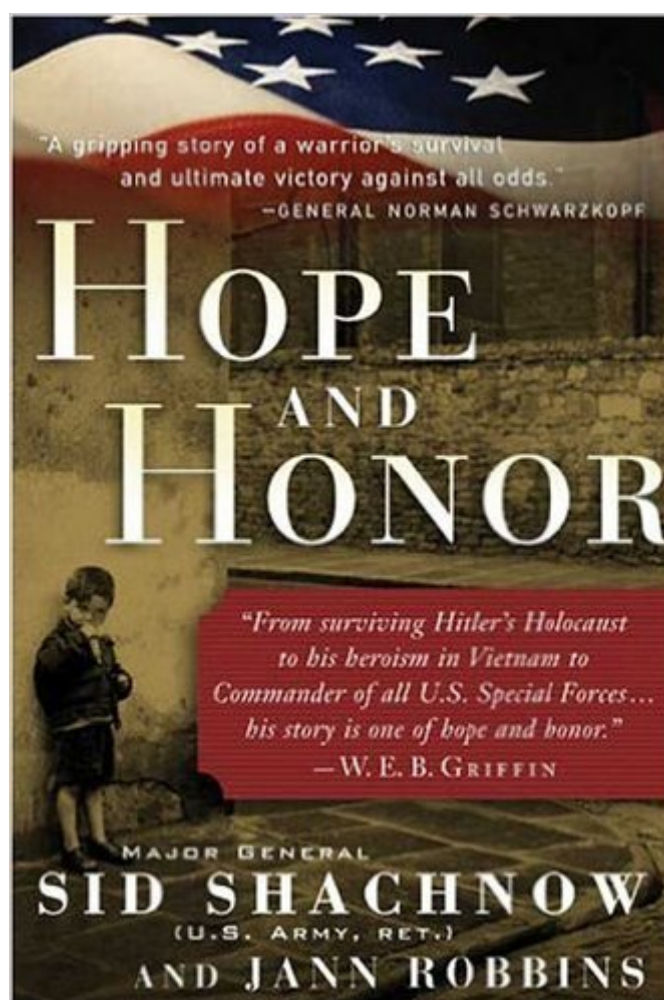


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# Hope And Honor



## Synopsis

Major General Sid Shachnow is more than a highly decorated Vietnam War veteran with two Silver and three Bronze Stars with V for Valor. He survived a crucible far crueller than the jungles of Vietnam: Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe, spending three years in the notorious Kovno concentration camp as a child. At age ten, with nothing but rags on his back, he was finally able to flee that hellhole. Most of those he left behind died. After returning to his home in Lithuania, now occupied by the Soviets, and finding it unbearable, Shachnow and his family decided to head west, often on foot, across Europe to the U.S. zone in Germany, where they found refuge. To earn a living in the grim aftermath of war, he smuggled black market contraband for American GIs. His next journey was to America, where he worked his way through school and enlisted in the U.S. Army, volunteering for U.S. Special Forces, where he served for thirty-two years. His primary goal was to save others from the indignities he had endured and the deadly fate he so narrowly escaped. From Vietnam to the Middle East to the Berlin Wall, Sydney Shachnow served in Special Operations. He grew as Special Forces grew, receiving both a master's and a doctoral degree. He traveled the world, rising to major general, responsible for American Special Forces everywhere, but the lessons of Kovno stayed with him wherever he turned, wherever he soldiered. *Hope and Honor* is a powerful and dramatic memoir that shows how the will to live---so painfully refined in the fires of that long-ago death camp---was forged, at last, into truth of soul and wisdom of the heart.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is the gripping memoir of a child Holocaust survivor who immigrates to the US, enlists in the

