty. His wartime correspondence with pen pal and naval reservist, DeEtta Almon, paints an endearing portrait of life on both the home front and battlefield—capturing the humor, horror, and humility that defined a generation. Interwoven with previously unpublished diary entries, military reports, postwar reminiscences, private photos, personal artifacts, and rich historical context, Winters's letters offer compelling insights on the individual costs and motivations of World War II service members.

Winters's heartfelt prose reveals his mindset of the moment. From stateside training to the hedgerows of Normandy, his correspondence immerses readers in the dramatic experiences of the 1940s. Via the lost art of letter writing, the immediacy and honesty of Winters's observations takes us beyond the traditional accounts of the fabled 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment's Easy Company. This engaging narrative offers a unique blend of personal wit, leadership ethics, and broader observations of a world at war. *Hang Tough* is a deeply intimate, timely reflection on a rising officer and the philosophies that molded him into a hero among heroes.



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Erik Dorr is the owner of the Gettysburg Museum of History—a structure that witnessed the famous 1863 battle. At an early age, Erik began collecting historical relics from throughout history. This broad range of artifacts has grown into one of the finest privately-owned collections in the United States. Among the treasures in the museum is the largest assortment of Major Dick Winters and Easy Company artifacts in the world. In his wide array of historical adventures, Dorr has led European battlefield tours and has appeared on the History Channel, Syfy, and the Smithsonian Channel. Learn more at www.gettysburgmuseumofhistory.com.



Jared Frederick is the author of a number of books, including *Dispatches of D-Day: A People's History of the Normandy Invasion*. Prior to his current position as an Instructor of History at Penn State Altoona, he served as a seasonal park ranger at Gettysburg National Military Park and Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. Frederick has appeared on C-SPAN, PBS, in numerous independent documentaries, and on Turner Classic Movies as a guest host. He has also received awards for his teaching skills and efforts on behalf of student veterans. Learn more about Frederick on his website at www.jaredfrederick.com.

A Conversation with *Erik Dorr* and *Jared Frederick*

Q: What inspired you to write *Hang Tough*?

Erik: When the Gettysburg Museum of History obtained Major Dick Winters's artifacts and files, I thought of Major Winter's letters as true gems of the collection. When I first read the correspondence, I felt an obligation to share them with the world. The emotional power of his letters, combined with photos of artifacts pertaining to his experiences, I think convey a very powerful story. A book was the only way to share that story.

Jared: Erik's collection of Dick Winters and Easy Company artifacts at the Gettysburg Museum of History is unsurpassed. As a historian who lived and worked in Gettysburg for a number of years, I became good friends with Erik, thanks to our shared passion of history. When he approached me about this collaborative project, I could hardly believe I was being granted the opportunity to work with these wonderful materials. I have been an admirer of Winters since I first saw *Band of Brothers* when I was in high school. The joy of this project has been an almost surreal experience for me.

Q: Why do you think Dick Winter's story resonates with people so much?

Erik: I think the story of Major Winters and Easy Company resonates because these were otherwise ordinary men who aspired to be the best. They volunteered for a new, elite unit and trained hard. Combat only strengthened their bonds. Winters was the foundation of this amazing outfit. Later in life, he helped bring their story to the world. Major Winters is the personification of "The Greatest Generation."

Jared: Thanks to his Hollywood depiction, Winters's story resonates with so many people because they can easily relate with him. He was presented to a vast audience in very human terms. He is emblematic of the generation that fought and won the war. Most notably, his style of quiet, dignified, is a trait that many people find admirable and seek to emulate.

Q: What is unique about Dick Winter's account of WWII?

Erik: Major Winters recorded his memories in the form of his "D-Day Diary" shortly after his first combat action. This entry is featured in the book. The young officer had the foresight to record his experiences while they were still fresh in his mind. He also maintained meticulous records and kept in touch with the men of Easy Company after the war. He left historians with a rich archive of fascinating materials to draw upon.

Jared: Winters's account of the Second World War is so unique because, unlike most veterans, he kept meticulous records pertaining to his experiences in the conflict. His home office was a dual shrine and library to the efforts of him and his men. In turn, those records and correspondence he maintained leave a vast treasure trove of items for historians to

analyze. Another factor that separates him from most is that he rose from the rank of private to major in less than four years. Very few service members have risen so rapidly through the ranks.

Q: What is the most fascinating or compelling part of Dick Winter's letters to you personally?

Erik: Two things. Number one: The letters give the reader a whole new look at Major Winters. Most of his previous writings and published accounts are very businesslike. He was very much the officer and gentleman—and it shows. His letters to friends and family, however, present his very human and emotional side, which is lesser-known. Number two: The letters show him growing cynical and even bitter as he endures the hardships of combat. He goes from a very “happy go lucky” person to having a much darker perspective of life. Readers will find his transformation stunning as they page through the book.

