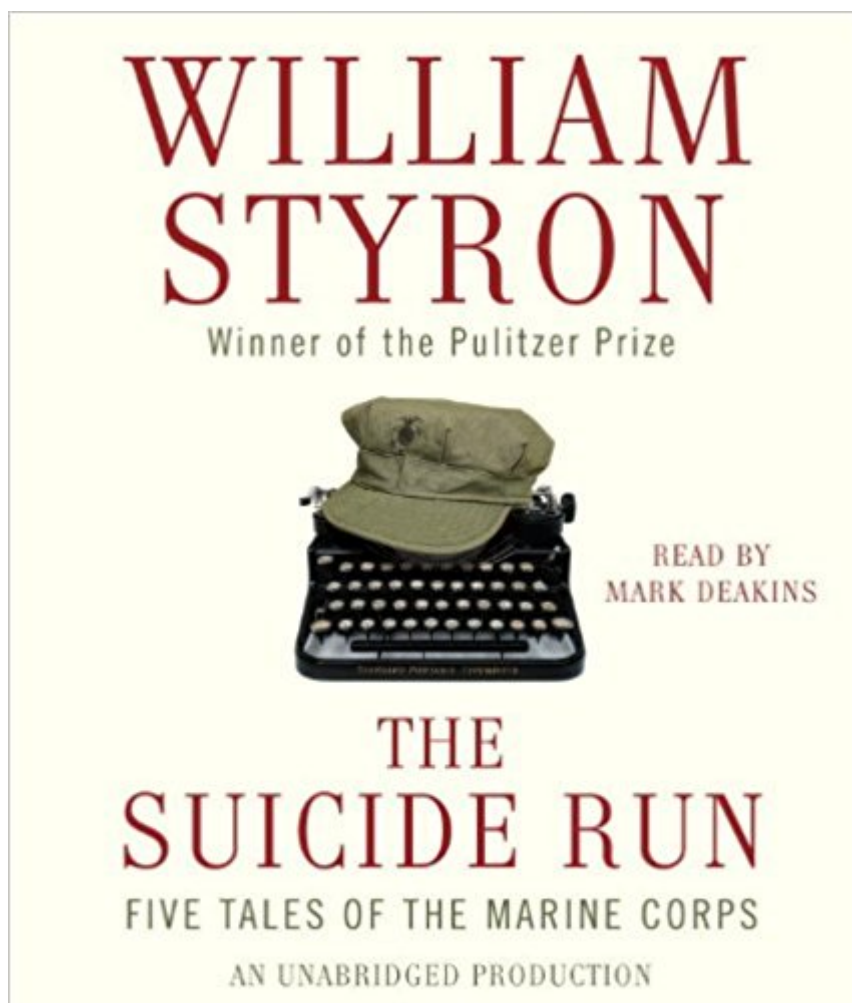


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# The Suicide Run: Five Tales Of The Marine Corps



## Synopsis

Before writing his memoir of madness, *Darkness Visible*, William Styron was best known for his ambitious works of fiction—including *The Confessions of Nat Turner* and *Sophie’s Choice*. Styron also created personal but no less powerful tales based on his real-life experiences as a U.S. Marine. *The Suicide Run* collects five of these meticulously rendered narratives. One of them—“*Elobey, Annobón, and Corisco*”—is published here for the first time. In “*Blankenship*,” written in 1953, Styron draws on his stint as a guard at a stateside military prison at the end of World War II. “*Marriott, the Marine*” and “*The Suicide Run*”—which Styron composed in the early 1970s as part of an intended novel that he set aside to write *Sophie’s Choice*—depict the surreal experience of being conscripted a second time, after World War II, to serve in the Korean War. “*My Father’s House*” captures the isolation and frustration of a soldier trying to become a civilian again. In “*Elobey, Annobón, and Corisco*,” written late in Styron’s life, a soldier attempts to exorcise the dread of an approaching battle by daydreaming about far-off islands, visited vicariously through his childhood stamp collection. Perhaps the last volume from one of literature’s greatest voices, *The Suicide Run* brings to life the drama, inhumanity, absurdity, and heroism that forever changed the men who served in the Marine Corps. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This posthumous collection from Pulitzer and National Book Award winner Styron (*Sophie’s Choice*) is a mishmash of early stories and unfinished novel excerpts that, while interesting as an

