

YOU GOTTA HAVE FAITH

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The date is December 7, 1940. A twenty-six year old soldier is sent off to war and begins his first mission as an officer. He rides aboard the USS *Susan B. Anthony*, taking him from Georgia to Africa. The young soldier is sent to French Morocco where he and his fellow officers are told they are to take over a Portuguese fortress and airfield. He is so excited to finally get off the ship that he forgets war awaits him.

The soldier does not forget for long, however, because after a brief night's sleep, the battle begins. He is in charge of about fifteen other soldiers, many of whom think this battle is going to be a pushover. In fact, they are so confident that they put cigarettes in their bullet cases as a joke. There is an eighteen-foot surf that day, and ships are being overturned, killing coastguardsmen and destroying the sparse rations they have. The next day, on the ninth of December, the soldier walks about four miles with his men and takes refuge in a vacation hut they find. He hasn't eaten a meal for three days, but considers himself lucky, because he has at least eaten some concentrated chocolate he found in his pocket. Little does the soldier know that he won't be able to touch chocolate for years afterward. On the tenth, he searches for his commanding officer, Captain McBride, so he can get his orders about the mission.

After he finally finds McBride, the soldier is ordered to gather the rest of the men and attack the fortress. Before he can do so, he hears machine-gun fire and realizes it is directed at him. The soldiers spread out

along the river and find large pieces of cork used to cap bottles, which they place over their bodies to protect themselves from the attack. When the gunfire ceases and it is safe, the soldiers walk two miles back to the fortress.

At ten o'clock p.m., they finally get back to camp, and the soldier hears a plane overhead. The next thing he knows, bombs are dropping all around him; one lands in the fortress, and one lands right next to him. The shock from the impact throws him up against some nearby rocks. He is caught in the heat of the moment, and the adrenaline he feels masks his pain. He figures he must be all right, so he gets up and walks toward the fortress. The soldier creeps across the wall to the fortress with two other men. He tells the men to wait there, and walks by himself up the rear entrance to the fortress. He sees an Axis soldier with a machine gun and enters cautiously with his Tommy gun, being careful not to attract attention to himself. The guards don't notice him, and the soldier quickly points his gun and tells them to line up against the wall two by two. The soldier walks all 118 prisoners down the path to the bottom of the hill, checks them for weapons, and turns them over to his sergeant. He then realizes that the impact from hitting the rocks earlier really did hurt him, and he decides to report to the battalion aid station, where he is given morphine, throws up, and falls asleep. He awakens to the stench of gangrene, and when he looks next to him, he realizes that there is a Moroccan soldier with a rotting leg lying in the next bed. The sight and stench of rotting flesh is enough to make him brave his own pain and report back to his unit. Before he leaves, he makes sure the injury will not be reported, so as not to worry his family. Then next day, there is an armistice signed with the French colonial forces, and the soldier's job is done, so he boards the Susan B. Anthony and heads off to battle somewhere

else (Sadowski Personal Interview).

Many people hear a story such as this and think that these events don't happen to ordinary people like them, only to famous war heroes such as Colin Powell or John Kerrey. It sounds like a well-written script from a war movie. Well, this story did in fact happen to a common man in World War II. My grandfather, Stanley Sadowski, is the soldier from this story. For his actions in the preceding story, he was awarded the Silver Star for bravery, which is the third highest military award. Nearly half of all Silver Stars are rewarded posthumously, so it is an award associated with life-threatening situations such as my grandfather's. Thousands of other veterans have similar stories; such is the life of a military officer. Military personnel truly are the unsung heroes of America. We hear about the experiences these men and women have gone through, so that we can enjoy the lives we have today.

When most people hear war stories such as this, they wonder how anyone can get through those types of situations. How can soldiers be so brave as to face death day in and day out? One thing that really gets soldiers through war and helps them get past the gruesome experiences that they encounter while there is their faith. Christianity has a strong presence in war. It may not seem like war is a very Christian act, but in the case of WWII, it was very necessary. Not only did the beliefs of Christianity provide a strong basis for starting the war, but it also allowed soldiers fighting in the war to move past their horrible war experiences and to be brave in difficult times. Many men saw their faith deepen through their war experiences, and that faith made all the fighting and death endurable.