Jared: As I read and transcribed his letters, I was continuously amazed by Winters's poise and coolness as an officer. He was a supremely, confident individual who constantly worked to enhance his skills as a soldier and mentor. His evolution as a leader is best represented in his wartime letters.

Q: How would you describe the relationship between Dick and DeEtta Almon and the significance of that relationship to Dick?

Erik: I would like readers to draw their own conclusions on the friendship of Dick and DeEtta. Some might say it was romantic, others perhaps not. However, as the war went on, it is apparent that Winters did not wish to be romantically involved with anyone because he privately expressed doubts of his survival.

Jared: DeEtta Almon, a naval reservist during World War II, was a trusted pen pal of Winters. She served as a sounding board and means of moral support. Dick and DeEtta imbued confidence in each other as they endured hard times and transitions in military service. Erik and I do not perceive their tale as a love story but one of sincere wartime friendship. We all need somebody to confide in, and that was the basic dynamic of their relationship.

Q: What do you hope readers take away from the book?

Erik: Major Winters thought of himself as a common, unassuming man. Despite that belief, he became one of the best-known American officers of World War II. There is a lot we can still learn from his traits of quiet leadership.

Jared: As they page through the book, I hope readers come to recognize the profound importance of letter writing for those who endured the World War II years. Written correspondence is a lost art these days, but in the 1940s, it was the sole means of friends and loved ones maintaining their ties. In regard to Winters's letters, we also gain an

intimate sense of his world view and the principles that forged him into a widely respected military man.

Q: What is something readers would be surprised to learn about you?

Erik: I founded the Gettysburg Museum of History with my own collection I started as a child. This collection has grown into one of the finest small history museums in the United States and has been featured on numerous nationally televised programs. The artifacts include a broad array of military, presidential, and celebrity items.

Jared: In addition to co-writing the book, I also completed some of the artwork found within its pages. In my younger days, I created a lot of historical art for various projects and my first books. In *Hang Tough*, I drew the map of the European Theater of Operations as well as a portrait of one of Winters's comrades. The latter was based off the single photo we could find of him—a grainy, poor quality newspaper image. I feel that the sketch help makes him a more approachable character in the narrative.

Another point of interest is that my grandfather landed on Utah Beach on D-Day. Winters's actions on June 6, 1944, helped limit the amount of enemy fire landing on that beachhead. Did Winters's battlefield deeds spare the life of my grandfather? It was something I often thought about while our writing was underway.

Q: What is the best piece of advice anyone's ever given you?

Erik: "Always set a good example, stand straight, think positive, Hang Tough!"
-From Major Winters inscription in his "Currahee" scrapbook.

Jared: Interestingly enough, I received some of the best advice about living life from Dick Winters's writings and interviews. One quote of his that I am particularly fond of is this: "Satisfy yourself so at the end of the day, you can look in the mirror after you've brushed your teeth, and say honestly to yourself, *Today I did my best*. If you do that...everything is going to be okay." Sure enough, I now try to tell myself that point every night as I brush my teeth.

Praise for *Hang Tough*:

“Stunning! This thoroughly researched and intimate work by Erik Dorr and Jared Frederick, complete with many never-before-published photos and color plates featuring personal artifacts, is a *must read* for anyone interested in the life, character, and leadership abilities of Band of Brothers hero Major Dick Winters.”

—**Larry Alexander**, bestselling author of *Biggest Brother: The Life of Major Dick Winters, the Man Who Led the Band of Brothers*

“Ever since the public became aware of Dick Winters’s exceptional leadership, there has been endless curiosity to learn what made him great. Winters left us a legacy of thoughtful and eloquent writings, in both his diary and correspondence. Erik Dorr and Jared Frederick have edited those words into this informative compilation. The book demonstrates that equal parts of courage and intelligence defined Major Winters as a warrior and an exemplary leader of paratroopers. This presentation is enhanced with color photos of Winters memorabilia, currently displayed at the Gettysburg Museum of History. Perhaps we have not seen the last of books on Dick Winters, but it is unlikely that this one will ever be surpassed.”

—**Mark A. Bando**, author of six books on the 101st Airborne Division in World War II

“*Hang Tough* provides powerful insight into Dick Winters’s military career, meaningfully integrating World War II artifacts now on display at the Gettysburg Museum of History. Following his exciting epic through Europe, from Normandy to Germany, the book skillfully shares the stories of Major Winters that have inspired so many.”

—**Michel de Trez**, founder of the D-Day Experience Museum Normandy

“What a compelling and absorbing book. Dick Winters’s letters shed fascinating light on his character and motivations, greatly enhancing our understandings of one of America’s most iconic World War II heroes. Expertly edited and framed with a highly knowledgeable contextual narrative, *Hang Tough* offers perspective and detail of one soldier’s extraordinary wartime career.”

—**James Holland**, bestselling author of *Normandy ‘44: D-Day and the Epic 77-Day Battle for France*