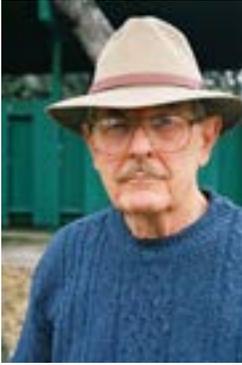


Questions for Robert L. Flynn

Interviewed by Voices Staff

Robert Flynn, professor emeritus, Trinity University and a native of Chillicothe, Texas, is the author of thirteen books. Ten of them are novels: *North To Yesterday*; *In the House of the Lord*; *The Sounds of Rescue*; *The Signs of Hope*; *Wanderer Springs*; *The Last Klick*; *The Devil's Tiger*, co-authored with the late Dan Klepper; *Tie-Fast Country*; *Echoes of Glory*; *Jade: Outlaw*; and *Jade: The Law*. His dramatic adaptation of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* was the United States entry at the Theater of Nations in Paris in 1964 and won a Special Jury Award. He is also the author of a two-part documentary, *A Cowboy Legacy*, shown on ABC-TV; a nonfiction narrative, *A Personal War in Vietnam*, an oral history; *When I Was Just Your Age*, a book of essays; two story collections, *Seasonal Rain* and *Living With the Hyenas*; and a collection of essays, *Growing Up a Sullen Baptist*. He is co-editor of *Paul Baker and the Integration of Abilities*.



Flynn also contributes to *The Door*, "The World's Pretty Much Only Magazine of Religious Satire." *North to Yesterday* received awards from the Texas Institute of Letters and the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, and was named one of the Best Books of the Year by the New York Times. *Seasonal Rain* was co-winner of the Texas Literary Festival Award. *Wanderer Springs* received a Spur Award from Western Writers of America. *Living With the Hyenas* received a Western Heritage Award from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame. Flynn's work has been translated into German, Spanish, Dutch, Afrikaans, Malayalam, Arabic, Tamil, Hindi, Kanada, and Vietnamese. Flynn is a member of The Texas Institute of Letters, The Writers Guild of America, Marine Corps Combat Correspondents, and P.E.N. In 1998, he received the Distinguished Achievement Award from the Texas Institute of Letters. In 2010, *Echoes of Glory* won the Western Writers of America Spur Award in the Western Long Novel category.

Robert Flynn is a native of Chillicothe, Texas, the best known Chillicothe outside of Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois, despite its size. Chillicothe is so small there's only one Baptist Church. Chillicothe is so small you have to go to Quanah to have a coincidence. Chillicothe is fairly bursting with truth and beauty, and at an early age Flynn set out to find it.

His life and work could be described as "The Search for Morals, Ethics, Religion, or at least a good story in Texas and lesser known parts of the world."

Voices: When did you begin to write? What triggered that impulse? Do you recall a specific moment?

Robert Flynn: My father was born in 1887, the third and last son, at the end of the track that became known as Chillicothe, Texas. Grandfather was section boss for the Fort Worth & Denver railroad but purchased a section of land along the railroad track in Wilbarger County. When my father was eight, Grandfather was murdered, and his widow, a former school teacher, and their three sons dedicated themselves to hanging on to the farm. The nearest school was more than two miles away down the railroad track, and they were able to attend school only when the weather was too bad to work on the farm.

Dad had little education outside what his mother taught him, but he always kept records to document when crops were planted, cows came fresh, and crops were harvested. He was drafted during World War One and kept a diary of his days in the trenches. When I enlisted in the Marines he asked me to keep a diary. I was close to my father and I did as he requested. Reflecting on and recording each day became something that I enjoyed, and I continued it.

You grew up in rural North Texas. How did your childhood experiences influence your writing?

I grew up on my father's farm. Because of my father's health, we moved to Vernon, the county seat, approximately 12,000 population at the time, and I lived in Vernon for one year, attending Vernon High School my senior year. In September I enrolled in Baylor. Waco was the biggest town I had seen with the exception of two FFA trips to the Fort Worth Fat Stock Show.

How has your war experience influenced your writing?

North Korea, backed by China and the Soviet Union, invaded South Korea in the summer of 1950. President Truman ordered US forces in South Korea and Japan to repel the invasion. We were the most powerful nation in the world, and I assumed the war would be over in a month, so I returned to Baylor. When US and South Korean troops were in danger of being driven into the sea, I left Baylor and enlisted in the Marines.

Serving in the Marines changed my life. I had lived a sheltered life, protected by my parents. I didn't know any "bad" people. My entire concept of good and bad, how things worked, the way people and nations were manipulated by propaganda, misinformation, and the deliberate withholding of information by both the government and the news and entertainment media was changed forever. It was a slow process, but I now believe Major General Smedley Butler, former Marine Commandant, and two-time Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, who said he spent his career making other nations safe for plundering by American corporations. In the 1930s bank and corporate executives tried to recruit Butler to lead a revolt that would remove Franklin Roosevelt from the White House. Instead Butler warned Congress of American fascism. Almost three decades before Eisenhower, Butler warned of the power of financial and industrial leaders, elected officials and military commanders, to seize control of the nation. Wall Street never loses money when Marines die.

How old were you when you went to Vietnam?

I was 38. I had talked to a Marine recruiter earlier, but my age was too advanced and my military skills too rudimentary for them to use. I asked for and received a special assignment for *True* magazine, intending to embed myself with the Marines. But first I spent time with Army transportation on the one road north from Da Nang to the DMZ as research for a book I intended to write some day.

Did your experiences in Vietnam shape your views on issues of war and peace in today's world?

Very much so. I don't believe we should ever send troops into combat-situations without a draft with no exemptions and increased taxes to pay for the war. There are too many Americans who will happily send someone else's kids to war if they and theirs don't have to serve or to pay for it.

Some of your works (e.g., *The Devil's Tiger*) draw on highly specialized information for credibility. Which of your works demanded the most extensive research? How do you gather information?

One of the first ideas I had as a writer was whether a person could maintain his belief in the reality of a situation if he was the only one who had experienced it. That was the beginning of *Echoes of Glory* and the reason I rode a gun truck through the Hai Van Pass, up the Street Without Joy to the DMZ. I had trouble completing the book because I didn't believe the military, the media, and the government would collude to create a false story until Jessica Lynch and Pat Tillman.