Army and works his way up to Major General in the US Special Forces. The story begins with the horrors of the Lithuanian Holocaust death camp (Kovno) described through the eyes of a young, naive boy. Shachnow tries to make sense of his small world as his life quickly spirals downward. I found the brazen anti-Semitism displayed by Lithuanians alarming and disturbing. Shachnow watches helplessly as his mother is violently raped and family members are robbed, tortured, humiliated and brutally slaughtered, one by one. To make himself less vulnerable to extermination, Shachnow performs excruciating work on a labor detail where a malicious guard bludgeons him unconscious with the back of a shovel. Rail thin and slowly starving to death, his hair and toenails begin to fall off from malnutrition but he narrowly escapes the death camp on the eve of its liquidation. The Holocaust portion is without a doubt the most harrowing part of the book. After immigrating to the United States, Shachnow must adapt to his new life in suburban middle-America. The Americanization of this young, unassuming refugee from post war Europe is at times poignantly heartbreaking and at other times laugh-out-loud hysterical. Still unable to speak English, he attends school for the first time in his life, tries Coca-Cola (tastes like medicine!), loves rock-and-roll, learns to play football, and does his best to fit in. This book shines light on how important it is for immigrants to integrate in order to succeed. In one particularly heartrending episode young Shachnow discovers the disturbing truth that his father is a sad failure at assimilating into life in America. He surprises his unsuspecting dad by showing up at his "engineering office" only to awkwardly stumble upon him in the restroom, bent over, scrubbing dirty toilets in a janitor's uniform. Shachnow keeps his father's shameful job a secret from his family, but must work long hours after school to help them keep their heads above destitution and poverty. The journey continues as Shachnow enlists in the US Army to escape his controlling and demanding family. He labors his way from Private to Sergeant, getting into fist fights and rowdy bar room brawls along the way. He gets his act together, attends Officer Candidate School and is sent to Viet Nam along the Mekong River with his Special Forces unit where he eludes death by a hair's breadth more than a few times, winning two purple hearts and a silver star in the process. Amazing. The story rounds out as Shachnow is inducted into Berlin's "Detachment-A" -- a cold war, covert unit secretly imbedded into Special Forces. The true identity of this clandestine unit was concealed, its existence denied, and its missions classified. In order to blend in, Det-A personnel dressed in civilian clothing made in East Germany, grew their hair longer and learned to walk, talk and think like Easterners. They carried Eastern European documentation & identification and were on high alert 24 hours a day, every day. I would have loved to read more detail about these cloak-and-dagger operations but perhaps some of it is still restricted information. During the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the cold war, Shachnow is assigned the

position of Berlin Brigade Commander. The story culminates with a great twist of irony as Shachnow's assigned military home is the same house that Nazi General Fritz Reinhardt owned and lived in during WWII. A residence where Hitler and his cronies attended parties and dinners. (Fritz Reinhardt was Hitler's Finance Minister). An ordinary man caught in many extraordinary circumstances, Shachnow's story is told with straight forward warts-and-all honesty and a self deprecating sense of humor. All in all, a truly engaging and inspirational read.

This is the best book I've read recently and I heartily recommend it. The first and most harrowing part of the book deals with General Shachnow's childhood and miraculous survival of the Holocaust. The protagonist of the story is primarily Shachnow's mother -- an extraordinary, quick witted and determined woman. It is mainly due to her efforts and incredible daring that both her children (one of whom was a mere toddler) survived, while pretty much everyone around them perished. Her strength through the war and the heartbreaks and challenges of the family's post war experiences were to me the most touching and heartrending aspect of the book. Shachnow does a fine job at crediting his mother's extraordinary sacrifices and bravery, but also touchingly describing her weaknesses and eventual failures. The second part of the book, which in some ways is just as touching, deals with the Shachnow family's move first to post-war Germany and then to the US. The immigration experience was particularly rough on General Shachnow, who arrived in the US as an unschooled and traumatized teenager, but managed, through toil and faith to complete high school successfully. Shachnow's parents fared less well. They seemed unable to transition to the new culture and its demands. Shachnow speculates that his mother had used up all her strength and ingenuity to survive and therefore found herself unable to cope with the new world. Shachnow tells us how the graceful heroine of the Kovno Ghetto turns into a nagging, selfish and small-minded woman, whose behavior inhibits her and her husband from succeeding in their new life. In one of the saddest parts of the book, Shachnow describes his break from his family following his marriage to a non-Jewish girl -- an event that his family treated with neither wisdom nor grace. The final part of the book is devoted to General Shachnow's military career, starting with his enlistment as a private at the end of his high school studies. His rise to the rank of general is described with humility and is of much interest, though, like other reviewers, I wish it was more extensive. This is an extraordinary book. In part it made me cry (the touching love between the brothers and the terrible heartbreak of Sidney's parents experiences in the US) and in part it made me wonder. But most of all -- the book inspired me. This is the story of the incredible power of love to save lives, to give meaning to existence. It's the story of familial ties and their challenges. This is the story of the ultimate

inevitability of success to those who are sufficiently persistent. And finally -- it's the story of true patriotism and leadership. It's a must read. I heard the book on CD (Blackstone Audio), read by the excellent Brian Emerson.

I just got the book the other day but finished it already. It's the first book I've read in years that I just couldn't put down. It is a fascinating true story. This is a truly amazing tale and with some great humor. I loved it!

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