



## **Book will focus on area man's military trial history.**

Robert Varley, Register Staff

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BRANFORD — Walter C. Bansley III inspired Tom Cruise's character in the classic film, "A Few Good Men," and now he has inspired a recent UConn graduate to write a book about his other military exploits.

Bansley, a Branford resident, New Haven lawyer and retired Marine, went to Iraq last year, where he won an acquittal for a Wallingford Marine reservist, Staff Sgt. Brian H. Musco. Musco, on his third tour of duty in the Middle East, was facing charges of dereliction of duty and conduct unbecoming his position.

Niamh Cunningham, 22, will focus on that more recent trip.

A Navy investigation alleged Musco didn't report that he received a stolen television set from his subordinates and condoned the thievery. Bansley, who paid for the trip himself, was the only civilian lawyer to defend the court-martialed Marine.

Bansley, who spent 20 years in the military, said Marine officials "didn't even want a civilian lawyer going over there, but they couldn't stop me because of my background."

Cunningham, who just graduated with a double major in English and journalism, said someone needed to get Bansley's experiences on paper.

Now she's digging through his old case files and interviewing various players in Bansley's legal career.

"I've known him for as long as I can remember. He's a family friend," she said. "I've grown up listening to his stories."

Bansley, who heads a family law firm with his son, Walter IV, and daughter, Shannon, thought about writing an account of his trip in Iraq himself, but realized he's too busy.

He also thought how great it would be to help launch Cunningham's career.

The student previously wrote about Bansley's exploits in Iraq for a magazine-writing class, but for the book they want to expand it to include other stories and cases.

"There's nothing funnier and stupider than Marines," Bansley said, recalling how two of them climbed a flagpole in Moscow in the earlier 1980s — when the Cold War was still downright

frosty — and took down the "hammer and sickle" Soviet flag. "It wasn't viewed as a humorous thing," he said.

Bansley's career covers everything from the "absurdly minimal" to the highest espionage and murder cases.

He wants to get past the stereotypes of "blood-sucking, greedy lawyers" and delve into the bonds between Marines and the strange machinations of military law.

"In the military, the very people you're attacking control your destiny," he said of times he had to cross-examine senior officers. "And it does take a good bit of moral courage to do what is right in those circumstances. ... There's nothing comparable in civilian law."

"A Few Good Men" is based on a case surrounding the hazing death of Pfc. William Alvarado on Guantanamo Bay and the ensuing cover-up.

Bansley represented three of the 10 men accused in the death. The jury found one of the men innocent and the other two guilty, but they were sentenced to only 38 days in jail, which they had already served waiting for the trial.

Cunningham plans to start her book with a "catchy" story and work into the Musco trial. She's confident she can handle all of the drafts needed to hone a book.

As a Branford High School senior, she wrote a student-athlete journal for the New Haven Register.

"I thought (the newsroom) was the greatest place ever," she said of the bustle endemic to most newspapers, "which is strange, because I don't actually want to be a reporter."

Professor Gina Barreca called Cunningham a "remarkably talented and determined young writer."

"Her academic work was always first-rate, but when she started writing short pieces for the nonfiction creative-writing class, I could see that she also had another kind of talent: She could tell a story," she said. "Get to the heart of the matter. Raise questions within a piece, not only outside of it."

Bansley, who finds himself fielding legal calls from many military families, can't rule out another trip to Iraq.

"There's only one of me and there are only so many hours," he said, noting a commitment to his practice, although he still has the desire to help fellow Marines. "But, under the right circumstances, yeah, sure."