artifact, adds little to his esteemed oeuvre. A former marine, Styron shows the horrors of war not through battle but through vignettes of men on leave (such as the title story) or in their quarters, struggling with their fate. Blankenship follows a young warrant officer as he investigates the escape of two Marines from a military prison island. Through interrogating another prisoner, McFee, Blankenship learns how deep soldierly ennui can run. Marriot, the Marine is about a writer recalled to duty as a reservist on the eve of his first novel's publication. He finds solace in a superior's love of literature and begins to believe that not all Marines are as brash as his roommate (he of the wet, protuberant lower lip and an exceptionally meager forehead), but the illusion doesn't last long. Styron's prose is as assured as ever and his knack for character is masterful, but the overall moralizing tone "war is debasement" is both too simple and too political to work in these character-driven stories. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Lest we forget, William Styron (1925–2006) was a major American writer, author of such profound novels as *Lie Down in Darkness* (1951), *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967), and *Sophie's Choice* (1979). Sadly, he is little read these days. Perhaps this collection of lesser Styron material will stir interest in his earlier works. These five pieces of fiction, referred to as "narrations" (including two previously unpublished), explore Styron's own experiences as a U.S. Marine. The collection, then, is a taste of his talent and one of his major subject-interests. Straddling fiction and memoir, they work out different contexts of the overall theme of the draw of military life, which obviously enticed Styron himself. For larger serious fiction collections. --Brad Hooper --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Real writers - and William Styron is firmly in the 20th century ranks - can record history in ways that straightforward accounts are not able. The prose shows both talent and care: it's beautiful, lofty and requiring a dictionary near-at-hand. The writer's care in expressing and recording important things in just the right words is evident throughout the stories. At the heart of each is a Marine either serving during WWII or recently returned. However, the war still rests on him. Besides instructing us in the post-war time, the book of stories reminds us of the high bar ambitious, good writers set for themselves in Styron's time.

I finished these "five tales of the Marine Corps" wishing that William Styron had written more, specifically that he had finished the section called "My Father's House," which he wrote in 1985 and

was the opening section of a novel never finished. As always with this great writer, these stories convey the complexity of that animal known as a human. The narrator of "My Father's House" is Paul Whitehurst, recently returned to Virginia-- the time is 1946-- from a three year stint in the Marine Corps fighting in "the Good War, that is, the second War to End All Wars" who can see the awful contradiction that, in order to be a good soldier, he has to hate the Japanese enemy, described by his commander as "subhuman," while feeling guilty over his memento of the war, an exquisite gold locket obviously taken from a dead Japanese soldier Paul won from a tipsy warrant officer in a poker game in Saipan. At first Paul thinks the locket is solid gold but then discovers a photograph inside of two little girls "who appeared to be sisters" on a ferryboat. "So I kept the picture in the locket and from time to time stole a peek at the ferryboat children, always making my mind an absolute blank whenever my thoughts began to stray toward the father from whose dead neck my trophy had been torn." Then there is the specter of race. In "Marriott, the Marine," it is rumored that half dozen or so black people had committed suicide rather than be uprooted from their homes to make way for what would eventually be called Camp Lejeune. And Paul in "My Father's House" has a heated argument with his stepmother Isabel over whether or not a black man convicted of raping a white woman should be executed. He, a liberal for the times who carried a copy of POCKET BOOK OF VERSE with him throughout the war, weighs in on a prison sentence since the rapist had not killed anyone. In the eyes of Isabel, however, he is a "monster," who has committed a crime worse than murder and moreover is represented by a New York "little Jew" lawyer. Finally Paul runs into the family cook Florence, who had been fired by his stepmother over a clash of personalities and whom he loves. She is thrilled to see that he has returned from the war unscathed. "My my, you is some big boy now." Paul's character surely is on some level autobiographical as he says that since boyhood "the whole conundrum of color and slavery's cruel bequest--had begun to absorb me." Readers of Styron know that he went on to write the controversial CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER. No writer comes to mind better than Mr. Styron at character development, often extended but sometimes by a few deft sentences artfully constructed: Blankenkenship from the first story; Marriott, the Marine who speaks fluent French, reads Flaubert but in the end is a Marine to the core; Darling (Dee) Jeeter, Jr., the country boy from South Carolina who cannot wait to kill the first enemy soldier; his father, "Daddy" Jeeter dying from lung cancer, a "boozier, brawler," but also a decorated war hero; Mamie Eubanks, the twenty-year-old Baptist girl, with whom Paul is smitten-- at least for carnal reasons. She reads THE ROBE (a novel I had not thought about since high school) and ends phone conversations with "God bless." Styron is a master of metaphor. A character has eyes with irises "like thin blue flakes of splintered glass, twinkly with scorn." Fallen soldiers have "pureed

