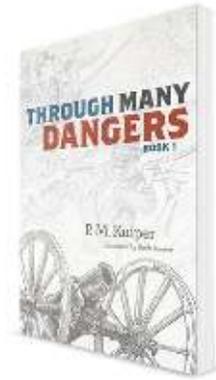


## Author Interview

P. M. Kuiper, *Through Many Dangers* (Jenison: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2021)

Illustrated by Paula Barone



*Through Many Dangers* is a work of Christian, historical fiction that has just been released this summer by the RFPA. The book is written especially for young people and details the story of a group of Dutch Reformed boys who serve in the Union Army during the Civil War. The test of faith that this service entails is a witness to God's faithfulness amid the harrows of war and the sinful culture in which these young men live. *Beacon Lights* staff member Aaron Van Dyke sat down with the author to discuss the book and provided the interview below. We hope this whets your appetite for the full story!

### 1. Can you tell us a little bit about what inspired you to write this story?

First, what inspired me to write fiction. Some years ago, in the *Standard Bearer*, Prof. Engelsma wrote a review of a children's book about the struggle Reformed believers faced in the Netherlands in the 1600s. In the course of his review, he noted a lack of good Christian fiction written from a Reformed perspective and challenged Protestant Reformed young people to take up that task. I thought, well, I'm not so young, but I can do that.

Then, as to this book, *Through Many Dangers*. I came across some letters from soldiers from the Dutch Reformed colony in Holland, Michigan, who fought in the Civil War. They struck me as honest and real. They were spiritually minded young men, but they still did foolish things sometimes. I was intrigued by their struggle to live faithfully even when they were suddenly "out in the world."

### 2. Did the writing process involve a lot of research? What was the most surprising thing you learned in your research?

I did quite a bit of research on the Dutch emigration, the early days of the city of Holland, and various aspects of the Civil War. But when I get interested in something, I like to learn more about it, so that was an enjoyable part of writing the book.

I was surprised that Rev. Van Raalte promoted having the young men of the church volunteer to go off and fight in the war. Given their isolation in a Dutch-speaking colony and their concern to avoid worldliness, I would have expected him to resist that. But instead, he pressed on them their responsibilities as citizens. I'm sure many of the parents were less enthusiastic about that. I suspect I would have been. But still, a large number of young men went.

### 3. Can you give a brief summary of the story?

The main character, Harm van Wyke, has recently turned eighteen. As the Civil War intensifies, Rev. Van Raalte urges the young men of Holland to join the infantry. Harm's father bitterly opposes the idea. Harm is unsure at first but decides to go, mostly because his friends are going. The story follows them through the war years, as they battle the Confederate Army in Kentucky and Tennessee, then take part in General Sherman's bloody Atlanta campaign. Along the way, they face exposure, disease, injury, and death. They also face daily temptations to forget God and turn from their faith.

### 4. How much of the story actually happened? Are there any people, places, or events in the story that *Beacon Lights* readers might be familiar with?

The story is based very much on historical events. Rev. Van Raalte was an influential Reformed minister and leader of the emigration from the Netherlands that resulted in the establishment of the city of Holland. His church, now known as Pillar Church, still stands in Holland. The young men of Holland joined the infantry and fought in the Civil War. My main characters are fictional, but I've tried to portray the trials they face and their spiritual attitudes in harmony with the available research.

**5. Who are some of the main characters in the story? What kinds of spiritual struggles do they face? Will *Beacon Lights* readers find these characters relatable?**

The main characters are Harm and his group of close friends. They were all raised to live a certain way—to honor God and walk faithfully. But once they join the infantry, they're removed from home and church and exposed to the world as never before. They each respond in different ways. Gerrit, who plans to enter the ministry, strives to maintain his life in the infantry pretty much as he lived it in Holland. Kees is more reckless, making friends he shouldn't make, and looking for fun in places he shouldn't be. Ted faces life with a good dose of humor, but also experiences some unique sorrows in his family.

I think the characters are very relatable to *Beacon Lights* readers because young people are at the age when they too must step beyond the security of home and church and begin to make their way in the wider world. Maybe it's at work, maybe at college, but suddenly they face new temptations. They find that living as a believer isn't so easy—maybe it brings ridicule, maybe exclusion from a group. They discover that faith comes with a cost.

**6. Who is your favorite character in the story?**

I can't say I have a favorite. Some of the characters are more likeable than others, some make me laugh, and some are quite flawed, but they're all in the book because I think they advance the story and reveal something important about life in this world.

**7. Why should *Beacon Lights* readers pick up your book?**

I hope they read it because it's a good story. I hope they find it honest, exciting, funny, touching, and thought-provoking.

**8. Do you have any advice for *Beacon Lights* readers who enjoy writing? Are there any resources you would recommend for writers looking for feedback?**

I want to echo Prof. Engelsma in urging young people to write good fiction. The library is full of books on the craft of writing, and I can't add much to that. But I can speak to the importance of it. Writing good Christian fiction is a unique and powerful way to use our abilities to serve God and his people. It's okay to make that a priority.

For those who are already writing, I advise them to join a good writers' group or form one with like-minded friends who can be genuine in their encouragement and honest in their critique. That's been a great help to me.

**9. Would you say writing Christian fiction is more challenging than writing general fiction?**

Christian fiction is difficult because you want to be so careful that you don't write something that presents the story in a way that is wrong, or misunderstood, or harmful. On the other hand, our daily struggle to walk faithfully despite our sinful inclinations and the temptations of the world is an unending source of conflict, which is the backbone of every good story.

**10. Do you have any other writing projects in the works?**

I have several other stories in various stages of development. Because *Through Many Dangers* takes place in the infantry, it deals mostly with young men. Hopefully my next book will be able to focus more on strong female characters as well.

Originally published Vol 80, No 11 November 2021