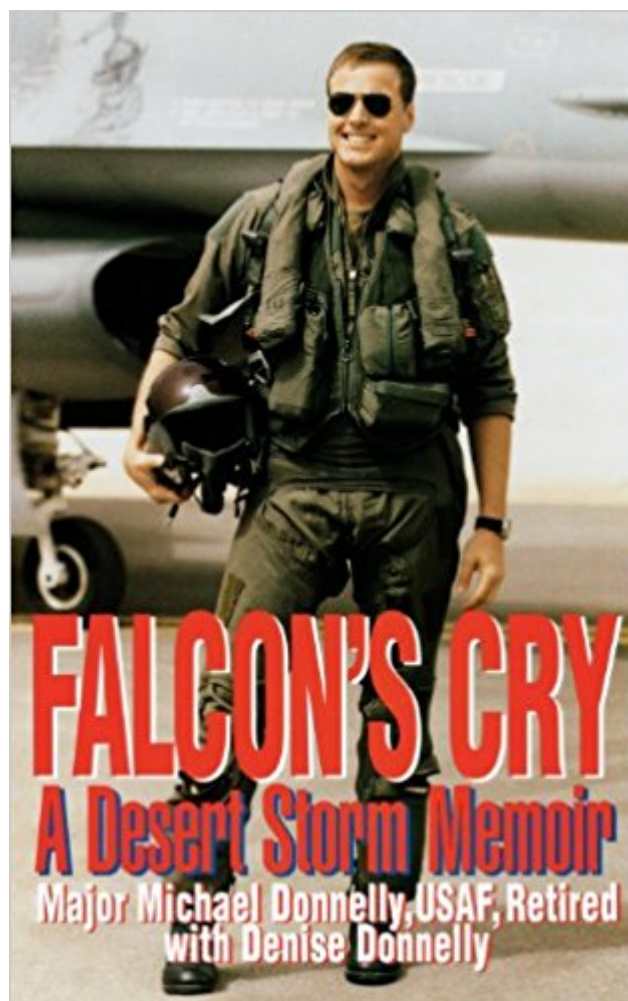


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# Falcon's Cry: A Desert Storm Memoir



## Synopsis

When Major Michael Donnelly was instructing his U.S. Air Force student pilots, he used to tell them three things: Timing is everything; it's nice to be lucky; and there is no justice. Highly decorated fighter pilot, proud young patriot, loyal friend with a mischievous sense of humor, loving husband and father of two, he could not have imagined the tragic meaning those words would assume just a few years after his tour of duty in Desert Storm. In 1996 Major Donnelly was diagnosed with ALS, Lou Gehrig's Disease, at the unusually young age of 35; the onset of this illness marked the beginning of a kind of torture beyond the scope of even the most rigorous military survival training. Betrayed by his body, eventually paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair, he experienced another betrayal perhaps even more difficult to comprehend—betrayal by his country. For despite the fact that over 110,000 Desert Storm veterans are sick, many dying of mysterious cancers and neurological diseases, including more than ten times the normal incidence of ALS—and despite all evidence pointing to U.S. troops having been dosed by low levels of Iraqi nerve agents and exposed to chemical weapons' fallout—the Pentagon adamantly denies any connection between their illnesses and their service in the Gulf War. *Falcon's Cry: A Desert Storm Memoir*, Michael Donnelly's unforgettable story, is his courageous attempt to unearth the truth and force an acknowledgment of that truth by the government he and his fellow veterans defended with their lives. Flying 44 fighter jet combat missions in a war fought on an all-or-nothing scale was thrilling for Michael Donnelly. When the war was won, he and his country rejoiced in the knowledge that, unlike in Vietnam, America had gotten it right in the Persian Gulf. Less than a decade later, the world is learning what veterans and their families have known since Desert Storm—we did not get it right at all. Saddam Hussein is still terrorizing a large portion of the globe. Moreover, we did not learn the lesson of Agent Orange which the Department of Defense denied for decades was the cause of early deaths and birth defects among Vietnam veterans and their families. Yet, thanks largely to the testimony of the author before the House of Representatives in 1997, a first step has been taken toward justice for the tens of thousands of Desert Storm veterans who are suffering virtually in isolation, many without any medical or disability benefits. Major Donnelly believes the truth about Gulf War Illnesses will be uncovered by studies funded in the recently passed Omnibus Appropriations bill, as well as through stories like his own, and he fervently hopes that America can, at last, get it right.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Michael Donnelly's diary entries offer a matter-of-fact account of his 44 combat missions during the Gulf War, but his descriptions of dealing with doctors after coming home are more frightening. Diagnosed with ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, Donnelly is convinced what he has is "Gulf War syndrome"--brought on by exposure to low levels of nerve and poison gases during the war. "I don't know what to believe, where to turn for help," he writes. "All the while my body continues to deteriorate, heedless of the possible causes of its slow degeneration." Although he had served in the military for 15 years, Donnelly had to hire a lawyer and appeal to the Air Force Medical Evaluation Board to force the air force to pay him full disability benefits. And though the government denied any responsibility for his illness, we learn that U.S. officials both in Washington and at the front were aware of Iraq's chemical-weapons capability--and continued with their plans regardless: "Troops came upon camels lying dead and decaying in the desert ... dogs and rodents and other small animals died, suddenly, inexplicably, shortly after those tens of thousands of 'false' chemical weapons alarms rang out. The alarms were so common, some commanders even ordered their troops to disable or disregard them." *Falcon's Cry* is a story of courage and betrayal, a war story in which the casualty doesn't occur until after the fighting stops. --Linda Killian

