

The background of the entire image is a close-up, slightly blurred photograph of the American flag. The blue field with white stars is visible in the upper left, while the red and white stripes dominate the rest of the frame. The flag appears to be waving, creating a sense of movement.

For God
and Country

Devotionals
Scriptures & Thoughts

*For Military Service-members, Families,
and Friends*

For God and Country

Devotionals *Scriptures & Thoughts*

*For Military Service-members, Families,
and Friends*

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Preface

This devotional book of selected *thoughts* entitled *For God and Country* was prepared with the military in mind. Its author, a United States Army Chaplain, wrote weekly thoughts from a Christian perspective for his soldiers for almost twenty-five years. He titled them “Just a thought.”

Many are personal and depict events that happened to him and his soldiers. Others are written with an intended message directed to a military audience.

To the individual, who takes the time to read these thoughts—may these devotions be an inspiration and a reflection for daily living.

To those who serve(d) in the military or who have sons, daughters, family members or friends serving in the military, these devotional thoughts are dedicated to the men and women in uniform who put their life on the line daily in the service of their country.

May their sacrifices be rewarded and their service recognized by these short inspirational thoughts.

Military Values



Author's father William G. Theodore (front row second from the left) WWII 1943, B-17 Flying Fortress Crew-Mechanics. Courtesy of Vance Theodore

A Caring Attitude

James 3:4 Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm.

It's the little things in life that tend to make the difference. However, it seems that the little things in life are often the things most over looked. This lesson was brought home vividly the other day as I was preparing to leave for work. Being in a hurry, I raced out the door not bothering to give my three-year-old his traditional good bye peck. You can imagine how I felt when I saw him chasing the car screaming "Daddy you didn't kiss me!" You see it was a little thing that I forgot that meant the most to that three-year-old.

In the ensuing days, many of our soldiers will be in-processing, it will be the little things that will impress them the most, and make them feel a part of this unit. It will be the clean barracks, physical fitness, the welcoming handshake, and the officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) taking charge with an "I Care Attitude."

Like with my son, a little thing missed may not be so little. Let us learn to pay attention to the small things we may overlook and not wait to make a big impression on these new soldiers.

So, a small thing like a welcoming handshake may not be a small event for these new soldiers--for out of a small gesture can come great things.

Attitude is a Choice

*Your attitude,
Not your aptitude,
Will determine your altitude.*
-Zig Ziglar¹

This last winter was a typical winter in Alaska. In September, it began to get cold and by early October snow began to fall. For those of us who have spent a year or two in this beautiful land, it is common for the snow and the cold to stay on the ground from in October to April. However, during this long stretch of cold we know that summer is just around the corner, and with the break-up of the ice and the coming of summer, hope begins to soar.

Excitement replaces the cold, and blue skies with a tinge of heat tell of adventures yet to be experienced. However, this summer the skies were not blue but instead were grey and smokey. Fires spread throughout the state; over 5.5 million acres were burned. Our prayers turned from “please let the smoke dissipate” to “let the snows come early”.

How different our life becomes when we cannot control it. About the only thing we can control in life is our attitude. Viktor Frankl, a prominent Jewish psychiatrist during WW II, survived the Holocaust, even though he was in four Nazi death camps including Auschwitz from 1942-45. Amidst the smoke and gray skies of the crematorium ovens, Frankl developed his ideas about life, which later were written in his book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*. He said “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms - to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”²

Here in Alaska, we have the opportunity to choose how we will act; whether it is about an upcoming deployment, the weather, the chain of command, a failed marriage, or a change of careers. We can choose how we will look at life. However, we are not alone. Prayer, scripture study, physical/spiritual fitness, family, and friends, are also constants in our life that can help us to choose our attitudes in “any given set of circumstances.”

Character

Over a door in an old building in Scotland is a stone placed there by John Allan, a 19th century architect, with a saying attributed to William Shakespeare, “What E’er Thou Art, Act Well Thy Part.”³ For years these words have inspired and influenced those who have walked past this message.

In our own lives, the pressure of living often has us act in ways that we may regret: the harshly said words to our wife or children; the interesting tidbit of gossip that we unintentionally pass on that may hurt others; or being someone who we are not.

The message in stone is as pertinent today as it was over three hundred years ago. It is to do and be our best no matter what the circumstances. Perhaps we can carry it written upon our own hearts to act well our part where ever we might roam in the service of our country.

Commitment

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

The other day I was thinking about a young army Black Hawk pilot, who lost her life while flying in Iraq. She was a young woman in the prime of her life. She had dreams and goals. She wanted children, and she could hardly wait until she completed her time in the service so that she could become a mother.

She was married to a wonderful husband who was also serving in Iraq at the time of her death. She would often comment to me how important her family was to her, and that when this conflict was over how excited it would be to get on with life. However, she had a commitment to fulfill. She did fulfill that commitment.

Sometimes things do not turn out the way we want them. Sometimes our commitments in life are difficult and have hard consequences. We may not like our choices, but usually we fulfill our commitments.

My father had a saying *that there will be another day, and that there will be another time*. For this young pilot, there will not be another day on earth. But, I believe that life does not end with this mortal existence.

So, what caused me to think of this young soldier? We all need to fulfill our commitments whatever they might be. There is honor in persevering. Usually, the easy road is not the best road. Thankfully not all our moments or commitments, even the hardest ones, require our lives.

Courage

John 14:15- If you love me, keep my commandments.

A story is told, probably apocryphal, about the Roman Emperor Nero, who had a great band of wrestlers who were called the “Emperor’s Wrestlers.” They were said to be the best athletes in the empire, and many of these fine athletes were recruited from the Roman Amphitheater. It was reported that when they went into battle they would chant: “We, the wrestlers, wrestling for thee, O emperor, to win for thee the victory, and from thee the victor’s crown.”⁴

This fine band of wrestlers was sent to fight in the battles of Gaul. They fought gallantly and were led by the centurion Vespasian. Vespasian learned that some of his wrestlers had accepted the Christian faith. It meant death to be a Christian. A decree was dispatched from Nero that said: “If there be any among the soldiers who cling to the faith of Christians, they must die!”

Vespasian read the emperor’s decree and with a sad heart called together his brave band of wrestlers. He asked if any practiced the Christian faith to step forward. Forty wrestlers stepped forward two paces and stood proudly at attention. Vespasian was surprised. He had not expected so many. He read the decree, “That any who cling to the faith of Christians must die! For the sake of your country your loved ones your comrades, renounce this faith.” Not one renigged. Vespasian pleaded with his wrestlers to reconsider their decision. He gave them until sundown. When sundown came again, he asked if there were any who claimed to be Christians. Forty wrestlers stepped forward. Vespasian pleaded long and hard with his loyal wrestlers to denounce their faith, none did. He finally said, “The decree of the Emperor must be obeyed, but I am not willing that the blood be on your comrades.” Vespasian then ordered the forty wrestlers to march out into the middle of a frozen lake to be left to the mercy of the elements. He instructed them that fires would be lit at the edges of the shore. He would be waiting at the largest to welcome them back if they renounced their faith.

They were stripped of their clothing and without a word they turned and in columns of four marched onto the ice singing their old battle chant with a different slant, “Forty wrestlers, wrestling for thee, O Christ, to win for thee the victory, and from thee the victor’s crown.”⁵ Vespasian, saddened, waited at the fire listening to his wrestler’s song as it became fainter and

fainter through the night. Finally, one of the wrestler's crawled to the fire where Vespasian stood. He renounced his faith; but out of the darkness came the words, "Thirty nine wrestlers, wrestling for thee, O Christ, to win for thee the victory, and from thee the victor's crown."

Vespasian looked at the state of his once proud wrestler, weak and distraught, and then he looked out from whence came the song of faith from his band of loyal wrestlers. "Off came his helmet, down went his armor, and Vespasian ran on the ice shouting, Forty wrestlers, wrestling for thee, O Christ, to win for thee the victory, and from thee the victor's crown."

