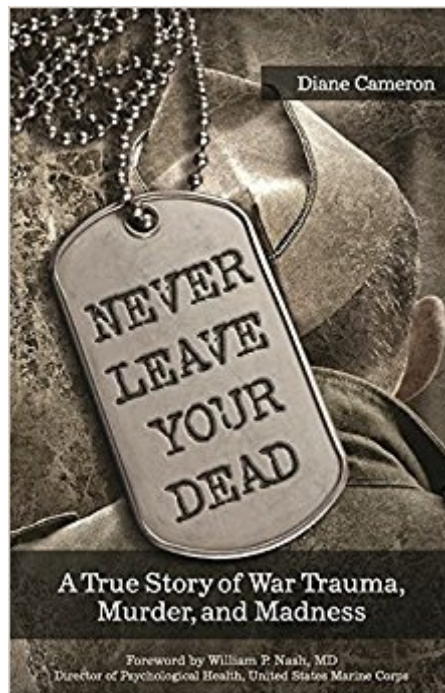




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Never Leave Your Dead: A True Story Of War Trauma, Murder, And Madness



Synopsis

Was Donald a traumatized veteran? A victim of abuse in the mental-health system? Was he a criminal? Mentally ill? Or just eccentric? Join author Diane Cameron as she unravels the true story of her stepfather, Donald Watkins, a former Marine who served in China from 1937 to 1939 during the Japanese invasion. After returning home, Donald's seemingly normal life took a sharp turn when he murdered his first wife and mother-in-law in 1953. As punishment for his crime, he spent twenty-two years at Fairview State Hospital for the criminally insane. Donald's story traverses continents and decades. Years after his release from Fairview, Cameron's stark examination of her relationship with Donald and her mother highlights the far reach of mental illness. Her in-depth research and keen insight will stir public debate about what is happening today and what we can expect as the impact of war trauma for veterans and their families unfurls and detonates. Diane Cameron is an award-winning columnist. An excerpt from *Never Leave Your Dead* was first published in the *Bellevue Literary Review* and was nominated for a 2006 Pushcart Prize.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Leatherneck Magazine review: "Cameron's book is both a swan song to her misunderstood Marine stepfather and a vivid testimonial on the varying and erratic symptoms of PTSD. She includes a short listing of the symptoms of PTSD and a suggested list of resources for veterans and their families in the hope of helping others. This enthralling little book reads like a well-conceived detective novel. Diane Cameron has produced an interesting and thought-provoking

tale of war trauma, murder and madness but the unimaginable and tragic tale of Donald Watkins is told with the greatest care and heartfelt compassion."#151;Robert B. Loring

PsychCentral Magazine review: "Full of the pain of war and horror of our history with mental illness, *Never Leave Your Dead* is by no means an easy read. And yet Cameron's approach fully embraces the sentiment of the title, a central ethos of the Marine Corps. She could have easily left Watkins' story untold, justified by the murder of two innocent women and her own complicated relationship to him. Instead, she asks us to consider Watkins' life and the implications of his experiences in the military and afterward. She encourages us to meditate on the effects of war and how we care for #151; or more often don't #151; those who come home after witnessing real horrors. And, using her own struggles, she draws meaningful connections between the pain of trauma and the pain of veterans' trauma, not creating an unreachable other, but instead unifying them and us in our common humanity."#151;Julie Pratt

#147;It is a privilege to meet Diane Cameron through this book. She has made her own hero's journey and brought us back this boon. No sentimentality here!"#151;Jonathan Shay, MD, PhD, author of *Achilles in Vietnam* and *Odysseus in America*#147;Diane Cameron's *Never Leave Your Dead*, unfolding like a good psychological mystery, is at once heartfelt and unillusioned. It asks the hard questions and considers the harrowing evidence about violence and its impacts on the soul, but then looks to move past judgment. Here are images and perspectives that will not be forgotten, however much the reader hopes they might. To understand the power of forgiveness we need to understand what things need to be forgiven. Cameron instructs us in both.

#151;Sven Birkerts, author of *The Gutenberg Elegies* and *The Art of the Memoir*#147;Wars never end for their survivors. Despite new diagnostic language and a culture at times sympathetic, military trauma all too often devastates the lives of our veterans and those who love them long after armistice. With this poignant, timely, and unforgettable memoir of her own effort to comprehend, Diane Cameron issues a powerful reminder that mental trauma is an intricate, three-dimensional problem#151;one that resists easy judgments and defies simple answers. Grounded in history, informed by psychiatry, and written with a rare blend of compassion and moral urgency, this is a powerful meditation on love, war, and our humanity. As our young men and women continue to return from Iraq and Afghanistan, may their families#151;and our national policy makers#151;read this important book and ponder its many valuable insights.

