

The wrong stuff



In the book, *The Wrong Stuff*, by Marcus Stern, Dean Calbreath, and Jerry Krammer, a sad story is told about a man that fell from grace as one of the truly great Americans and went on to become one of the most publicly lambasted figures of a generation. The book talks about the life, trials, and tribulations of Duke Cunningham, the American congressman that saw his star fall as far from the sky as one could possibly fall. In the book, the authors take an interesting viewpoint on the many different scenes that would eventually shape Cunningham's life and they use an interesting style to get across these points.

Ultimately, the authors combine to render an effective work that takes a comprehensive view of a man with an emphasis on proving that his life was one that was ultimately wasted. The main idea of the book is to not only give the reader a history of Duke Cunningham and his situation, but to shed a light on what might have caused the congressman to mess up something that could have been so good. It does not take a short sighted view on the congressman, either.

Instead of simply focusing on the bribery scandal that sent him to jail or the tax evasion that was a part of his life, it focuses on letting the reader know why these things happened and what might have motivated Cunningham to take such risks. The book talks at length about the fact that Duke Cunningham had it made as a congressman from the moment he entered office. He was able to gain his seat after the incumbent fell victim to a scandal of his own. In addition, he was able to use his past military service in the Vietnam War as a means of earning respect among both his peers and his constituents.

The book ties all of these events together in a way that gives the reader a clear view of Cunningham's entire life and political experience. One important point that the book tries to make numerous times is the fact that Cunningham gained his position of influence not only by circumstance, but also because he was a relentless worker. On page twenty-four of the work, the authors write (2007), " But no one outworked Cunningham. Jim Laing, one his tactical flight instructors, once marveled at his willingness to study¹" (p. 24).

This was an important theme through the book that was represented by in many ways using tales of his Vietnam days. The book's authors understood that people would be more moved by tales from the battle front, so they took advantage of those stories as much as possible. In one way, this is why the book succeeds in grabbing the reader. In the work, the authors find a lot of success in validating their primary points. They try hard to make the point that the congressman had everything out in front of him, yet he did not have the right stuff to make it happen in life.

Luckily for the authors, Cunningham gives them many examples of both of these instances. Not only is he an excellent worker with many accomplishments leading up to his problems, but his political career crashes and burns in such a way that it would be nearly impossible for any author to miss the point in describing the event. Because this was one of the most publicized political corruption incidents of all time, it is very easy for the authors to make the reader understand its significance.

The authors make mention of the publicity of the incident when they write (2007), " Cunningham could no longer walk the halls of congress without

being dogged by television cameras and shouted questions” 1 (p. 237). This is a clear indication that the event was taking its toll on the senator, and the authors waste little time mentioning this in their work in a way that readers can understand. I would certainly recommend this book to people close to me because it is a perfect recollection a fairly interesting incident.

It succeeds in a lot of different ways because it uses real life examples to not only tell the story, but to paint a portrait of Cunningham as a man. It would really allow my parents to see the congressman in a human sense, instead of simply as a politician with no soul. Of the weaknesses in the book that I would point out to those people, there includes the fact that it is slow moving at points. People that pick up this book to read it are looking to get insight on the scandals and political situations that the congressman was involved in.

It spends a little bit too much time focusing on Cunningham’s life as a youngster, while it should be focusing on the main points. Still, these weaknesses are not all that evident to the casual reader, because it is not a slow enough book that will make readers want to put the book down.

References Calbreath, D, & Condon, G. E. , & Krammer, J. , & Stern, M. (2007). *The Wrong Stuff: The Extraordinary Saga of Randy “ Duke” Cunningham, the Most Corrupt Congressman Ever Caught*. PublicAffairs Publishing.