Do we have hearts like Vespasian and his 39 wrestlers? Do we have the faith of our convictions to do what is right no matter what the consequences? Vespasian did. Do we?

Determination

The Olympics is an event in which fans from all over the world watch their athletes experience the agony of defeat and the ecstasy of victory. For many, just watching the Olympics brings about a feeling of hope and accomplishment.

The Olympic motto is *Citius, Altius, Fortius* "Faster, Higher, Stronger."⁶ However, for most of us in life, our challenges do not require that we jump higher, sprint faster, or be the best in the world.

This week, as a unit, we celebrated Black History month. The speakers inspired us, challenged us, and reminded us of the accomplishments of Black Americans. With this in mind, during the 1936 Olympics the world became captivated by an African American athlete by the name of Jesse Owens. At that time, Hitler was taunting the world with his Nazi slogans and his claims of Aryan supremacy. Onto this stage walked Jesse Owens. He won his first Gold in the 100m edging out Metcalf. The next day, Jesse Owens tried to make the finals in the long jump. He fouled his first two jumps. With one jump remaining, Luz Long, the world record holder in the long jump, introduced himself to Jesse and suggested that he set a mark several inches before the takeoff board and jump from there so he would not be disqualified. Jesse took his advice, qualified and in the finals that afternoon both Long and Owens battled for Gold. On Long's fifth and final jump, he matched Owens's jump of 25' 10". But Owens leaped for a final of 26' 5 1/2", a record that lasted for 26 years. After the jump for Gold in front of the roaring Olympic fans, Long hugged Owens.⁷

Concerning that historic jump, Owens said, "It took a lot of courage for him to befriend me in front of Hitler," "You can melt down all the medals and cups I have and they wouldn't be plating on the 24-karat friendship I felt for Luz Long at that moment. Hitler must have gone crazy watching us embrace. The sad part of the story is I never saw Luz Long again. He was killed in World War II."⁸ (An interesting side note is that Jesse Owens corresponded with Long's family long after the war.)

Described as a remarkably patient and generous human being, Jesse Owens would be posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor by President George Bush a decade after his death.

Bush called Owens' victories in Berlin, “an unrivaled athletic triumph, but more than that, a triumph for all humanity.”⁹ Perhaps, Jesse Owens greatest accomplishment was not in what he did but in who he was. The race then is not to the swift but to all of us who endure to the end.

Endure to the End

Matthew 10:22 – He that endureth to the end shall be saved.

*Pain stayed with me so long I said today,
“I will not have you with me anymore.”
I stamped my foot and said, “Be on your way,”
And then paused, startled at the look he wore.
“I who have been your friend” he said to me.
“I who am your teacher—
all you know of understanding Love and sympathy,
And patience, I have taught you. Shall I go?”
He spoke the truth, this strange unwelcome guest.
I watched him leave and knew his words were wise.
He left a heart grown tender in my breast.
He left a far clearer vision in my eyes.
I dried my tears and lifted up a song.
Even for one who tortured me so long. (Author Unknown)*

Often the lessons in life are learned through opposition and struggle. We all want to have joy. Like a physical fitness test—we practice and we work out on a regular basis, and when it is done and we pass, we feel a certain amount of joy and relief that it is done, and if we do well, a certain sense of satisfaction.

Perhaps, the most important things that we learn in this life are learned the slow way through practice and through trial and error, Robert Browning, the poet, understood this when he penned the following, “There is an answer to the passionate longing heart for fullness...: live in all things outside yourself by love and you will have joy. That is the life of God; it ought to be our life. In Him it is accomplished and perfect; but in all created things, it is a lesson learned slowly against difficulty.”¹⁰

This seems to be the case with marriages, parenting, and careers. We want the benefit and joy without the struggle. Perhaps joy, like grace, comes after all we can do.

After all we can do to be good parents, after all that we can do to be good spouses, and after all that we can do to be the best we can at our careers. Happiness and joy is brought about through the struggles of life. May we all experience that joy that surpasses all understanding as we endure to the end with what-ever plight in life we have been given.

Endurance

Job 1:21 The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away: Blessed be the name of the LORD.

There is an old infantry saying which brings a smile to my face every time I hear it, and I quote, “It’s not over til it’s over.” You will hear it when we have been in the field for two weeks—when we are hot, thirsty, dirty, or tired. It is used to define a great deal of feelings, and to quiet complaining. Maybe we can define it as patience, persistence, resolution, perseverance-never giving up. It is the old principle of getting back on the horse that has thrown you—repeatedly. It is a simple faith in ourselves that we can endure life’s complexities and still survive.

How many of us have endured life like Job in the Old Testament. He never denounced God. He had an abiding faith in the Lord, and though even the very jaws of the adversary opened to destroy him, he never denied the faith. It wasn’t over til it was over.

Job could have quit. He could have cursed God and been done with the suffering. He did not. Moreover, today, he is remembered for his patience, tenacity, and faith.

Last month, I received a letter from one of our soldiers. Let me read you a part of his letter. And I quote: “Dear Sir: Hello! How are you and your family doing? I myself am doing fine! I’m working one full and one part time job and I am going to check into some job training next week. How is everybody in the unit doing? Did you go on any deployments? My mom says to say hello. Has anyone gone AWOL lately? Well that’s about it Chaplain. Tell the boys I said hello and take care!”

Let me tell you something about this soldier. I bet if I were to draw a character sketch of his earlier years, he would be the one who was always picked on. The kid who was bullied, and the one who always got his nose bloodied or his body slammed to the ground. I expect he did not even have many friends. This soldier was one who always had his eyes to the ground and who rarely looked up. He was the one who threw the grenade about ten meters, while Everyone dived for cover. He was the one who discharged his rifle during a live fire exercise and almost hit someone. He was the one who ended up upside down on the rappelling tower. He tried people’s patience. However, let me tell you another story about this soldier, the one who never cursed God.

Unfortunately, he was chaptered out of the Army for his inability to adapt. His trial was a difficult one of about four months while he tried to fight it. He wrote letters to his congressional representative. He went in to talk to his chain of command, from the Company to the Brigade Commander, and this was not by appointment, but by walking up to their office and asking to talk to them. He had real courage.

During that time, I started to see a change in him. He began to hold his head up higher. His eyes no longer graced the sidewalk, but looked forward into an uncertain future. For him, the Army was a stepping-stone.

He never cursed others, but accepted his plight. He worked to change it and in the end, he did succeed. He may not have won the short battle of the present; but I believe, he won the battle of the future. This soldier, like Job, never gave up. He believed that he was right and went forward.

As a unit, may we have the courage of this soldier, to never give up, to strive to do our best, and if we fail, to pick ourselves up, and try again.

Happiness

Proverbs 16: 20 -- He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.

James Sharp wrote these lines, “Many run about after happiness like an absent-minded man hunting for his hat, while it is in his hand or on his head.”¹¹ It appears that in a time of rising affluence we seem to find happiness even more elusive.

What is it that keeps us from finding this elusive goal? Is it because we continually look to external events to bring us happiness. Is it the time or money we spend on expensive gifts or other pursuits?

I believe that happiness is an internal event. We are all responsible for our own choices and lives. In the life of the Savior, we find the formula for happiness that was apparent in his life.

First - He believed in something. He knew the truth and it made him free.

Second - He knew who he was.

Third - He sacrificed for his goals.

Fourth - He sought help through prayer.

Fifth - He served others.

Happiness does not need to be elusive. Robert Louis Stevenson, the great novelist, wrote, “I know what happiness is for I have done good work.”¹²

May we in the 7th Division of the 5th of the 21st Infantry Battalion know what true happiness is. May we be sure of our ourselves, sacrifice for our goals, and trust in the Lord as we serve others.

Honor

Job 27:4-6 My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.

