



Written by [Jack Kerwick, Ph.D.](#) on January 15, 2013

A Story of Life: Conklin's Book "Don't Thank Me, Thank Your Recruiter"

It has been quite some time since fictional character Rocky Balboa achieved the stature of a cultural icon. Sylvester Stallone's hugely successful film franchise has his beloved "Italian Stallion" exchanging blows with one adversary after the other. Yet Stallone has repeatedly insisted over the decades since the debut of the original *Rocky* that the series is not ultimately about boxing at all.



Rather, it is about *life*.

As he reveals in his recently published, [Don't Thank Me, Thank Your Recruiter](#), Army veteran Ken Conklin is one person who knows the value of using metaphors to better discern the pearls that life has to offer. But there are two differences between Conklin and Stallone in this regard.

First, it is by way of the imagery of *the military*, not boxing, that Conklin delineates for his readers the contours of life.

Second, it is from *his experience* in the military that Conklin draws.

That is, in contrast to Rocky, Conklin, and the story that he recapitulates, are real.

Yet Conklin's book is dramatically unlike any other centered on the military in supplying readers with an insider's account of life among "Support Soldiers" — not "Combat Soldiers." It would be a grave mistake, however, to think that it is any less packed with action and adventure for this.

And it would be an equally grave mistake to think that *Support Soldiers* generally, and Conklin in particular, aren't the most determined of fighters.

Writing in an earthy, matter-of-fact style, Conklin pulls no punches as he shares with readers his nearly 10-year journey in the U.S. Army. This is a journey that originates in the weeks following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and ends (well, sort of ends) in 2011 when the author leaves the military. It is a journey that, despite its humble beginnings in Smallville, USA, Conklin's beloved Saint Johnsville, New York, winds up transcending continents: Iraq, South Korea, and Afghanistan are just some of the far-off places on Conklin's itinerary — lands that he describes with all the blood, sweat, and tears that only an American soldier is capable of shedding.

Yet in the last resort, Conklin's is not a journey about places and times. It is a personal odyssey, an adolescent's trek toward manhood.

Again, [Don't Thank Me, Thank Your Recruiter](#) is not about the military, much less about war. Readers are no more required to take an interest in such matters to delight in this book than are the millions of *Rocky* fans worldwide first required to be fans of professional boxing. In fact, whether one shares Conklin's vision of the good life or distrusts the military and vehemently opposes the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq — wars that Conklin believes America was justified in prosecuting and in which Americans like himself, from the love, not of government, but of country, were justified in serving — one



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can still appreciate, and even fall in love, with Conklin's book.

The reason for this is twofold.

First, it is a story to which every human being can relate. Despite its particularity, Conklin's is a narrative that strikes a universal chord insofar as it reenacts the failures and successes, the trials and the joys, of the human experience.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, it is Conklin's *perspective* on life — his *philosophy of life*, so to speak — which promises any reader an incalculable reward. Uniting the emotionally varied episodes that he relays is an eternal optimism that the reader can't help finding infectious.

Conklin, though, while an optimist, is not a wide-eyed optimist. He has neither the will nor, given his experiences, the ability to view the world through the proverbial rose-colored glasses. His optimism is not naïveté — a denial of pain, suffering, and outright evil in the world. Conklin of all people is all too aware of the brute fact that as long as our world exists, such things are here to stay. His optimism boils down to a faith that, for however dark and dismal one's circumstances may be at any given time, the darkness is never impenetrable. Light can and will prevail. Yet for this to happen, one must be willing to fight for right.

Eighteenth-century Irish political philosopher and statesman Edmund Burke famously observed: "The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing." Conklin would agree. The evil, though, is as frequently — and probably more frequently — within oneself as it is outside of it. Nor are those with whom one is joined as a comrade in arms exempt from acting treacherously. This Conklin makes clear.

[*Don't Thank Me, Thank Your Recruiter*](#) is an inspirational work of the first order. It is the book for those who want to "support the troops." Yet it is also the book for those who are interested in rediscovering the timeless truth that the only things worth having in life are those worth fighting for.



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