In 1996 Michael Donnelly, a highly decorated Air Force fighter pilot, consulted his flight surgeon about the extreme fatigue and erratic heart rhythms that he'd been noticing, and asked in passing if they might be connected to his service in the Gulf War. While the military doctor immediately dismissed Donnelly's suggestion, saying "there is no conclusive evidence linking service in the Gulf to any illness," he ordered additional tests. Eventually, Donnelly was diagnosed with ALS or Lou

Gehrig's disease, a degenerative disorder that soon left him confined to a wheelchair and struggling to swallow. The hard-charging former fighter was outraged not only by his condition, but also by the military establishment's steadfast denial of Gulf War syndrome, even when faced with the claims of 110,000 veterans who say that they became ill after serving in Desert Storm. Not one to take disability lightly, Donnelly set out to tackle both his disease and his intransigent government. There is no cure for ALS, but Donnelly has become a powerful spokesman for his fellow veterans and has helped persuade Washington lawmakers to look further into the illnesses that vets believe were caused by exposure to chemical weapons and Iraqi nerve agents. Told with the help of Donnelly's sister, this gripping account could do much to unseat Pentagon assertions that "Gulf War Syndrome" is a myth constructed by stressed-out veterans. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

A frustrating situation regarding Donnelly's health, and the trials he went through.

Knew Mike. He did not deserve to be treated so poorly by our government!

Colin Pendergast  
Ms. Miron  
English 9-225  
March 2014  
Quarter Three  
English Book Review  
In my opinion, I believe anyone with an interest of : history, warfare, or any type of political interest should read this book. My reasons for this is *Falcons Cry* explains the life of a war veteran that served his country off of the ideals and beliefs his forefathers set for the entire country, after the Gulf War Michael Donnelly was permanently crippled by a disease that renders his life to be limited due to Lou Gehrig's disease, a disease that eventually will cause paralysis and destroy his career as an F-16 fighter pilot. This shows the actual intentions of our government and really does provide a keener view of war from another's eyes. I agree with Thirteen Moons post that he was simply cast aside by the bureaucracy in his most desperate time of need, this book too made me laugh and cringe and feel for the family of Michael Donnelly. The reason why this is such a good book is it provides an actual educational background, whether explaining the cause of other wars in the past or talking about politics and how they work in a time of war. Another reason this is such a good book is it has so many literary devices that embellish this book. For instance it provides action when a SAM site may lock onto Michael's jet when he and his squad are tasked to take out Iraqi SCUDS or comedy when Michael explains in great detail what happened in their free time with practical jokes played on one another like when they took sticks and threw them through apples and hurled them at one another while they were kids. Yet the best reason why this book is a great read

is Michaels writing completely grasps the reader and pulls them into the story, actually being able to picture everything he explains. My favorite character is no doubt Michael Donnelly, the reason for this is he is such a strong person ;whether it was helping Kuwait people when they were being invaded by Hussein facing intimate destruction ,or when he constantly puts his family's safety ahead of his own . This is evident when instead of taking a safer commercial airliner he takes the U.S fighter job because it would better support his family. However the biggest reason I liked Michael the best is when he was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, it didn't stop him from being a father ,husband, or provider of his family he kept going on. ,never giving up for one moment .My favorite quote was when Michael was about to take off on his first flight mission to take out a anti-air missile site he was asked by a fellow pilot if he was scared to which he replied," what is there to be scared about"(Donnelly 58). This was the best quote because it shows how strong Michael really is and how much a funny character he is along with his gutsy personality which really does display the classic all American soldier and even though he was scared he kept his image of being a fighter pilot. Sadly Michael Donnelly had passed away in June 30th, 2005 and I send my most sincere regards to his family, he was a strong one of a kind man and I wish i could of met him.

Around the time that Generals Powell and Schwarkopf were being feted in the United States as the most conspicuous heroes of the Persian Gulf War, Major Donnelly returned home to an equally jubilant but more modest reception. He had flown more than forty bombing missions during the conflict and emerged unscathed. But coiled tightly within him on his return home was a war related affliction -- amyotrophic lateral sclerosis or ALS, better known as Lou Gherig's disease -- that gradually stripped him of his mobility, leaving his body immobilized, while his mind and senses remained unimpaired and sharp as a tack. *Falcon's Cry: A Desert Storm Memoir* is an action packed memoir of the gulf war told from an F16 pilot's point of view, a record of Major Donnelly's tragic deterioration, and a partial account of his valient and ultimately successful effort to persuade men without chests in the Pentagon that there is indeed a well founded connection between the illnesses suffered by more than 160,000 returning troops and their service in the gulf. Only recently, under much pressure brought by gulf war veterans, Major Donnelly among them, has congress passed a law that would presume gulf war illnesses are related to hazardous wartime exposures, thus ending the agonizing battle fought by sick vets to obtain medical relief for illnesses they suffered in the service of their country. When the subject is flying, Major Donnelly prose takes wing and ascends to poetry. At its best, some passages remind me of St. Exupery's writings on flight. The narrative includes sharp

profiles of his comrades in arms, and his story is told with the kind of mildly exaggerated humor that flowed so effortlessly from the pen of Mark Twain. In the last few pages of his book, Major Donnelly aims his sights at officials who towed the Pentagon's line on Gulf War Syndrome. The assault will be particularly gratifying to true patriots. Unfortunately for Major Donnelly and his courageous family, there can be no happy ending to his story. But his book is itself a record of a man fully alive who has battled valiantly for others and, as such, it represents a great victory of love and the human spirit over fear and death.

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