A man once said, "I have been asked what I mean by word of honor. I will tell you. Place me behind prison walls--walls of stone ever so high, ever so thick, reaching ever so far into the ground--there is a possibility that in some way or another I may be able to escape, but stand me on that floor and draw a chalk line around me and have me give my word of honor never to cross it. Can I get out of that circle? No, never! I'd die first!"¹³

Like this man, do we have a circle of honor in our lives? Like Job, in the Old Testament, will we die before we remove our integrity? What is it that keeps honor in our lives or as the saying above implies, embedded in the constitution of our moral fiber, that causes us not to break?

What is our circle of honor? Does it matter what the consequences are or how difficult the decision? Can I stay within the circle of my honor when it is so easy to walk out and nobody would know but me?

Job in the Old Testament was asked to curse God and die because he had lost everything. Can we maintain our honor when it seems that everything is going against us or when everyone else is doing it?

Maybe our word of honor is something that we need to think about. What are the circles of honor in our lives? Perhaps, if our honor is not intact, it's time to take out our chalk to re-draw our circle.

Humility

Proverbs 29:23 A man's pride shall bring him low: but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit.

Humility in today's world is regarded as a weakness instead of a strength. People who demonstrate this virtue are seen as old fashioned or quaint. However, one man, the Father of our Country, could teach us all something about the virtue of humility.

At the end of the American Revolutionary War, when the formal peace treaty between Britain and the United States was yet to be signed, two officers from Washington's Army, Alexander Hamilton and Roger Morris, developed a plan to oust Congress in a coup and set up martial law. They were disgruntled because their wages had not been paid. Washington, finding out about this plot, called together his officers on March 15, 1783. He began to speak—carefully from a written manuscript, referring to the proposal of “either deserting our Country in the extremist hour of her distress, or turning our Arms against it...” Washington appealed simply and honestly for reason, restraint, patience, and duty—all the good and exciting virtues.

“And then Washington stumbled as he read. He squinted, paused, and out of his pocket he drew out some new spectacles. Gentlemen, you must pardon me,” he said in apology. I have grown gray in your service and now find myself going blind.” Most of his men had never seen the general wear glasses. Yes, the men said to themselves, eight hard years. They recalled the ruddy full-blooded planter of 1775; now they saw...a big, good, fatherly man grown old. They wept, many of those warriors. And the Newburgh plot (mutiny) dissolved.”¹⁴

Humility is a trait that is rarely considered in today's world. Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18).

May we learn from the example of this great leader and ...let us not be weary in well doing (Gal. 6:9). May we seek after that which is good with a humble heart, and with the strength of a true warrior as depicted in this story concerning the Father of our Country.

Kindness

1 Samuel 16:7 The Lord seeth not as a man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

Because life is not made up of daily historic events or earth shattering happenings, it's the little things in life that end up meaning so much to most of us.

It's kindness that helps us to get through the day. It's not harsh words or criticism; but, it is daily acts of kindness which can lift a distraught spirit, cheer up a hurt soul, or make someone a little happier.

Have you ever wondered why people tend to gravitate to those who they think are kind. It's because they will not be hurt. They can rest without fear of reprisal. And most of all, kindness is free with no price tag attached.

Not all of us will have the opportunity to go down in history, but we can all be everyday heroes by being kind to one another. It's the small things that often have the greatest impact.

...He was sick and I fed him, He was sick and I cared for him. He was naked and I clothed him...Matthew 5:35

True kindness can rescue a friend in despair and help others to get through the day. It is my prayer that we can all benefit from performing and receiving simple acts of kindness.

Leadership

Proverbs 16:32 He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty.

As I finished practicing the parachute landing falls from a three foot ramp, I could tell that I was not getting it. In fact, my body was feeling the pains of poor parachute landings. I wasn't worried that I wouldn't finish airborne school, but instead I would hurt myself when exiting at 1200 feet from a perfectly good airplane. I believe that my drill instructor could read the frustration on my face.

He was an interesting man. He was a Gunny in the Marine Corp, a drill-instructor that was on loan to the Army for this training cycle. We were fortunate to have him. The other airborne instructors voiced their displeasure at the cadets by yelling and by belittling their charges. However, this natural leader taught by his quiet demeanor. He did not yell, swear, accuse, or belittle. He encouraged, motivated, and by his example trained us to be the best paratroopers possible. I found out from a friend that he tested parachutes for the Marine Corps and that at 100 feet, on one of his jumps, the parachute he was testing malfunctioned from which he plunged to the ground and broke both hips. However, he was here a year later working with us, new airborne trainees, as if nothing had happened.

Seeing my frustration, he came to where I was lying in the dirt, waiting for me to get up, and then placed his arm around my shoulder. He simply stressed that I needed to keep my knees and feet together when I hit the ground, or I could hurt myself. He said it in a soft voice, and took me a few feet away from the other trainees when he gave me the counsel.

A simple task, but after all these years, I still remember his ability to motivate through kindness, example, and his natural ability to lead. After all these years, his example of leadership still rings true.

Men and Women of Character

Luke 15:32 It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

As we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day, we are reminded of this great man who was a leader of the Civil Rights Movement, a great public speaker, and a man who was awarded the Nobel Peace prize. But to me, what stands out most about Martin Luther King, Jr. is that he was a man of character. He believed in righting wrong, standing up for justice, and ultimately gave his life for what he believed.

What is it that makes people of character? What is it that distinguishes those who stand tall for something? And what is it that makes their influence felt for generations after they are gone?

We might say that character is a combination of many good qualities like honesty, courage, integrity and gratitude. All of us in the military have known and have been led by men and women of character. In fact, I would say that those leaders who we admire the most are known for this quality.

In the scriptures, we find many examples of men and women of character. The man with leprosy, who when healed by Christ returned to give thanks. The Savior asked him, "Where are the others?" He replied, "no where Lord." The Lord told him that his faith had made him whole. Or how about the woman with an issue of blood who was made whole through her faith when she touched Jesus's garment. And, there was Moses, the prophet of the Old Testament, who led his people out of slavery to the Promised Land. He also was a man of character and in a symbolic way, a precursor of He who was to come.

And another great example of character from the scriptures is the Savior, Christ the Lord. He who took upon himself the sins of the world so that we could, by Him and through Him, be saved. His influence has resonated throughout the generations and to this day His standard is what can be used as a measure for character.

So, as we celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, let us remember and apply the attributes that make men and women of character.

Morality

Exodus 20:2-17 Ye shall have no other gods before Me. Ye shall not make for yourself any graven image (idol)... Ye shall not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain...Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy...Honor thy father and thy mother...Ye shall not murder...Ye shall not commit adultery...Ye shall not steal... Ye shall not bear false witness against your neighbor...Ye shall not covet thy neighbor's wife...Ye shall not covet thy neighbor's house...

The other evening, I was sitting in my den watching TV. We have two channels because I am too cheap to get cable. As I turned the TV on I flipped it to channel 5. During about ten minutes of viewing, I saw: two affairs, another woman asking a married man for sexual favors, a mob plot, and a mother being shot by her son—of course it was an accident. I turned the TV off and thought, what is our society coming to and what are we as a nation viewing?

It made me think of morality and what it means. Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, a student of Plato, argued that the highest good of an individual is the excellent activity of the soul and that happiness is not just a moment in life, but is like the swallowing of water, one sip does not last a lifetime.¹⁵

Socrates, in the Apology, says, that man worth anything at all does not reckon whether his course of action endangers his life or threatens death. He looks only at one thing—whether what he does is just or not, the work of a good or of a bad man (28 b-c). Socrates put moral considerations above all else.¹⁶

Epicurus makes the argument that pleasure correctly understood as it relates to passion coincides with virtue.¹⁷ All three of these ancient philosophers understood society and the concept of morality - that virtue is the dominant aspect of morality as it relates to happiness.

The Ten Commandments, as a moral code, can be viewed as virtues that if followed lead to happiness. Our legal system is a reflection of the many religious and moral codes of our nation that provide us an ethic of what is right or wrong.

