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Author pens exciting adventure based on true-life experience

By Diane Claytor



Mark Clifford Photo provided

Many people retire after spending a lifetime of intense and dangerous work and happily walk into the sunset, content to spend their days relaxing with a fishing pole or tending to their garden. Moraga's Mark Clifford is not one of those people. A bundle of energy, it's likely Clifford, a former Marine, retired police officer and current author, rarely sits still for any length of time (except, perhaps, when he's writing his next book).

Clifford retired in 2020 after 27 years as a San Leandro police officer, noting that he was extremely proud to have served that diverse community. Referring to his career as "colorful," Clifford rose to sergeant's rank and his assignments included being a police academy recruit training officer, a stolen vehicles investigator, serving on the SWAT team, and working undercover narcotics.

Being a police officer was the second career for Clifford, a man who admits to continually reinventing himself. Prior to that, the fourth generation San Franciscan and second in a family of seven children, served in the Marines for 10 years, rising to the rank of staff sergeant. He received special operations training with the 3rd Marine Division in Okinawa and was operating in the Philippines in 1991 during the historic Mount Pinatubo eruption. And this is when, perhaps unknowingly, Clifford began preparing for this third career: author.

"After being at Mount Pinatubo and experiencing the second largest volcanic eruption of the last century," Clifford says, "I knew I had to tell a story about it." It was June, 1991 and Clifford was stationed on Luzon, the largest of the Philippines' 7,641 islands. He was living in the jungle with his troops when he was called back to base because the volcano had erupted. "I looked up and saw a huge cloud. It was an unbelievable cataclysmic experience," he recalls, "literally putting us under ash." Clifford always wondered why this wasn't a huge story. "It was an epic disaster in every sense, like living through an apocalypse."

Fast forward 25 years and the story that had been fermenting in Clifford's mind since 1991 finally comes to fruition when he writes his first book - "Typhoon Coast" - inspired by the Mount Pinatubo eruption and a lost treasure rumored to be near the top of the volcano. As Clifford describes it, "'Typhoon Coast' is a rollicking ride through 1980s San Francisco, through the vibrant eyes of a boy who loses his mother, and then his innocence. In the jungles of the Philippines, . that boy becomes a man . and begins a lifelong quest for a mythical hidden treasure trove. . Magical realism and romanticism merge with the hard, cold reality of a Marine's life to reveal a glimpse into how the imagination conspires to keep us dreaming."

Clifford is very pleased with the way the different arcs of the story eventually all fell into place. "Imagine telling someone about surviving the most cataclysmic volcanic eruption in a populated area of the last century. It's hard to really grasp the story. So I decided to tell it as a slightly fictionalized account, developing composite characters and settings," he said. "I loved the creative aspect of doing it this way."

Available on amazon.com, one reader of "Typhoon Coast" called it a "fun and adventurous book," while another said, "writing is great, what an imagination."

It's been said that the best thing that happens to your first book is your second book. With that in mind, "Typhoon Coast" is the first of a trilogy: "The Barbary Coast: Fly from Evil," will be released next year and "The Devil's Sea" will be published in 2023.

Clifford, who is quite talented at marketing and firmly believes that life is a treasure hunt and the people you meet are the real treasures, coined a descriptive phrase to go along with "Typhoon Coast."

"Life is a treasure hunt; seek and you will find" is on merchandise that can be purchased at typhooncoast.com. He has also buried \$1,000 in a public location in San Francisco with clues given throughout the book. Details can be found on the website. One of the most worthwhile and humbling experiences Clifford has enjoyed recently is doing veteran outreach through Grammy-award winning country singer Zac Brown's Camp Southern Ground. Clifford works with post 9-11 veterans during the camp's

Warrior Week wellness program, helping them adjust to the many challenges they face as they return to civilian life. As Clifford proclaims, "We are here to take care of each other, be our brother's keepers. We are as good as the people with whom we connect. When you've been able to achieve success in life, help the next person achieve theirs."

Clifford has done this his entire life. Perhaps this is why Moraga resident and first responder Douglas Young called Clifford "a local American hero."

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