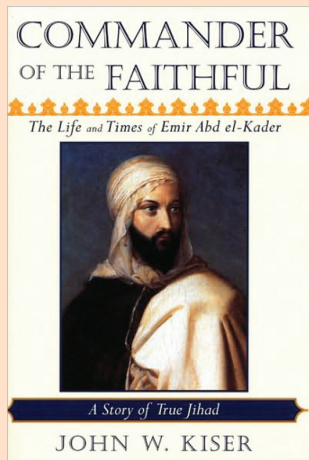


SPEAKING OF WRITING

**John W. Kiser**

Author of *Commander of the Faithful* (Monkfish Publishing)

When did you start reading, and what did you like to read as a kid?

When I was around seven or eight year old, I distinctly remember reading good, hardbound Landmark books for kids. These were all, to my recollection, historical fiction books, simply told but very informative: *The Battle of Britain* or *Washington at Valley Forge* and so forth. I had a particular liking early on for military history and was an enthusiastic collector of lead soldiers.

When did you think about becoming a writer?

I started writing for pleasure when I finished a trip through the Soviet Union in 1969, a kind of graduation present to myself. I wrote vignettes of various scenes and encounters that I found interesting. I was first encouraged to write a book by a family friend and well-known Editor at Putnam Books, Edward T. Chase. He encouraged me to write my first book in 1986 called *Communist Entrepreneurs*—profiles of innovative mavericks in the Soviet bloc who had invented new technologies (like soft contact lenses) used in the West but not generally known to have come from the Commie world.

How do you write? Do you have a daily routine? What's good about it? What do you hate about it?

My routine. When I am not doing research, I usually write regularly in the mornings from 9am to 1 or 2 PM, with Sundays and sometimes Saturdays off. The key thing is to sit everyday and stare at the paper and write, even if it is only a paragraph. What I like is the challenge of figuring out how to organize material to make it a good read and at the same time inform the reader. I like nonfiction, off beat subjects which combine current events and history and cultural diversity. I like what I do. One shouldn't attempt to write (on spec at least) unless committed to a subject that will enrich the writer in some way. Rewriting is always viewed as drudgery by writers, but is the part that improves the work the most.

Is there any particular story to tell concerning the writing of this book?

No particular story other than it took me to Algeria frequently which was considered a very dangerous country but in fact wasn't. I also enjoyed immensely going to Syria, especially Damascus. One clear impression I had throughout was that Arabs do not hate Americans, as some politicians would want us to believe. They do dislike some of many of our government's policies.

What's some good advice that you've received concerning writing? What advice can you offer newer writers?

Advice to young writers? Don't try to write (books) unless you have some strong inner drive to do so, and don't expect to make much money. Be disciplined. The main thing is to write about something that you feel drawn to strongly and have some kind of personal connection to. Also read widely and read classics.

The rest of this interview is available at www.forewordmagazine.com/authors.

The review of this book was published in the December/January 2008 issue, and is available online at www.forewordmagazine.com/reviews/.