brains." On a more pleasant note, the "afternoon sacrament of ice cream." In a parade on Fifth Avenue in New York, the narrator of "Marriott, the Marine" sees General Douglas MacArthur, just having been removed by President Truman from his post as commander of United Nations and American forces in the Far East. He glances straight at the narrator and "behind the raspberry-tinted sunglasses his eyes appeared as glassily opaque and mysterious as those of an old, sated lion pensively digesting a wildebeest." Finally the same narrator says "Flaubert's enormous craft, his monkish dedication, his irony, his painstaking regard for the nuances of language--all of these commanded my passionate admiration." These very words could be used to describe the genius of Styron, himself.

Interesting look at his previously unknown to me service in the USMC.

I liked it a lot. thoughtful character portrayal.

Interesting perspective on war, the USMC and the post WWII time period.

As a former Camp Lejeune enlisted marine, 1952-54, I found the author to be somewhat overwrought about his situation there. After all, he was an officer who had many privileges the peons had none of - the Officer's Club for one. The Suicide Run story was right on - having experienced the same Lejeune-NYC, 48 hour pass wacky auto trips. Almost every weekend there were reports of carloads of marines dead in car accidents. I had trouble with his redneck description of Lt Darling Jeeter - I can't imagine a marine officer that dumb, or at least I never met an enlisted ranked marine as such. We also had the same weather he did and I don't remember it as bad as he portrayed. Parris Island was worse, in case he forgot. I also had trouble with his French conversations with a LtCol. If you want better descriptions of USMC, read Eugene Sledge (With the Old Breed) and Robert Leckie (Helmet For My Pillow.) William Manchester's Goodby Darkness is superb. Robert A. Aherne

This collection of short stories by William Styron tells of his early experiences as a marine during the later part of World War II. The book is a series of five short stories - a couple of which run to about 50 - 60 pages while the others are much briefer. In fact, the book was compiled after his death and so, not surprisingly, the connective tissue between the stories is a little tenuous but the terror of war, in its many guises, is there for both the reader and the author to wrestle with. It goes without saying

(I hope) that Styron is one of the great writers of the 20th century. I have read that it pays to read his work with a dictionary by your side and I certainly come away from reading one of his books with a larger vocabulary (but unfortunately not a better memory!). Notwithstanding the shortcomings of this compilation, I saw several themes that play out in his better known work and in his life:- race relations, or the lack of them, in Virginia are ingrained in the daily fabric of life. Styron seems somewhat tormented by this inequity but it is part of the DNA of a southerner in the mid 20th century.- the fear of falling short and disappointing your family / friends / country is greater than the fear of battle itself. Most of us feel this in some way, although not with such life and death consequences. Fortunately, Styron was not put to the test as the war ended, but in its place one senses an element of survivor guilt - there but for the grace of God - battling demons is the unfair lot of returning serviceman - the horrors of war (actual and impending) leave their mark and there's not much we civilians can do about it. This collection is not at the top of a Styron reading list but his prose is as detailed and nuanced as ever. For Styron fans it helps provide some context to his later depression but the newly initiated should stick to the tried and true classics.

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