One 1st Sergeant put it eloquently and very simply—he said, “Trash

put into the mind equals trash coming out in action.” Our Army Values are a moral code of Loyalty; Duty; Respect; Selfless-Service; Honor; Integrity and Personal Courage. These are the virtues or considerations which we should honor as part of our actions as Soldiers above all else. Interesting, what a few minutes of TV viewing can spark the mind to think about.

Never Give In

Hebrews 12:1 ...Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.

All of us get discouraged or disappointed at different times in our lives or we meet people who do not particularly see things the same way that we do. Many times, we have obstacles in our lives that seem insurmountable or we may just feel like giving up.

One of my favorite stories is of Winston Churchill when he gave a speech to the boys at his old private school in Harrow on October 29, 1941. These were dark days for England. The Germans were bombing England in anticipation of an invasion. England stood alone with its commonwealth partners. The United States was not yet involved with the war only with its lend lease program. It fell to England to mobilize opposition to Hitler and the Axis powers.

In England's darkest hours, Churchill spoke at his old school. It was reported that he went to the podium and as only he could in his gravelly voice said, "Never give in—never, never, never, never, in nothing great or small, large or petty, never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy."¹⁸

The students that day felt that they had received one of the finest speeches of their lives.

Perhaps, that is a good message for us when life seems tough and we feel discouraged, to remember to never give in, no never.

Perseverance

Psalms 40:1-3 I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.

This week we had the privilege of listening to the Army's Deputy Chief of Chaplains at a prayer breakfast. His central theme was one of perseverance in that we are a nation at war. He related that as a young boy in the state of Georgia how his mother had bought him a pair of Buster Brown shoes. They were saddle shoes. He told the audience how excited he had been as a five year old to have new shoes and especially that they were Buster Brown shoes.

However, one day while in the back yard, he failed to see that the septic tank was open and without realizing it found himself up to his ankles in sludge. He was surprised and angry because he could not get himself out of the miry pit. Ultimately, his lungs saved the day and his family extricated him from his dilemma after hearing his yells. Unfortunately, he could not get the stain off of his new shoes and he had to throw them away.

I guess what helped the young boy out was the strength of his lungs, and even though his shoes were destroyed, he still persevered and was saved from his plight. We might compare this story to what we are facing as a nation. Things might not be progressing as a military as well as we think they should. We have been diligent in supporting current policies, and now as a military we are getting a new course correction. We also understand that we may have to discard our old pair of shoes and get new ones, and set them on firmer ground. However, this does not negate the progress that has been made over the years, or the sacrifices that have been made by our brave men and women in uniform.

Perseverance as a concept is something that we can all benefit from. The Lord preserved his dedication and trust of Peter, and upon that rock he strengthened the church. Christ believes in all of us or he would not command us to Trust in the Lord. Perseverance as a character trait can go a long way in helping us to be better men and women in uniform.

Think of the concept of perseverance and remember that God can help us not only as a nation but as individuals if we wait patiently upon the Lord when we need to make a course corrections in our lives.

Respect

Job 11:13, 16 If thou prepare thine heart and stretch out thine hands toward him: 16 - Because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away. Job 11: 13, 16

A Sergeant was sitting at the Post Exchange, near the soda machine when a Captain walked up to purchase a soda. The officer checked his pockets for change, he had none. Then he opened his wallet for a dollar bill again he had none only a fiver. He looked over at the Sergeant and asked, "Hey Sarg do you have change for a five?" The Sergeant replied, "Sure Buddy".

The Captain looked at the Non-commissioned officer and said, "OK Sergeant let's do this again. Do you have change for a five-dollar bill?" The Sergeant replied "No Sir". (source unknown)

We all want to be treated with respect no matter what our rank or position in life. This last week we celebrated Holy Week. We examined the last week of the Christ's life where he entered into the Holy City (Jerusalem) through the Golden Gate on Sunday, and was met in triumph by the cheering crowds. He preached and talked to the people in the temple from Monday through Wednesday. He confused the learned with his responses. He cleansed the temple and declared that the temple was not a place for thieves but a house of prayer. On Thursday, he instituted, in the upper room, the sacrament, communion or the Eucharist, and told his disciples that one would betray him. That evening, he walked to Garden of Gethsemane, and took upon himself the sins of the world. He told Peter that he would deny him three times and late into the night he was delivered up to Annas and Caiaphas, the high priests, for judgment which caused Caiaphas to rent his clothes and to declare Jesus as having committed blasphemy worthy of death.

Jesus was sent to Pilate, the Roman Governor, because of his alleged seditious acts. However, Pilate could find nothing wrong with this man. He sent him to Herod of Antipas, because he was a Galilean. Herod sent him back to Pilate. Pilate devised a plan to set him loose, but the crowds said to crucify him. Pilate washes his hands of the affair and sends Jesus to be flogged and then to be crucified. On Friday, he was flogged. He walked the Via Dolorosa (way of pain) with his cross and was crucified on Golgotha – place of the skull. On Sunday, the angel declared to the women at the tomb that He is risen.

So, when we ever feel that we have been treated with disrespect think of the Savior entering through the Golden Gate with adulation and triumph only to be denounced a few days later by the crowds with the words “crucify him”.

We may not like what life has given us, or how we have been treated; but the good news is that there will always be a Sunday.

Selfless Sacrifice

John 15:13 Greater love hath not man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

The B-17 bomber was called the flying fortress during World War II. It was one of our most dependable long-range bombers. During one of its missions, flying from Germany back towards the English Channel, one such B-17 was engaged by the enemy and mortally crippled. A young eighteen-year-old boy who was in the ball turret underneath the B-17 was also critically wounded and in such a position that he was not able to exit as the plane made its descent towards the English Channel.

As the pilot ordered the crew to take their parachutes and to abandon the crippled B-17, it was reported by one of the survivors, that the young eighteen year old knowing that he was soon to ride the huge fortress of steel into the cold waters below cried out with terror and pain. The pilot laying his parachute aside went back and took the soldier by the hand and said, "Don't worry son we are going to ride this down together." This Army Captain was later posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for bravery. (source for story unknown)

How many of us are selfish in our daily activities? It was commitment to something higher that caused this pilot to give his life for one of his own crew members. The unselfishness of this young man's commander is poignant if not admirable. Though the story may be apocryphal, it represents the highest form of unselfishness and sacrifice, i.e., the giving of one's life for another.

Over two thousand years ago, Christ hanging from a cross said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34) Let us remember the importance of sacrifice and unselfishness. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him would not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

True selflessness like that represented by the Army Captain and by the example of our Lord on the cross is priceless. May we in the military have the opportunity to serve others and to be selfless in whatever we do.

Service—Military

Luke 17:10 We have done that which was our duty to do.

The other day I was in the commissary (grocery store) waiting in line to pay for a few purchases. In front of me was a retiree who was wearing a black baseball cap that had inscribed on the visor in golden thread "Vietnam Veteran". Normally, I take a few minutes and talk to the veterans about their service. However, he seemed to be in a hurry and I didn't get the opportunity to talk with him.

I wondered what caused him to wear the baseball cap. It appeared worn as if he used it daily. Was the Vietnam War a defining event or moment in his life? Did he not feel appreciated? Was it just a symbol to let others know that he had served his country honorably and faithfully, that he had done his duty?

Funny what thoughts can occur in your mind when one is waiting in line to pay for a few groceries.

Service—Ministry

Ephesians 6:7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to man.

As I closed the door of the chapel it was nearly midnight. The Knights of Columbus, a fraternal men's Catholic organization that renders assistance and financial aid to families and individuals, stored the ladders and paint brushes in the storage cabinets. We had spent the weekend painting the in-side of the sanctuary, and the classrooms in the back of the chapel. We were covered in paint, tired, and hungry. We must have listened to hours of country music and rock n' roll as we laughed our way through hours of scraping, taping, priming and applying two coats of fresh paint to the walls.

