Conviction, Courage and Devotion 60 Years Ago

Description

This is, by necessity, a long post. It is a story to honor those who have braved combat, and displayed great courage. Please read it through, and then tell others about it.

Somewhere in a box, I have a picture. It is three elementary school children and a blonde German Shepard-Elkhound mix puppy standing next to a monument. The picture was taken in 1962 or 63, and it is my two sisters and I, and our dog, Scooter.

All of that is important, and itâ€™s not. What is not as important is how my life has been intertwined with the name cast on the brass plate, and what is is the bigger story, the story of how that name came to be placed on the monument.

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As I sat down to gather the links, I re-read the Medal of Honor citiation. It covered a period from April 29th through May 21st. One some web pages, the day of this manâ€™s most significant action, is listed as May 5th, 1945, which, was a Saturday, by the way. Hang on to that fact, youâ€™ll need it by the end of the post.



The monument was then, the day of the picture of my sisters and I, located near a sugar cane field on the island of Okinawa. It was there my father told us a story of an Army Medic by the name of Corporal Desmond T. Doss, who distinguished himself (that day) by climbing an escarpment, repeatedly, venturing out onto a machine gun fire swept battle field of open, relatively flat ground, to recover his fellow soldiers, and lower them down the escarpment to safety. A brave man indeed, but he was braver still, in the context of then, and even today than those key points describe.

Desmond T. Doss is (he is still living) a 7th Day Adventist. This Christian denomination does not believe in the taking of life. Desmond Doss could have easily avoided service in WWII. Because of his upbrining and personal faithfulness, a request for CO status would have, most likely, been granted without question. Yet, Desmond T. Doss joined the Army, not to kill, but to save lives.

This quote discussed the character of a man, being vilified for his faith by those he served with:

> So what do you do with a soldier who wonâ€™t train on Saturday, eat meat, or carry a gun or bayonet? Dossâ€™ commanding officer knew what to do. Paperwork was initiated to declare him unstable, a miss-fit, and wash him out of military service with a Section-8 discharge as â€œunsuitable for military service.â€• But Doss wanted to serve his country, he just refused to kill. He performed all of his other duties with dedication, was an exemplary

> a soldier in every other way. At his hearing he told the board, â€œIâ€™d be a very poor Christian if I accepted a discharge implying that I was mentally off because of my religion. Iâ€™m sorry, gentlemen, but I canâ€™t accept that kind of a discharge.â€• So the Army was â€œstuckâ€• with Desmond Doss.

Desmondâ€™s story has been put into a book, The Unlikeliest Hero by Booten Herdon, and a movie, The Conscientious Objector.

This site Home of Heros has the details of this story, and many others. Desmondâ€™s story begins here.

Desmond Doss saved lives at Guam in July 1944, then at Leyte in the Philippines in Oct 1944, and Okinawa in Apr-May 1945 while assigned to the 77th Infantry Division, 307th Medical Detachment.

At the amphibious assault at Leyte, hereâ€™s an account of what happened:

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> Time after time at Leyte Doss braved enemy fire to go to the wounded, and to remove them to safety. Once he darted into the open to treat and rescue a wounded man even while the area was alive with sniper fire. From a distance his fellow soldiers watched in horror as a Japanese sniper leveled his rifle at the fearless medic. Because of the sniperâ€™s position they could not return fire for fear of injuring some of their own. Doss treated the wounded man, evacuated him to the rear, and returned to his position. One of the sergeants told him, â€œDoss, we expected to see you killed any second. We couldnâ€™t shoot the sniper without killing our own men, and he had his machine gun aimed right at you. Didnâ€™t you see him?â€•

And, read this, which came to light many years after the war:

> Years later a missionary in Japan related the story of Dossâ€™ brush with death that day. After the service a Japanese man in the back of the room told one of the deacons, â€œThat could very well have been me. I was there, and I remember having a soldier in my gun site, but I couldnâ€™t pull the trigger.â€• Doss not only survived Leyte, for his repeated heroism he was awarded the Bronze Star Medal. So as Corporal Doss stood before the men of Company B at the base of the Maeda Escarpment on Okinawa, they were beginning to believe in the prayers of the medic whose only weapon was his Bible.

Sounds to me like Godâ€™s protectionâ€¦.

The time leading directly to his winning of the MOH begins with this actual quote from Lt Goronto, as his unit was about to take the Maeda Escarpment, a 400 ft high sheer cliff:

> â€œFellows, come over here and gather around. Doss wants to pray for us.â€•

He did, and on that first assault, while Alfa Company was being chewed up by the Japanses, Bravo had taken about 8-9 enemy emplacements, with only one wounded soldier. That was the 29th of April.

Hereâ€™s the story of the results of the after action report:

> The next day a follow-up inquiry was made to determine how Company B had accomplished the miraculous assault on the Maeda Escarpment without a single casualty. A photographer arrived to take a picture and Lieutenant Goronto sent Desmond to the top to pose. (The photo at right is the US Army photo taken that day, and Desmond Doss is the man at the top.) As far back as Army headquarters in the States, everyone asked how Company B had pulled it off. No one could find a reasonable explanation. Finally, with no other way to conclude the report, the official answer was filedâ€¦all the way back to the United States. The official answer:



> â€œDoss prayed!â€•

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Another miracle.

