



THE ACCIDENTAL WARRIOR

GENE WRIGHT

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Draumr Publishing, LLC
Maryland

The Accidental Warrior

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There is no ISBN associated with the electronic version of this book.

PUBLISHED BY DRAUMR PUBLISHING, LLC

www.draumrpublishing.com

Columbia, Maryland

Printed in the United States of America

Dedication

For L.W.W.
With love and gratitude.

Acknowledgements

Alfred, Lord Tennyson has his Ulysses declare, “I am a part of all that I have met.” Before Tennyson, Lord Byron admits in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, “I live not in myself, but I become/Portion of that around me.” And before Byron, the brilliantly analytical John Donne observes wisely, “No man is an island.”

Accordingly, anyone attempting an artistic reflection of reality necessarily filters the effort through a lifetime of experience with people and events. I acknowledge, therefore, all whose thoughts, writings, and actions have made me what I am and my work what it is. I am indebted to my kind and supportive agent, Patrick Wright, Esq., and to those “front-line editors” who read the manuscript and made valuable suggestions: Dr. G. R. Vela and Dr. Don W. Smith. But because thoughts, writings, and actions of even the most wise must be restricted and distorted by my own limitations, as a flawed radio will distort the clearest signals, any defects in the work are mine alone. Like Milton’s Eve, I don’t always take good advice.

Thanks to Rida Allen, General Editor of Draumr Publishing, for all her friendly good help, and to the editor of my book, Robert Allen, III. The definition of a good editor is one whose skills and devotion make a book better. Robert is a good editor.

I am grateful, also, to Janet Chermack and Cindy McCallum and Patrick Wright for their continued interest in the works of one whom they have known *ad nauseam*—and to Len, Brent, Hyejin, Amy, Leslie, Jennifer, Katie, Rebecca, Kelly, Gene the Younger, and Mia. Most thanks and credit for this and any product of my existence is due to my worthy friend, LWW, who makes it all worthwhile.

“...if way to the Better there be, it exacts
a full look at the Worst.”

In Tenebris

Thomas Hardy

PROLOGUE

At ten-hundred hours on Thursday, 17 August 1939, a young German *Obersturmführer* knocked lightly on the office door of *Generaloberst* Franz Halder, chief of staff of the German Army, Central Headquarters in Berlin, and walked crisply across the room, stopping two feet from Halder's desk. He did not salute the general, nor did Halder, preoccupied with writing in his diary and characteristically determined to show his own high position by ignoring the presence of a subordinate, acknowledge his aide's presence. The young officer quietly placed a sealed, official document on the desk and stood back. When the general continued to ignore both the aide and the document, the young man cleared his throat to indicate to his superior that he needed to be acknowledged. Only then did Halder glance up at the document and notice that it was from Heinrich Himmler, chief of Hitler's *Schutzstaffel*, the *SS*, the Nazi Party's own police force. As the aide turned and left the office, Halder frowned and broke the seal on the document.

“*Mein Lieber Halder,*” the memorandum began, “My dear Halder, I require a supply of twelve Polish military uniforms,

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all with appropriate and authentic insignias. You will, under the strictest security, please to find, procure, and deliver the items unto my aide within one week. *Heil Hitler!*” The message was signed, “Heinrich Himmler.”

Halder’s eyebrows raised in surprise at the odd request. Himmler had not mentioned why he wanted the uniforms, and Halder had no information on the matter. But if *Herr Himmler* wanted Polish military uniforms, then he would get them.

General Halder picked up his telephone and got through to one of his senior officers in eastern Germany, ordering him to use strict security to locate the uniforms, inspect them for authenticity, and send them to Berlin within the week.

Having set in motion a process that would give Himmler what he wanted, Halder turned back to his diary and wrote a brief note concerning the peculiar order from his dangerous superior.