

# BIPOLAR

My Forever War with Mental Illness

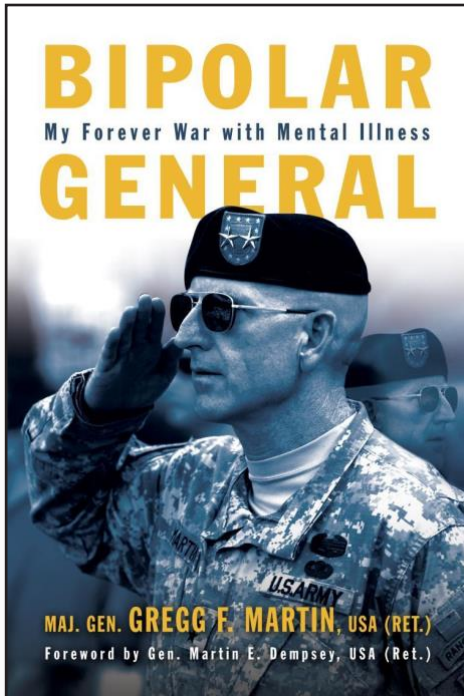
# GENERAL



**MAJ. GEN. GREGG F. MARTIN, USA (RET.)**

Foreword by Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, USA (Ret.)

## Exemplary human or mentally ill?



### **BIPOLAR GENERAL** **My Forever War with Mental Illness**

**By Maj. Gen. Gregg Martin, USA (Ret.)**

“An intense, compelling, courageous book by a gifted senior combat leader whose life was taken over by severe bipolar disorder. I served with Gregg Martin in combat; he is the real deal and so is his book, one that will provide enormous insight and inspiration to families grappling with mental illness.”—**Gen. David Petraeus, USA (Ret.), former Director of the CIA**

“A gripping account of his own ‘invisible wounds of war.’”—**Lt. Gen. Michael Linnington, USA (Ret.), CEO, Wounded Warrior Project**

Fiction and film frequently portray military characters who are a bit “off,” eccentric, irrational, or just plain crazy: Yossarian in *Catch-22*, Colonel Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now*, or Gen. Jack Ripper in *Dr. Strangelove*. But what happens when fiction becomes reality? What happens when you are at war, and you notice that your

senior commanding officer has gone from being intense, efficient, and brilliant to maniacal, reckless, and delusional—when “Gung ho!” becomes “Oh no!”? Well, he gets promoted, of course! That is exactly what happened to Gregg Martin.

The very traits that made Martin an outstanding military leader—incredibly positive attitude, tireless, and hyper-focused—went too far. Though he did not realize his penchant for intensity in thought, word, and action shifted into an abnormal range amid the chaos and fog of war, those around him did identify and witness these behaviors. There is a fine line between genius and madness, and Martin became intoxicated by war in ways he could no longer fully control. Only much later would he learn how the pressure of organizing dozens of simultaneous life-or-death missions each day had altered the biochemistry of his brain.

During the Iraq War, Martin was able to successfully lead the thousands of combat engineers who paved the way for Army troops to forge through to Baghdad. He did so well that he was promoted in subsequent years—not once, but twice—to the rank of major general. In [Bipolar General](#), we learn that since adolescence Martin had what psychiatrists call a “hyperthymic personality,” or an exceptionally positive, energetic, and can-do disposition. The Iraq War triggered what military and Veterans Administration psychiatrists diagnosed as late-onset bipolar disorder, a chemical imbalance that sends sufferers whipsawing between grandiose imaginings and suicidal depressions. His increasingly erratic behavior led to his forced resignation as president of the National Defense University and ended his military career.



Even after resignation, Martin's initial psychiatric evaluation cleared him for duty, which again illustrates how difficult it is to diagnose mental illness in high-performing individuals. The author provides a firsthand look at the various treatments available for bipolar disorder, ranging from powerful medications to electroconvulsive therapy. He discusses why his condition went undiagnosed for so long and explores what can be done both within and outside the armed forces to diagnose and treat mental illness. [\*Bipolar General\*](#) should be of value to those with mental illness and to the communities of family, friends, and caregivers surrounding them.

**Maj. Gen. Gregg F. Martin, PhD, USA (Ret.),** served on active duty for thirty-six years and commanded an engineer company, battalion, and the 130th Engineer Brigade in combat during the first year of the Iraq War. General Martin served multiple overseas tours, commanded the Corps of Engineers Northwest Division, was Commandant of the Army Engineer School, commanded Fort Leonard Wood, was Deputy Commanding General of Third U.S. Army/Army Central in the Middle East, Commandant of the Army War College, President of the National Defense University, and Special Assistant to the Chief of Engineers. Martin holds a PhD and two master's degrees from MIT, master's degrees in national security strategy from both the Army and Naval war colleges, and a bachelor's degree from West Point (class of 1979).