Many soldiers in WWII relied on religion and faith to help them get

through the war, but what does the Christian church itself actually believe about war? Christianity does not promote war as an acceptable way to settle conflicts. In WWII, atomic bombs killed 80,000 people in Hiroshima, Japan and 40,000 in Nagasaki, Japan. Gamma rays from those bombs caused thousands to suffer from fever, hair loss, and bloody diarrhea, which ultimately let to death within a week of exposure (Vincent 30). How does the church justify causing this suffering to innocent people? The Christian church has not actually given a definitive answer to this question, though some New Testament scholars suggest the New Testament demands complete pacifism (Vincent 43). Others disagree: "Jesus' own teaching doesn't supply any ready-made answer on the subject of war... He leaves the way open to the possibility that factors other than loyalty to Him could lead a man to take part in war" (Vincent 44).

Since the church has given no definite answer, a Christian must decide for himself whether or not the war is justified. "The Christian has the duty and right to weigh the rights and wrongs of every situation and every problem, be it to do with space travel, racial antipathies, or war" (Vincent 39). A Christian must gather evidence from experts and form his own opinion.

Regardless of what the church thinks about war in general, there is support from Christian beliefs for the war effort in WWII. Yes, the atomic bombs were destructive and deadly, but the Japanese would have used them against us if they had had the technology available. Use of the atomic bombs was actually consistent with Christian values, because it was a means of ending the war quickly. The rather abrupt end to the war saved many lives in the long run, though it took many quickly. A Christian must ask himself if

it is worth fighting a war to save man with methods that contribute to man's destruction. At what point do the methods of mass destruction negate the positive aim for which the war originally began? (Vincent 28) "Any honest person reading the Gospels cannot escape recognizing that it never once occurred to the mind of Jesus that it was wrong to be a soldier" (Powys 45). In fact, in second Samuel, Jesus even says, "[God] trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze" (New Revised Standard Version 22:35).

Although Christians should not make war, as citizens, they must defend their country. Christians are resolved to exert all their powers to effect a just peace settlement (Miller 49). In the Bible, God says to "love your neighbor as yourself" (New Revised Standard Version Matthew 19:19). Therefore, no man can serve God without at the same time serving his neighbor. WWII was a war to save our neighbors, the Jews in Europe (Spellman 29). In essence WWII was a war to save all our neighbors throughout the world from a German takeover.

During WWII, Nazi leader Adolf Hitler was hated in a manner similar to that of the devil. Both pacifists and rationalists agreed that it was wrong and illogical to pray merely for the defeat of Hitler; "this order of the devil [Hitler] is destined to be destroyed" (Powys 92). We simply have to think of what life would be like if WWII had not taken place to realize it was necessary. Life under Hitler and the Gestapo would threaten our right to be human; the Nazis wanted to enforce a life of rigidity and take away man's right to be lazy, inefficient, and careless. It may sound like eliminating those things is not such a bad idea, but just imagine life without them. Life would lack the very characteristics that make us human and not god-like (Powys

171).

WWII was necessary to save the world from Hitler's domination; he was not going to compromise with other world leaders to settle his differences. Hitler needed to be stopped before he took over the world, and war was the only option the rest of the world had to stop him. While it may not be very Christian to fight a war, it is also not very Christian to stand by and watch millions of innocent people be slaughtered because of their faith. As Reverend Harry Reginald Hammond, a chaplain from WWII, said, "I think we were on God's side. The US has done some foolish things, but in that war I knew we had God with us" (*Greatest Generation* 55). This attitude inspired many people to get involved in the war. My Grandfather said he knew volunteering for the war was "just the right thing to do" (Sadowski Personal Interview). Man was fighting to save humanity from the takeover of a madman. Men died in WWII for mankind as Jesus died on the cross for mankind.