We said our good byes, and I thanked the Knights of Columbus profusely for helping me and my chaplain assistant paint the interior of the chapel. Before I left the chapel, I checked the building to make sure that it was secure. As I began to turn off the lights I looked at the walls of the sanctuary once more—clean, painted and bright. I had a good feeling as I walked to my car and got in to drive home.

Glancing back once more at the chapel, I knew that providing service without remuneration for work accomplished came with its own rewards. We knew that we had all contributed in our own way to making the chapel a better place for worship.

Service with the aim of simply giving comes with its own compensation.

Spiritual Life of a Soldier

Joshua 1:9 Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

"I look upon the spiritual life of the soldier as even more important than physical equipment...The soldier's heart, the soldier's spirit, the soldiers' soul are everything. Unless the soldier's soul sustains him, he cannot be relied upon and will fail himself and his country in the end."

General George C. Marshall- Former Chief of Staff of the Army¹⁹

So what is the spiritual life of a Soldier? According to General Marshall, it is the heart, the spirit and the soul. And perhaps for today's Soldiers, like the Soldiers that General Marshall knew in WW II, it is their hearts when they are separated from family, friends and loved ones fighting a foe on foreign soil and longing for the time when they can return.

It is their spirit knowing that "they are just soldiers, protectors of our land. Servants called to battle when their country takes a stands."²⁰

It is their soul. Like Lincoln at Gettysburg, and General Washington at Valley Forge, praying for divine guidance, knowing that there is a God who loves and cares about them. It is the combination of the heart, the spirit, and the soul that makes up the spiritual life of a soldier.

Like our fore-fathers, today's soldiers need to know the importance of a spiritual life so that when all else fails it can sustain them. So that they can look at or go through the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil because they know that God is with them and that he cares about them.

Tradition

Last month, many of us had the opportunity to attend the St Barbara's Ball in the museum at Ford Island—Honolulu, Hawaii. It was a fun evening. I enjoyed sitting under the wing of the B-24 Liberator, an American heavy bomber that was used during WW II in the Pacific. During WW II my father was a mechanic who maintained the B-17s, the flying fortress that was often compared to the B-24. It brought back memories of his stories.

The evening was filled with tradition: the playing of the Army song, the posting of the colors, the toasts, the prayers, the punch bowl ceremony and the awarding of the Honorable Order of Saint Barbara. Traditions are like truths that rarely change. They help to instill in the participants a sense of history that is handed down from one generation to the next.

They are statements of beliefs, customs and knowledge. They are not like secular knowledge that changes from time to time when more information is available.

These traditions remind me of truths that never change that are absolutes that come from a source higher than our own intelligence: faith proceeds the miracle, love is enduring, prayer is the souls sincere desire, forgiveness heals the heart, kindness opens doors, families are important, hope is enduring, vision precludes failure, and repentance renews your character.

Sitting under the wing of a World War II B-24 Liberator can be inspiring.

The Rockets' Red Glare

Joshua 10:25 Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage: for thus shall the LORD do to all your enemies against whom ye fight.

The following was written by Chaplain Jim Higgins on May 14, 2007 at LSA Anaconda, Balad Airport in Iraq:

"I recently attended a showing of "Superman 3," here at LSA Anaconda. We have a large auditorium we use for movies, as well as memorial services and other large gatherings. As is the custom back in the States, we stood and snapped to attention when the National Anthem began before the main feature. All was going as planned until about three-quarters of the way through the National Anthem the music stopped.

Now, what would happen if this occurred with 1,000 18-22 year-olds back in the States? I imagine there would be hoots, catcalls, laughter, a few rude comments; and everyone would sit down and call for a movie. Of course, that is, if they had stood for the National Anthem in the first place. Here, the 1,000 Soldiers continued to stand at attention, eyes fixed forward. The music started again. The Soldiers continued to quietly stand at attention. And again, at the same point, the music stopped. What would you expect to happen? Even here I would imagine laughter, as everyone finally sat down and expected the movie to start. But here, you could have heard a pin drop. Every Soldier continued to stand at attention. Suddenly there was a lone voice, then a dozen, and quickly the room was filled with the voices of a thousand Soldiers, finishing where the recording left off:

'And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air, Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there. Oh, say does that Star - Spangled Banner yet wave, O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!'

It was the most inspiring moment I have had here in Iraq. I wanted you to know what kind of Soldiers are serving you here."²¹

It is inspiring to read stories such as this told by Chaplain Higgins. I know we are all proud to serve our country. It is good that those who serve do so with honor.

Trust

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

I once heard someone say, “Why would anyone want to jump out of a perfectly good airplane.” It makes sense. There have been times in my life when I have thought the same. Why do I get up so early in the morning? Is this all there is to life? Why doesn’t the Army make different MREs (meals ready to eat)? I am tired of sleeping on the ground. When will this deployment be over? When will I be going home? Why is it always raining when we are training? Do we have to go to the range today? That looks a bit scary (rappelling), who is on belay? When is the PT (physical training) test? Let’s see, I have been gone the last three years out of five, you say that the unit I am transferring to is deploying in June?

All of us who have trained, and who have been in the military for a few years have many stories to tell about war, deployment, units where we have served, what we have done and what we have experienced in serving. Hopefully, our service has been rewarding and we have all felt a sense of accomplishment.

In serving, what I have been most impressed about is the quality of those individuals with whom I have served. There is nothing better than a good jumpmaster who will check out your equipment before you exit from a perfectly good airplane. Or, the great NCO (non-commissioned officer) who has your back covered and is always there to advise, support, and to let you know how it might be done a little bit better or differently. We all have experienced those great leaders who we would go to combat with. And, we all have had the opportunity to trust in others.

One of the most comforting leaders that I know is the Lord. He has always been there for me. He always has my back and has listened when I have been scared, alone, away from home, in danger or not quite sure what I should do. He has been there to check my equipment, to lift me up when I am tired and to be on belay as a safety to catch me when I fall. He is my refuge in the storm, my comfort in times of turmoil, and in who I trust, and turn to for understanding.

Vision

Proverbs 29:18 Where there is no vision the people perish.

In Proverbs, it says, “Where there is no vision the people perish.” What happens when we stop dreaming? What happens to us when we lose the idealism of youth and settle for the experiences of life? Some have said that it is naïve to shun experience. However, the experience of seeing violence on a daily basis, being fed a constant dosage of bitterness, or watching a consistent diet of injustice or woe from today’s world can warp one’s sense of vision if it is not balanced.

Vision in life is a highly sought after commodity. We read books on how to be highly successful. We mirror the habits of those who tend to be in focus. We admire those who have conquered life’s difficulties. However, when we fail to dream or fail to set temporal or spiritual goals our vision can become blurred.

I remember an officer who was fearful of his approaching retirement. He felt that his life was soon to be without focus. He did not look forward to his retirement, and he had no plans for the future. His whole life was the military, and his vision had been consumed by its mission. Even though he was in the final stages of finishing a very successful career, he was not able to enjoy his last few months.

So perhaps:

Where there are no dreams life can turn to bitterness.
Where there are no dreams faith withers up and dies.
Where there are no dreams hope becomes something that others have.
Where there are no dreams age whispers that it is too late.
Where there are no dreams balance in life can become one sided.
Where there are no dreams a focus on oneself can appear selfish.
Where there are no dreams God appears to be dead.

Christ gave us a vision of hope when he atoned for our sins so that we could be cleansed. However, we tend to turn to him only when we have troubles or are stricken with grief. It is difficult to maintain our vision and think rationally when we are hurt. “If you love me keep my commandments” (John 14:15). A focus that is not solely on ourselves might help us in our endeavor to maintain our vision and in going through life’s difficult situations.

So as the scriptures say, vision in life helps us to not perish, and faith in God keeps dreams alive. This, with a healthy dose of spiritual readiness, will keep our sight true, and our vision focused not only on ourselves but on those whom we have been called to lead and to serve.