### **ADVANCE PRAISE**

"Exemplary human, or mentally ill? There's no clear line between the two, as this entertaining memoir will show you. Mental illness in the U.S. military? You bet. General Martin led battalions into war, and now he leads again, demonstrating that bipolar disorder can enable spectacular performance, even for years—and that after crashes into severe depression, full recovery and a rich life is possible."—**Jim Phelps, MD, author of *A Spectrum Approach to Mood Disorders***

"This unflinching, harrowing, and inspirational book is utterly unique. No senior military leader has ever ripped back the curtain and told their personal struggle with mental illness. A distinguished soldier-scholar-leader, courageous combat commander, and devoted family man, Maj. Gen. Gregg Martin epitomized success—but when he was suddenly removed from command, it shocked everyone, until we learned of his bipolar disorder. I'm enormously proud of how Gregg Martin has handled this stretch of stormy seas, emerging stronger than ever. *Bipolar General* is an important and magnificent book."—**Adm. James G. Stavridis, USN (Ret.), 16th Supreme Allied Commander at NATO and author of *The Leader's Bookshelf***

"Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Gregg Martin's memoir paints a brutally honest portrait of a high-ranking military officer's debilitating, but ultimately redemptive, experience with bipolar disorder. For civilians, this memoir provides a fascinating glimpse into the life of an accomplished Army officer. It also underscores the complicated relationship between the military and psychiatric illness. This book will help anyone struggling with bipolar disorder better understand their illness and feel less alone. A person of prodigious knowledge and talents, Martin turns his lived experiences with bipolar disorder into life lessons for all of us."—**Dr. Holly A. Swartz, MD, Professor of Psychiatry, University of Pittsburgh; Editor-in-Chief, *American Journal of Psychotherapy*; Treasurer, International Society for Bipolar Disorders**

"This is a groundbreaking and courageous book—the first of its kind. A senior military officer reveals his personal battle with bipolar disease in an effort to reduce the stigma that so many in public service still attach to mental illness. Kudos to Gregg Martin for his willingness to share his journey from a nightmare back to good health." —**Ambassador Wanda Nesbitt, former Senior Vice President of National Defense University**

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## Foreword

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**Maj. Gen. Gregg Martin** and I served together over a seventeen-year period in a number of assignments, beginning in 1997. Gregg was serving as the 5th Combat Engineer Battalion commander, and I was commanding the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment. We later served in adjacent units in Iraq and Germany when I commanded the 1st Armored Division as a two-star (major general) and Gregg commanded the 130th Engineer Brigade as a colonel. And as a four-star (general), I was Gregg's commander when he commanded Fort Leonard Wood, the AWC (Army War College), and then the NDU (National Defense University) as a two-star.

Gregg was an outstanding officer and leader—bright, energetic, enthusiastic, and outgoing. A real people person, he was creative, innovative, and driven. Among the Army's hundreds of general officers of his era, I considered him a transformational leader. We had a goal of reimagining the curriculum of NDU, and I selected Gregg to lead the transformation.

So in 2014, when I started receiving reports that his behavior was becoming erratic and disruptive to the mission, I was shocked. Whenever I would engage Gregg one on one, he seemed fine—the same smart, thoughtful, energetic, and enthusiastic officer I had known for years. Yet

as the reports of his mood swings increased in frequency and severity, I directed a series of assessments to discern, objectively, what was going on between Gregg and the staff and faculty of NDU and our ongoing transformation efforts.

The assessments were clear that while many positive things were going on, Gregg Martin had lost the confidence of the staff and faculty of NDU. Moreover, though none of the individuals conducting the assessments were medical personnel, there were clear indications that Gregg was suffering emotional instability. I subsequently made the decision to remove him from his leadership position at NDU and encouraged him to seek medical care.

We now know that Gregg was suffering from acute bipolar disorder at the time. According to the Army Medical Department and the VA, this condition began in 2003 during combat in Iraq, when the intense stress and trauma of the war “triggered” his genetic precondition for bipolar disorder. Although he was extremely exuberant, happy, energized, and “up” during combat operations and performed brilliantly, damage was done to the brain circuitry that produces and regulates dopamine, endorphins, and other critical chemicals. As a result, from 2003 until his bipolarity peaked in 2014 at NDU, his manic episodes swung higher and higher, while his depressive episodes sunk lower and lower, ultimately resulting in acute bipolarity from 2014 until he stabilized two years later.

Bipolar disorder is a brutal and destructive disease that indiscriminately affects the lives, health, marriages, families, careers, finances, and friendships of some 5–10 million Americans each year, including veterans and active military service members. Those with bipolar disorder can end up as alcoholics and drug addicts, homeless or in prison, and as victims of suicide.

Gregg was fortunate. He made a grueling multiyear recovery thanks to his own desire to get better, his loving wife and family, a committed Army battle buddy, and the VA. He fought through adversity and successfully stabilized his brain biochemistry in September 2016.

Since then, he has moved to Florida and constructed a new life of meaning, purpose, and hope. He and his wife are the healthiest and happiest they have been in many years. He is passionately committed to increasing bipolar and mental-health awareness, to reduce the “stigma” of bipolar disorder and other brain maladies, and to help mitigate the effects of bipolarity on the millions of Americans who have bipolar disorder. He writes with the hope of educating the many tens of millions of family members, friends, and work colleagues who are affected by the illnesses associated with the disorder.

I am enormously proud of Gregg and Maggie for their career of Army service, their ability to survive the brutal storm of their bipolar crisis, their steadfast perseverance through a grueling recovery, and in the way they have reimagined and recreated their lives in the warm Florida sunshine.

I am personally and professionally inspired to support Gregg and Maggie in their efforts to fight the brutal effects of bipolar disorder through education, understanding, and action.

This is an important book—as far as I know the first of its kind in telling the story of an Army general officer who was struck down and then recovered from bipolar disorder. Gregg and Maggie have been great ambassadors for the Army for decades. Now they will be ambassadors and warriors in the battle against bipolar disorder and other mental-health challenges.

—Martin E. Dempsey  
General, U.S. Army (Ret.)  
18th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

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