The fighting continued, and on May 5th, it got bloody for Bravo Company.

> On May 5th the tide of battle turned against the Americans. Enemy artillery, mortars and machinegun fire began to rake into the ranks of Company B, 77th Infantry Division. Japanese soldiers swarmed out of their foxholes and caves in every direction. Almost immediately 75 men fell wounded, and the remaining men were forced to fall back and retreat to the base of the escarpment. The only soldiers remaining at the top of the cliff were the wounded, the Japanese, and Desmond T. Doss.
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> Heedless of the shells that burst around him and the bullets directed his way, Desmond tended his injured comrades. At the base of the escarpment those few soldiers who had managed to escape the onslaught could only sit helplessly by and hear the sounds of the battle as the wounded struggled to survive atop the cliff. And thenâ€¦amazinglyâ€¦a wounded soldier appeared over the face of the escarpment. Dangling from a rope, he slowly descended to the safety of its base as a tall medic fed the rope through his hands from the summit. First one, then another, and anotherâ€¦.and another. Heedless of the advancing Japanese, Desmond Doss went about the work of sending the wounded to safety. Reports of that day tell of Japanese advancing with rifles and bayonets to within a few feet of the medic, slowly lowering his men to safety, before one of the wounded could kill the enemy before they shot Doss.
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> For five hours Doss lowered soldier after soldier down the face of the escarpment, using little more than a tree stump to wind the top edge of the rope around. Throughout the five hours Desmond had only one thought. He prayed, â€œLord, help me get one more. Just ONE more!â€• How many men Doss saved that day, only God knows. One hundred and fifty-five soldiers went up the escarpment that day, and only 55 were able to retreat without

> assistance. The Army determined the conscious objector who had almost been court martialed or discharged as unfit for military service, had saved 100 lives. â€œCouldnâ€™t be,â€• Desmond had replied. It couldnâ€™t have been more than 50. I wouldnâ€™t have had the time to save 100 men.â€• In deference to Desmondâ€™s humble estimate, when the citation for his Medal of Honor was written, they â€œsplit the differenceâ€•, crediting the intrepid soldier with saving 75 fellow soldiers.

More miracles, about 100 men being rescued for a start, but this lone medic, slaving away to save the wounded, ending the fierce battle unscathed.

In the ensuing days, Cpl Doss continued to save the men he served with, and was wounded himself. He tended to his own wounds and directed other wounded be cared for before himself.

Read the rest of the story here and here.

And through it all, when he got to the hospital ship, and found he was missing the Bible his wife had given him, he had word sent to his unit on the beach, to let them know he had lost this precious â€œweapon.â€• Desmond Doss was awarded the Medal of Honor by President Roosevelt. When he returned hom after the ceremony, there was something waiting for him:

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> At home another surprise awaited the young man. His men hadnâ€™t forgotten the brave medic or his love for the Word of God. The message about â€œDossâ€™ Bibleâ€• had been delivered. Incredibly, the men who once mocked the Godly Seventh-Day Adventist who would not compromise, had returned to the Maeda Escarpment with a new mission and purpose. After soundly defeating the Japanese they fanned out across the rocky terrain and conducted a search until they found, and mailed home, Desmondâ€™s Bible.

Near the beginning of this post, I asked you to hang onto the fact that May 5th was a Saturday. The 7th Day Adventists continue to keep the original Jewish Sabbath on Saturday, unlike other Christian denominations that use Sunday as the Sabbath. Desmond Doss was saving many lives on the Sabbath he observed.

Desmond Doss remains active in his Church near Lookout Mountain in Rising Fawn, Georgia. I plan to make a trip up there soon to meet this man, who does what so few others seem to be able to do: Live by a moral code, regardless of the ridcule of others, and to steadfastly love his â€œneighborâ€• as he would love himself.

I can only guess this is the first story I heard about the coveted Congressional Medal of Honor, as a 3rd grader on an island far out in the Pacific Ocean. It took me years to see that the story of Desmond Doss is a reflection of Jesus Christ on earth, which is the story I missed until a few years ago.

In reflecting on not only this â€œconnectionâ€• in my life, I also lived on Guam a few years later, and while I was in the Navy, I served aboard a ship named for a sailor, GM Paul Carr, who died aboard USS SAMUEL B. ROBERTS (DE-413) on Oct 25th, 1944 at the Battle Off Samar, while the outnumbered and out gunned task force of â€œTaffy 3â€• kept a Japanese battle force from breaking through and wiping out the Army troops ashore at Leyte, where Desmond Doss had landed. I can hang onto Psalm 139:16 as a result of this study.

While researching this material, I found the Army has made a specialized pack for the â€œCombat Life Saversâ€• (CLS) personnel, and have named the M3A Pack in honor of Desmond Doss.

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