Faith in God was a large part of the lives of the WWII generation. The very nature of the war caused many who participated in it to think more deeply about God and their faith in Him, both while they were at war and once they returned home. Whether they were fighting in the war or providing support from home, spiritual beliefs helped the members of this generation cope with the constant presence of death, injury, suffering, and other anxieties brought on by war. Reverend Hammond said, "[at war] you need something to keep you going. It made me realize that there was something much larger than just me. I realized it had to be God" (*Greatest Generation* 55). This feeling was prevalent amongst many WWII soldiers.

The battlefield was so horrific that many who had previously never

believed in God turned to Him as a source of comfort and hope. Many soldiers became such faithful accepters of God that they wished to be baptized while at war. Military chaplain John Craven baptized four men during his five weeks at Iwo Jima. The men he baptized had each accepted Christ on the ship while they traveled to Iwo Jima. Craven looked to their acceptance of God as an inspiration: "To witness such new birth amid the death and devastation of attack was miraculous" (*Greatest Generation Speaks* 114).

Many found providence in WWII; God watched over the soldiers and protected them from the hazards of war. War reporter Larry Allen found God when the ship he was traveling on was hit and sinking; to make things worse, Allen couldn't swim. He prayed repeatedly to be saved, and miraculously, he was. Before his next assignment, Allen learned how to swim and also joined a church to thank and praise the God he believed saved him from a near-death situation (Runbeck 108-110).

Eugene Clayton also experienced the power of God; he accepted God while sleeping in a foxhole one night while shells burst around him. Clayton frequently wrote home to his sister, and in one such letter he wrote about his first experience with prayer: "That night I prayed fervently, and I learned for the first time the great value of prayer. It comforted me and gave me a great sense of security" (*Las Vegas Sun* 1). Clayton also remarked about how he felt the influence of prayers being said for him and how he knew God was watching over and protecting him. He found comfort in God's protection, and like many other soldiers drew his courage from God (*Las Vegas Sun* 1).

Combat marine Philip Cochran shared Clayton's experience and

said, "There are no atheists in foxholes" (*Greatest Generation Speaks* 105). Cochran found himself stranded alone one night after being caught in the middle of sniper fire. He recalls, "I have never been so scared, but you know what, I discovered the power of prayer at that moment, a power I never had to call upon before, but a power for which I had occasion to be grateful many times during the war, a power I have relied upon throughout my life since then" (*Greatest Generation Speaks* 105). Cochran used God's strength to get him through that night and the rest of the war, and he never lost sight of it.

When many men entered the war, they saw it as foolish to pray and they thought it made them less tough if they needed the help of God. However, many of these attitudes changed after the experience of war. For example, several air force officers whose plane was hit turned to God when they saw no other option. One officer said, "You can see they're not sissies, those boys, and when they say they prayed you can be sure its no whining kind of prayer. I imagine it's the kind of prayer that warms God's heart and makes Him glad He made such people" (Runbeck 132). After being saved, those men did not forget the power of God.

These officers all share similar experiences about the first time they accepted God; this attitude was not uncommon in WWII. Soldiers realized how much danger they were in and that there was not much they could do to protect themselves. They had to find another source of protection, and for many, that source was God. God watched over these soldiers and made sure that they were able to make it home to see their loved ones, even when the odds were against them.

While WWII brought many people to God, it also made some

question their faith. It seemed impossible that any kind of loving god would allow the horrific events that took place to occur. Innocent people were dying all around them, and many soldiers questioned why. Why would God bring this terrible suffering to millions of people? Some thought the war was “as great a purger of spiritual pride as it was a destroyer of the sense of property” (Powys 209). WWII killed the spirit of man just as it injured his body and destroyed endless miles of land.

In one instance of lost faith, a soldier was injured in battle, and while he was in the hospital, he regained his health but lost his faith. “It was as if all he had ever heard of God and immortality, of redemption and atonement, had dissolved... into a new sensation different from any he had ever had before” (Powys 88). This soldier no longer recognized religion in his life. His war experiences made him question God and ultimately lose his faith in Him. Jesus had also dissolved into this new sensation the soldier felt, and he lost the desire to enjoy any future or revive any past. All he could see was the present, the war (Powys 88). War had completely blindsided him.