Religious Observances



Conducting a religious service, Ardennes Forest, France bombed out WWI chapel. Courtesy of Vance Theodore

Christmas



*Serving soldiers and families Christmas Eve meal at dining facility—Fort Shafter, Hawaii.
Courtesy of Vance Theodore*

A Message of Hope

Luke 1:5-25

*It came upon a midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth,
To touch their harps of gold.
Peace on the earth, good will to men,
From Heav'n's all gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay,
To hear the angels sing. (Richard S. Willis)²²*

The second Sunday of Advent is a message of hope. That day, the community of North Pole, Alaska had their 33rd annual candle lighting ceremony. I would say that there were around two to three hundred people in attendance. Family and friends gathered to light a candle, sing carols and to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. It was a touching scene, to see a community come together, voluntarily, to sing, to read about Christmas and to pray.

I did not really know anyone there, but they had invited me to give a benediction. I was impressed seeing the three mayors from the local area participate in the ceremony. It was not flashy but heart felt. Community members sang, read verses, and the King and Queen of the candle lighting ceremony was an older couple who had been married for fifty-seven years.

At the end of the ceremony, everyone lit a candle, the benediction was given and all present stayed and sang Christmas Carols. As I left the auditorium, I had a feeling of peace. Perhaps the meaning of the carol "It came upon a midnight clear" was present. There, indeed, was a feeling of peace on earth goodwill towards all and the message of the 2nd Sunday of Advent was there - Hope.

Christmas Away from Home

While I was growing up our family's focus on Christmas was on the Savior and the blessing that His life and mission brought us. I remember the many Christmas Eves that we spent together singing Christmas carols, sharing stories and enjoying the spirit of the season. However, there was one Christmas that I will never forget; let me share it with you.

As few years ago, our family had the opportunity to work in a small village in the highlands of Guatemala. As Christmas was approaching, I was a bit sad about not being in the U.S. for the holiday season. We were in a different land, with different customs and traditions. How could we possibly feel or enjoy the season? Where were the Christmas trees, the manger scenes, the carolers singing our favorite Christmas tunes? I thought we were in for a dismal time.

However, one of the villagers proposed that we all get together for a Christmas party on Christmas Eve. I rebelled a little against the idea but as Christmas Eve approached, my wife and I decided to participate. And participate we did, as everyone showed up at our house with their favorite Christmas foods. There was a piñata, tamales, chicken, beans, fireworks, songs, and dance.

As we said good-bye to our friends, I realized that Christmas is a time of sharing, of singing, and of remembering Christ's birth. Even though, we were in a different land, and not home for the season, the feeling of goodwill and peace toward all crossed the miles and transcended the barriers of time, memory and culture.

As Light Fighters of the 7th Infantry Division, many of us will spend time away from our loved ones, our homes and our families during the holiday season, but may the real purpose for this season be bright for all of us as we remember His birth.

Merry Christmas!

Scrooge

In Dickens's classic, *A Christmas Carol*, Ebenezer Scrooge is a penny-pinching miser who cares nothing for Christmas. On Christmas Eve, the ghost of his former partner Jacob Marley visits Scrooge. Chains bind Marley, who appears as a ghost to Scrooge to warn him about the consequences of his life on earth. He hopes to help Scrooge avoid the same consequences of a life filled with poor choices. He informs Scrooge that three spirits will visit him. These three spirits represent the ghosts of Christmases past, present, and future who will help him find the error of his ways.²³

The three spirits of Christmas eventually succeed in transforming Scrooge, and on Christmas Day Scrooge captures the true Spirit of Christmas by buying a turkey for his clerk, Bob Cratchit, donating to a charitable organization, attending Church, talking to people on the street, and spending Christmas Day with his nephew, Fred. His transformation continues with his raising of his clerk's salary, and by helping Tiny Tim, Bob Cratchit's crippled son. Dickens, in the conclusion of his book stated that, "Scrooge became 'as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew'."²⁴

At the end of the story Ebenezer relearns what the true Spirit of Christmas represents. He is a reminder to all of us that if we have lost the Spirit of Christmas, it can be found again and that what has occurred in the past does not have to continue in the future.

Perhaps, this Christmas story is a reminder to let Christmas be a time of giving and receiving, a time of family and friends, and a time to ponder the wonderful miracle of the Birth of Christ.

Sentimental Junkie

In the Benning Ledger (a local newspaper), a recent poll confirmed the fears of Christian leaders, when asked what makes Christmas important to them, only one third of the adults in the survey said the birth of Jesus. Forty four percent said family time, and friends, and a day off from work. It was interesting to note that only three percent said presents. The poll concludes with comments from religious leaders, one stating that churches need to more actively teach their members the true meaning of Christmas, and help them avoid turning the birth of Christ into “sentimental junk.” (source unknown)

As you can guess from these comments, the purpose of today’s message is to talk about the real meaning of Christmas. During the last few days, I have pondered about sentimental junk. To be quite honest with you, one might call me a sentimental junkie. I enjoy the Christmas trees, the lights, the carols, and the stories about Christmas. I especially enjoy the food. I love the choirs, the movies and the religious stories that surround the event. Yes, I admit, like the article warns us, I am one of those sentimental junkies.

However, there is another side to the story that for me goes with Christmas, and that brings back many religious feelings that help me to remember the true meaning of Christmas. Come with me for a few moments as I examine with you these sentiments. They center on the words and music of Christmas Carols, which I believe, can help us to center our thoughts on Christ during this season.

One of my most vivid memories of people thinking about Christ during Christmas was in Bethlehem where a group of Coptic Christian women were worshipping in the church of the Nativity, where a silver star marks the site of the Savior’s birth. This smoke covered grotto is the traditional place where they say the Savior was born.

I am with a group of infantry soldiers visiting this holy site. These women (nuns) surround us. There is no manger. There is no crèche depicting Mary and Joseph or the Three Wise men bearing gifts. However, a simple silver star has been in place for centuries marking the birthplace of the baby Jesus.

The smoked stained walls are pungent with the smell of incense and the Star is worn thin by the touch of human hands. The women are bowing their heads touching the star. Their tears run down their cheeks. We

silently watch, then quietly leave. The Carol, *Away in the Manger*, takes on a special significance,

*Away in the Manger no crib for his bed, the little Lord Jesus lays
down his sweet head. The stars in the heaven looked down where he
lay. The little Lord Jesus, a sleep on the hay.*

Another carol brings back sentimental memories of this day,

*O Come All Ye Faithful, Joyful and Triumphant, O Come Ye O come
Ye to Bethlehem.*

My father was a music teacher. Every year he would pick his best musicians to play Christmas carols for the downtown businesses. There were not malls in those days, and most of the shops were on Main Street. The band members would usually meet at our home for hot chocolate and donuts before we would leave to play Christmas carols. When I was little, my father used to let me play the triangle. I can almost hear the sound of that triangle. I remember playing the carol *O Come All Ye faithful*. I felt the Spirit of Christmas.

I do not think it is bad to be a sentimental junkie. The season of Christmas reminds many of family, and shared experiences. I enjoy the lights, the stories of Santa, and the holiday cheer. I am also a sentimental junkie for what is important about Christmas to Christians, Christ's birth.

The Christmas Truce

Luke 2:14 Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

*Silent night! Holy night! All is calm, All is bright
Round yon virgin mother and Child.
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace; Sleep in heavenly peace.
Silent night! Holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight!
Glories stream from heaven a far; Heav'nly host sing Alleluia!
Chris, the Savior, is born! Christ the Savior, is born! (Franz Gruber)²⁵*

One of my favorite Christmas stories takes place during World War I December of 1914. World War I is barely four months old; the fighting has started in Flanders Field in Belgium. British and German troops are dug in on both sides of the trenches. Between them, there is an empty space called no man's land covered with holes and barbed wire where if you venture out into it, you will surely die. Daily there is the terrible hail of shrapnel, accompanied by the freezing rain with disease and death rampant. Snipers easily pick off those foolish enough to raise their heads above the earthen walls.

