

Catherine Mann

Air Force wife/author puts human face on the military

Thursday, May 13, 2004

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ThisWeek Contributor

Award-winning Centerville author Catherine Mann pens patriotic romantic suspense novels featuring a C-17 squadron of Air Force pilots and their courageous families.

Military romances, a hot category within the largest of the fiction genres, provide a tribute to U.S. armed forces "by showing the nobility behind the call-to-duty," Mann recently told *ThisWeek*.

Her April release, *Anything, Anywhere, Anytime*, and her May Silhouette Intimate Moments, *Joint Forces*, are the latest in her best-selling "Wingmen Warriors" series for Harlequin, the romance publishing powerhouse. Mann writes from her experience as the wife of an active-duty Air Force aviator.

"The outpouring of patriotism lately has been incredible," she said. "And very much appreciated. However, the military works tirelessly 24/7 during peacetime as well. I've chosen to showcase some of the peacetime operations and missions, too, including humanitarian relief, in hopes that people will remember the ongoing sacrifices made by servicemen and women."

As an Air Force wife, Mann has held down the home front for months on end while her husband's military calling led him to war zones such as Afghanistan and Iraq. While her spouse was deployed to Kosovo, Mann sought to fill the hours and perhaps find some peace through writing. A story idea triggered by a news report became the first of her popular military series. With their mix of adventure and romance, Mann's books have won an enthusiastic following.

"Last winter, as things were heating up in Iraq, I received an e-mail from a fan telling me that reading my military books made her feel safer by giving her insights into the people defending our country," the author said. "I printed out the note for my husband, who, after reading it, placed it in his bag to take with him to the Middle East."

Her stories grow from a desire to put a human face on the men and women serving in the armed forces. *Anything, Anywhere, Anytime*, her breakout mainstream romance novel, was written while her husband was deployed for Operation Iraqi Freedom. *Romantic Times BOOKClub*, the leading magazine for the romance industry, awarded Mann's April release a four-star review and "Top Pick" status, writing, "*Anything, Anywhere, Anytime* is a guaranteed page-turner filled with heroes and heroines passionate about love and duty."

Set in a fictional war-torn country, *Anything, Anywhere, Anytime* features an Air Force pilot hero and a flight surgeon heroine, estranged lovers on a dangerous assignment to rescue civilians behind enemy lines. Working with a squad of Army Rangers and a hotshot group of Navy SEALs, the USAF team fights to save innocent lives. The fan-pleasing novel also includes Mann's trademark blend of suspense and passion.

Joint Forces, her current series-length romance, also received a four-star review and "Top Pick" status from *Romantic Times BOOKClub*. The novel offers a mature hero and heroine who, after more



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than 20 years of marriage, discover they are not only expecting a child but have been targeted by a murderous enemy. The hero's prisoner-of-war experiences and his fight to repair crumbling family relationships illustrate the far-reaching effects of combat.

An avid romance reader since her teenage years, Mann attributes her first sale to snagging an editor's attention during a run on the romance writing contest circuit that totaled a remarkable 17 finals. By the end of her first year on the shelves, the author had made 13 more sales, landed on a bestseller list and won a RITA Award, the top honor from the Romance Writers of America (RWA).

She garnered her fourth RITA Award nomination, for her November 2003 Wingmen Warriors' book, *Strategic Engagement*. With her critique partner and friend, Harlequin author Joanne Rock, Mann presents workshops for aspiring authors at romance writing conferences around the country. In July, she will participate in the RWA's national conference in Dallas. When asked to distill her writing advice down to one sentence, the author said, "Read, read, read the genre you're targeting and then sit your tookus in a chair and write, write, write."

In addition to writing about the military experience, Mann contributes author copies of her books to causes such as "Support Our Soldiers: Operation Shoebox" (<http://rtnewsletter.homestead.com/OperationShoebox.html>), which distributes paperbacks, letters and other items to U.S. troops. Fisher House (www.fisherhouse.org), a program that enables family members to be close to a military loved one during hospitalization, is another of Mann's pet causes. "It's basically the military's equivalent to the Ronald McDonald House," she explained.

Mann is working on a new, action-packed Air Force Special Ops series when she's not promoting her current releases. Her publisher markets her books on the eHarlequin Web site and through advertising, while the author sends press releases, networks through the Internet, maintains a newsletter and sets up book signings to meet her fans.

"My favorite part of promotion is visiting with readers through e-mails and in person," Mann said. "I was so thrilled recently when a group of them drove hours just to attend one of my book signings."

Penning military romances is a dream come true for the author, who has never had to wrestle with writers block.

"Following my aviator husband around the world with four children, a beagle and a tabby in tow provides endless inspiration for new stories," Mann explained. "And it's great to be married to my very own USAF research source."

Meet the author

Catherine Mann, author of *Joint Forces*, will appear at a book signing at 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, May 15, at the Upper Arlington Barnes & Noble bookstore, 3280 Tremont Road, Columbus. Call 614-459-0920 for more information.

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