#151;Dr. Brian Matthew Jordan, author of *Marching Home: Union Veterans and Their Unending Civil War*#147;Diane Cameron is a teacher and historian who puts one Marine's life into the context of historical events#151;many which we have forgotten. She

frames that man's trauma and that of many of the men we send to war. Part memoir, part history lesson, and part psychological mystery, Diane Cameron's book educates all of us about the complexity of a single life, and she helps us to understand and honor our warriors, past and present. As a clinician who worked with traumatized veterans at the VA for many years, I am moved by the compassion in Diane Cameron's understanding of what it means to be a Marine, and how the trauma of war can mold one's life forever. This is a compelling story and a well-researched history lesson that remains relevant today.

—Susan Griffiths, RN, MS, Clinical Nurse Specialist in Psychiatric Nursing

Diane Cameron's book is simply a tour-de-force with the page-turning power of a world-class thriller. It is the story of one family member's attempt to create a coherent narrative out of the mind-numbing shards of war trauma. Cameron is a fierce detective; deeply well-informed; and every page of her determined inquiry moves us closer to a nuanced understanding of the effects of trauma on us all. The astonished reader of this book accompanies Cameron on her journey through a fog of cultural and clinical denial and superstition; and finally arrives with her at some profound and healing truths. I simply could not put this book down.

—Stephen Cope, Senior Scholar-in-Residence at Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health and best-selling author of *The Great Work of Your Life* and *Yoga and the Quest for the True Self*

Diane Cameron is an award-winning columnist whose topics include popular culture and social perspective. Her work has appeared in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Baltimore Sun*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Albany Times Union*. Her column, "The Common Writer," in the *Altamont Enterprise* was awarded first place for Best Column from the New York Press Association in April of 2007. An excerpt from *Never Leave Your Dead* was first published in the *Bellevue Literary Review* and was nominated for a 2006 Pushcart Prize.

This book is for everyone who is trying to successfully go through life. It is for people who have an interest in History. This book is also for teachers, counselors, and just about anyone else who deals with other people. I liked the presentation style. Ms Cameron's writing, while very approachable, is also instructive and deeply personal. I will recommend this to everyone I know. Thank you Diane for sharing this with us.

Diane Cameron's writing style was enjoyable and the organization of the narrative was very

effective. Very eye-opening. Explained the effects of war trauma very clearly.

If you have a war veteran in your life, read this book. If you have someone in your life with mental illness, read this book. If you or someone you know have experienced a traumatic event, read this book. If you want to know what it means to reach for compassion and understanding, read this book. If you've lost motivation to complete a project, read this book. In other words, everyone should read this book. This book is well researched and beautifully written. It is as compelling as any mystery novel I've ever read. I couldn't put it down.

Diane Cameron tells the story of a veteran of the China Marines through trauma, murder, institutionalization, and some manner of redemption with a sure, clear voice that keeps the pages turning. The clearest and most thoughtful piece of nonfiction I've read all year.

Difficult subject that was dealt with in a realistic and informed way. Cameron tells a good story as she educates about the very important veteran's issue and our poor management of the larger problem among those who have served our country. Well done!

Powerful, tragic, fascinating story of trauma and survival. I highly recommend this book... it would also be a wonderful book club read.

an important piece of work, meticulously researched and written with great personal courage and perception

This book is a search for answers and combines all of the elements of a memoir, biography, true crime, psychological inquest, and Marine memorial. Cameron's goal here is to try to understand her stepfather, Donald Watkins, a former Marine who returned from duty and subsequently murdered his wife and mother in law. Since he was declared insane, Watkins never stood trial for the murders, and was shunted off to an asylum where he faced 22 years of abuse and deprivation. This man did not have an easy life. As witness to the horrors that the Japanese inflicted on the Chinese, Watkins suffered what we today define as PTSD, which in the early 40's lacked classification. Not only did he have to stand by helplessly as the Japanese brutally massacred the Chinese, he also had to clean up the mess of human remains. When he finally "cracked," he was not given the proper treatment for

his trauma, leading to even more tragedy. Cameron attempts to understand how a man could have endured such horrors and how that would motivate him to kill his own family. She also struggles with her own past, especially her strained relationship with her mother who married Watkins despite his dubious history. It's an intriguing piece of investigative journalism, incorporating military history and mental illness to define the unfortunate life of Donald Watkins. I received a complimentary copy of this book from the publisher.

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