However, On Christmas Eve, a group of German soldiers hold a candle light service in a bombed out monastery. They light candles and place them on a Christmas tree "Tannebaum". The British soldiers witness this and take an interest in what is happening. They begin to sing Christmas carols. Two British soldiers, against orders, go over to the other side to arrange a Christmas truce. One British soldier wrote home about this experience to say, "We were going to give the enemy every conceivable song, from carols to Tipperary." That night, Christmas Carols were sung in English, French and German. A Chaplain read from the 23rd Psalm. A German violinist could be heard playing Handel's Largo. Someone sang, "O Holy Night".

The next day, Christmas soldiers make their way across the barbed wire and ditches to exchange gifts, a handshake, a Merry Christmas. They hold services to honor their fallen comrades. One witness recalls, "The Germans formed up on one side, the English on the other; the officers standing in front, every head bared. Yes, I think it is a sight one will never see again."²⁶

During that terrible war, on those dark days there was, indeed, the Spirit of Christmas. And for a moment, the carnage and death stopped. This truly was a miracle. Perhaps, that is what is missing in today's world. If we take off the last syllable in the last word in the phrase the Spirit of Christmas, we have The Spirit of Christ. I believe that is what was felt those many years ago, during that Last Great War (World War I). For a space of two days, during the years of carnage to come, during that, silent, holy night there was indeed, "on earth peace, good will toward men."

The Greatest Story Ever Told

We had just finished singing “O Holy Night”, “Silent Night”, and “We Wish you a Merry Christmas”, to veterans at the center for aging at the Tripler Army Medical Center in Honolulu, Hawaii. Standing with me were three teenagers, their mother, and a family of five who were part of a small group caroling the veterans who were either lying in their beds or sitting in their wheel chairs.

As we left the room of one of the veterans, he smiled and looked at us and said very quietly, Merry Christmas. His wife thanked us for the carols, and gave each one of us an angel pin. We thanked her and left his room.

As we departed, we sang more Christmas carols, about the birth of Christ and about the Joy that Christmas brings to all who celebrate it.

Today, Christmas Eve day, I am wearing that angel pin that the women gave us, on my tie.

The Son of Man is Coming-Advent

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a child is born, Unto us son is given; And the government shall be upon his shoulder; And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

The first Sunday in December is the beginning of the Advent season. It is a time for Christians to prepare their hearts and minds for the Messiah's coming. Advent comes from the Latin word *adventum*, which means "arrival."

In many Christian Churches, there is a small ceremony with the lighting of one candle for each of the four Sundays. Each Sunday represents a theme for his arrival: 1st Sunday of Advent (A Child Will Be Born to Us); 2nd Sunday of Advent (The Birth of Christ); 3rd Sunday of Advent (The Shepherd and Angels); 4th Sunday of Advent; (The Visit of the Magi).²⁷

The candles stand on an advent wreath, which represents the unending love of our Savior. The green holly branches around the wreath remind us of Christ's everlasting life. The wreath consists of 4 candles: 3 purple (a royal color representing the coming of the King), and 1 pink, (the joy candle). On Christmas day a white candle in the center of the wreath is lit. It represents the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.²⁸

Advent is a time that we prepare our minds and our hearts and remember the birth of Jesus Christ. It is a time to be with family and friends as we thoughtfully remember his arrival as the greatest of historical events. As we prepare our homes with lights, as we set up the Christmas trees and get out the ornaments, and listen to Christmas music, let us not forget why we celebrate the season.

In a sense, we all celebrate Advent. We expectantly wait for Christmas Eve and morning when we can open up gifts, eat with friends and family, and share the holiday spirit. However, as we prepare for the Advent or arrival of Christmas, let us not forget, its true meaning.

The Spirit of Giving

As a country, we just celebrated the birth of Christ and felt the spirit of giving. As we approach a new year, I was thinking about how the 94th Army Air Missile Defense Command donated over 176 volunteer hours to the needy in collecting food, visiting a veteran's home, and a pediatric ward in Tripler Army Medical Center. They helped with Christmas parties at the local elementary school. They gave gifts to those in need, and they generously donated their time, and talents.

I was impressed with the holiday season. It was watching Soldiers and family members of the unit at the River of Life Mission for the homeless, cutting onions for lunch with the odor so thick that tears were coming down their eyes as they stood there laughing.

It was watching soldiers give toys to families in need, and in preparing Christmas boxes for children who would be staying in the hospital. The look of joy on those who received the gifts from the soldiers was priceless.

It was Christmas caroling to children in the hospital. One of the participants said, "It was a lot of fun especially in the pediatric ward, seeing the kid's eyes light up brought us great joy."

It was noticing an officer congratulating a WW II veteran for his service, and then giving him a coin, a little something that meant so much to that individual who served. It was caroling and bringing joy to those who do not receive many visits—maybe they are the forgotten.

It was watching others give who would not receive anything in return that brought joy. Perhaps, that is the joy that makes selfless service worthwhile.

As we prepare for the New Year, let us not forget the spirit that the holiday season brought, and carry it with us throughout the New Year.

Lent

Psalm 27:1 The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Many people in Christianity are celebrating Lent. Lent is a period of forty-days before Easter. It begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Easter. For the Roman Catholic Church, Lent ends at sundown on Holy Thursday, with the beginning of the Mass of the Lord's Supper.

The tradition of Lent imitates Jesus' journey in the wilderness where he fasted for forty days and forty nights. For many Christians, it is time for reflection, prayer, and fasting. It is also a period when one gives up something for the betterment of self. In the early church, it was used as a time of reflection and meditation where the new converts were instructed in the faith preparatory for baptism.

The color for Lent is purple which represents the royal color, to prepare for the King.

In many countries the Mahdi Gras, shove Tuesday, or Fasching were the last fling before the Lenten season. Carnival called the festival comes from the Latin *festum*. In some cultures, these events were the last activities before the season began.

Lent precedes Easter as Christianity celebrates the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. What an opportunity to learn from the Lenten season even if we do not practice the tradition of Lent.

All of us need a period of self-examination and a time for meditation. The tradition of giving something up for forty days like meat or alcohol means little if we do not think of the reason why we are letting go.

For those who prepare for Easter may it be a time of renewal and reflection, as we ponder the significance of the Easter season. I believe that Lent has a way of focusing one's mind whether it is our tradition or not.

Easter



Easter Sunrise Service, somewhere in Iraq. Courtesy of Vance Theodore

Easter Sunrise

As we finished the sunrise service, my assistant and I wondered what we were going to do with the wooden cross that the unit engineers had made for us. The war was over (Desert Storm) and we were somewhere by the Euphrates en-route to provide security for the cease fire that was negotiated on the 3rd of March and was formally signed on the 6th of April 1991.

At the end of the Easter Sunrise Service all who attended were given a pen and they signed their names on the wooden cross. We left the cross in the sands of Iraq, and in a few short weeks we were home with loved ones and family.

Sometimes, I wonder what happened to that cross that represented the risen Christ on that Easter morn long ago. Perhaps some wandering Bedouins found it and used it for fire wood, or in one of the many sand storms it might have blown down and was covered by the desert sands.

It is not so much what happened to the cross, but what it meant to those men who long ago fought for something they believed in, and on that Easter morning, in the deserts of Iraq, thought about our Lord and Savior and what he did for us on the cross that day on Golgotha.

Easter—Sunday through Friday

As I ponder the significance that the Holy Week has for all of Christianity, I cannot help but think of it as one of the most important weeks ever recorded in history. As a young man, I really did not understand its significance. I knew all the stories, and the events, but I never took the time to put them together. It was not until I was stationed in the Sinai for six months that I truly felt the spirit of that occasion by walking where Jesus walked. In a sense, I walked “in his footsteps.” Perhaps a review of this momentous week will, again, renew that spirit.