Rabbi Judah Nadich, a Jewish chaplain, also questioned his faith. He saw what the Nazis were doing to Jews in the concentration camps, and subsequently he began to question his faith. How could God permit such things to happen? However, as it turned out, Nadich came out of the war with a strengthened faith. He decided that, “If I believe in God I have difficulty. If I don’t believe in God, I have more difficulties” (*Greatest Generation Speaks* 117). He realized that WWII was not going to be easy to serve in either way, but with God by his side, it might not be quite so hard.

Most Christians had similar experiences to Rabbi Nadich, and those

who went to war with a strong faith often left it with a stronger faith. WWII allowed those who were involved in it to evaluate their faith and realize what their lives would be like without God.

Reverend Hammond said, "I saw more bodies in a short time than most undertakers will see in a lifetime. Every night I would pray for those guys and myself. I think it deepened my faith" (*Greatest Generation* 55). When Christians turned to God, instead of away from Him, they found comfort in His presence and salvation.

When he was injured, soldier Lamar Clark had the opposite reaction to the previously mentioned injured soldier. Clark wrote home to his wife about how his faith in God was strengthened when he was injured. He was shot in the side of his leg, and he wrote, "I have been through everything, but am more convinced than ever of Divine Protection. Please have faith in me and our prayers to put God's love around me" (*Greatest Generation Speaks* 108). Clark's faith in God grew when he was injured, because he realized that had the circumstances been different, he could have died. However, he was protected by God and was saved from death. He knew things could have been a lot worse for him.

From the onset of the war, aviation cadet Clifford Anderson trusted God to protect him while he was fighting. Anderson said, "I have put my life in His hands. I wish more people could realize that we are not self-sufficient" (Runbeck 131). Anderson realized that if he survived the war it would not be because he had fought a better war or because he was lucky; it would be because God protected him and saved him. There is no luck involved in that— simply faith.

Many men were willing to do whatever they had to do to stand up

for their faith. German military authorities beheaded Austrian peasant Franz Jagerstatter after he refused to join the German army, because they saw him as an enemy of the state. Jagerstatter refused to join because of his religious beliefs; he refused to fight for an army that was slaughtering millions of innocent people. His refusal to join was the political implementation of his desire to be a perfect Christian. He surrendered his own life rather than take the lives of others (Merton 69). This is not something that is easy to do. It was much easier to simply obey the orders to join the army, and most people did just that. However, Jagerstatter refused to give in, and in doing so proclaimed his faith in God.

Stanley Sadowski had a strong faith entering the war. His faith in God was something that helped him get through the tough times. It gave him the courage to single-handedly take one hundred-eighteen prisoners after being wounded in French Morocco and the courage to continue fighting in two battles after being wounded in them. Sadowski was a highly decorated Major at the end of WWII; he was even offered a position with the army working in Washington DC at the pentagon. While the position was a high-ranking army position and would have given him and his new bride stability, Sadowski could not accept it. He said he had seen enough of war and didn't ever want to see it again. Faith helped get him through the war, but it also told him when to quit. After WWII, he retired from the army and accepted a job working at the post office (Sadowski Personal Interview).

WWII was a hard time for all those involved. It is something that no one who has not experienced it can understand. Most people will never know what it was like to have bombs dropping all around them or snipers

firing at them. Not experiencing those things is something that many people thank God for. However, what would our lives be like today if millions of soldiers throughout the world hadn't fought in WWII? While those of us who have never experienced war thank God that we haven't, those who have served in war thank God for being there with them during that time. Many veterans attribute their survival of war to God's protection. When I hear some of the particularly miraculous war stories, it seems impossible to me that God was not there watching over the soldiers as they fought for humanity. "Christ is in the movements of men's minds, whether Christian or not, when they strive for justice or peace... Christ is there. We can be with Him or against Him. We can look for Him or be blind to Him. The choice is ours" (Vincent 160).

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