

Author channels experience in Navy for book

By NATHAN LURZ
nlurz@shawmedia.com

WHEATON – There are some stories about his 26 years as an intelligence officer and interrogator in the U.S. Navy that Eric Wentz cannot tell.

Instead, he says, he tells his stories and the stories of others through fiction.

Wentz recently released his second book, entitled “Killing Sharks: De Profundis.” Like his first novel, “Piercing the Veil,” it follows the exploits of Lt. Comm. Grant Chisolm, a Navy SEAL, as he combats terrorism from the Taliban and Al-Qaeda around the world.

Wentz, who also has spent time as a teacher of English literature, said that his books are based on his own experiences.

So much so that he wanted to make sure that he “didn’t cross certain lines.”

“When you live in a world of classified information, you have to ask yourself ‘Did I pick that up from a classified source



Photo provided

Author Eric Wentz, a former naval intelligence officer, released his second book.

or did I pick that up from my imagination?” he said.

To ensure the book rang true in tone and content, Wentz sent out several copies to current and former members of the military, calling them “my toughest audience.”

“If I am trying to fool people, they’re going to know and they’re going to see it,” he said.

Among those who received an early copy was Ralph DeFalco, a retired captain for Naval intelligence who is the

intelligence oversight officer on the staff of the director of naval intelligence.

DeFalco, who worked with Wentz in the intelligence community for years, said the author’s experience in the field laid the ground for believable dialogue and plot scenarios in “Killing Sharks.”

“There is a ring of authenticity in Eric’s work that can only come from people who have been there, done that,” DeFalco said.

Retired Navy Commander John Luther, who Wentz worked under while in naval intelligence, echoed DeFalco.

“The interactions with people and interactions with the intelligence data were realistic,” Luther said. “The book sounded like more than fiction because it was more than fiction.”

Wentz said his book was so realistic that he was turned down by two of publishers who told him they enjoyed the book but wouldn’t publish it due to its portrayal of controversial topics.

Despite a narrative steeped in military experience, DeFalco and Luther said the book remained accessible to civilian readers.

“The success of novels in the genre over the last 50 years have proved how enduring that approach is – the knowledge of a professional taking his experience and turning that into words has proved very successful,” DeFalco said.

Evidently, the critics agree. “Killing Sharks” recently was nominated for the W.Y. Boyd Literary Award for excellence in military fiction as well as for annual recognition by Reader’s Choice and the Military Writers Society of America.

Wentz said while he was flattered by the awards, he also was pleased that he could finally tell his side of the story.

There often is a negative portrayal of interrogation in the media, Wentz said, and it usually is much more about building rapport than a good cop/bad cop routine. He said some of his questioning sessions simply were talking to the detainee about soccer or smoking cigars.

“People have watched enough television and movies and I know they like to sensationalize it,” he said. “They accuse us of things we didn’t do and we take the hit. You’re not allowed to respond. Now I’m retired and I’m responding.”