Sunday – John 12:12-13 “On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. They took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

Here we find Jesus making the triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem where three of the four Gospels devote more than a third of their contents on reporting this week. Palms are thrown at the donkey's feet, a symbol of triumph and victory. Jesus comes down on a path through the Mount of Olives, crosses Kedron brook and enters the city through the Golden Gate. One can imagine the excitement of this occasion as the humble proclaim him “King of Israel.” We might wonder what is on Jesus' mind, as he knows what the end of the week will bring.

Monday through Wednesday – Jesus spends his days in the temple. One of the most striking pictures of the Holy Week is of Jesus cleansing the temple. We can see him on Monday entering the temple casting out all of the moneychangers and those who were making a profit saying, “My house shall be a house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.” Matt. 21:13 These acts would dispel any rumors that Jesus wanted to keep a low profile-his triumphant entry into the city, and the cleansing of the temple dissolved any doubts of “Whom they said that he was.”

During Monday through Wednesday, Jesus teaches in the temple, and the crowds hang onto his every word. Present are the Sadducees and the Pharisees aristocracy who are trying to catch Jesus in their snares. We can imagine that some of the best minds are present to discredit him. We hear their questions as one asks, “Tell me Teacher, is it lawful to give tribute unto Cesar or not?” We can see the Savior take a coin from the tribute money for visual representation, and ask, “Why tempt you me” “Render to Cesar the things that are Cesar's and to God the things that are God's.”

Mark 12:17 We know that when they heard his words they marveled and they went their way. The attempts to discredit Jesus had failed. History would record that other methods were soon to be used against this man called Jesus.

Thursday finds Jesus resting in Bethany. We can surmise that he was spending his last moments of freedom with his friends. Towards noon, he sends Peter and John into the city to arrange for the Passover meal. The disciples and Jesus retire for the evening meal to the upper room of a house that was designated by the Savior. We can see them eating the traditional meal, the Passover Seder of roasted lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The evening begins with eating, and then the washing of the feet of his disciples, teaching them a lesson in humility. As he finishes washing their feet, he says, "...one of you shall betray me." Here the scene is set for the betrayal of Jesus. Judas, knowing that he is found out, says with the other disciples, "Is it I Lord?" "Thou hast said." "Do quickly what you are going to do." Matt 26: 20-25 Judas leaves and Jesus changes the Passover Seder by instituting the Lord's Supper, the sacrament or Holy Communion, that Christianity since that time has been celebrating through the centuries.

Thursday continues, we can picture the disciples as they walk out of the upper room and begin their ascent to the Mount of Olives where their destination will be Gethsemane-the Garden. Perhaps as they are walking Jesus says, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night" Mark 14:27. Moreover, Peter, ever the resolute Peter, announces possibly prematurely, that he would never deny Christ! Jesus, sadly, responds that before the night is through you shall deny me three times. Of course, Peter could not foretell the events that were soon to unfold. So here, we find Jesus in one of the most poignant moments of the story. He takes three of his most trusted apostles, Peter, James, and John, to sit with him while he prays. However, the night is late and they cannot stay awake. Here the Savior, alone in the garden, utters these words, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" Matt 26:39. The apostles sleep on; Jesus takes upon himself the sins of the world. It is hard to imagine his selfless suffering for us, and when he is finished, he meets with the soldiers that will take him to begin the process of earthly judgment of those who will sentence him to be crucified.

However, Thursday is hardly finished. The soldiers approach, and Peter, ever the impetuous one, cuts off a soldier's ear in defense of his Lord. The Savior quickly heals it, and Jesus is taken to be tried by Annas and Caiaphas, the High Priests. The proceedings take place during the night, which is unlawful by Jewish law. Annas becomes disgruntled with Jesus and sends him to Caiaphas. Caiaphas, the High Priest, then asks Jesus if

he is Christ the Son of God. Jesus answers, "Thou hast said." Whereupon Caiaphas rents his clothes the length of the palm of the hand and cries blasphemy. "What think ye? He is guilty of death." They respond. Matt 26:66. So the stage is set. Caiaphas has what he wants and must send Jesus to Pilot because the ability to put one to death remained with the Roman Government.

During the same time (Thursday night), another touching scene takes place with Peter's denial. We find Peter warming himself at a charcoal fire. He is waiting outside where Jesus is being questioned by Caiaphas. He is recognized and asked, "If he was not with the Galilean." He denies it. A second time, another man asks him, "Didn't I see you in the garden with Jesus?" We can guess his response. And finally, "Certainly, you are one of him, because of your accent" Matt 26:69-75. Peter denies it. However, this time he hears the cockcrow and bitterly, with tears streaming down his face, he realizes his folly.

Friday – Jesus is taken before Pontius Pilate. Pilate can find no wrong with this man, and he sends him to Herod of Antipas because Jesus is a Galilean. However, before King Herod, the Savior remains silent. Maybe this is a reaction to King Herod's killing of John the Baptist. However, the Jesus in quiet majesty chooses not to respond to Herod's questioning. Back to Pilate, Pilate is in a quandary and can find no wrong with this man, and decides to flog him and release him. Nevertheless, the crowds intervene saying crucify him. Pilate is not done. He comes up with an idea to provide amnesty to the accused. Surely, the crowds will choose Jesus. They respond by asking for Barabbas, a criminal.

Many have wondered about the reaction of the crowd that day, which is in contrast to the multitude that met the Savior just a week before, at the Golden Gate. Here they cry, "crucify Him." Jesus is then led away to be flogged or scourged as it says in the scriptures. Then Jesus takes up the cross and begins his journey to Golgotha, the place of the skull.

An aside to this depiction of the last days of Christ: I am always amazed at the strength of Christ, not only of his character but also of his stamina both physical and mental, an evidence of his Godhood.

Golgotha, where Jesus was to be crucified. The most hideous of punishments reserved for slaves, terrorists, and religious rebels. When the condemned reached Golgotha, they were offered the ritual drink of wine and myrrh to act as a narcotic. Jesus tastes it but did not swallow. He is stripped naked, and his garments are divided into four shares, and they cast lots for his cloak. His hands and feet are spiked to the

cross, and he most likely was made to straddle a wedge of wood placed between his legs, so that his nailed hands would not be torn apart.²⁹ And in this position, Jesus agonizes “from the sixth...until the ninth hour.” Matt 27:45 During this time, the New Testament records, the final seven utterances of Jesus.

1. “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” Luke 23:34.
2. “Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” Luke 23:43.
3. To Mary his mother, Jesus said, “Woman, here is your son.” and to John, “Here is your Mother” John 19:26-27.
4. “Eli, Eli Lema Sabbachthani, My God, My God, why hath thou forsaken me?” Matthew 27:46.
5. “I am thirsty” John 19:28.
6. “It is finished” John 19:30.
7. “Father, Into thy hands I commend my spirit” Luke 23:46.

It is dark, the earth trembles and finally, from the centurions who were at the crucifixion, they utter these prophetic words, “Truly, this was the Son of God” Matthew 27:54.

It is finished. The body of Jesus is taken down from the cross. We can imagine the grief of his mother Mary, John and Mary Magdalene. Shortly thereafter, Joseph of Arimathea asks Pilate for permission to remove the body and have it laid out in a burial plot.

Events happen quickly. The Sanhedrin place guards at the tomb to guard the body. They expect the disciples to take the body and perpetuate a hoax that Jesus Christ had indeed risen. However, the apostles were not planning this. They were numbed by the proceedings. Most of them were in hiding and trying to survive. And here the gospels are clear that on Sunday eve, three women: Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Joana, remain faithful to Christ and go to the sepulcher to anoint the body of Jesus.

“And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow; And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord Lay” Matthew 28:2-6.

The week ends. The risen Christ continues to teach his disciples and we in Christendom celebrate this event, Easter.

He is Risen!

Matthew 28:5-6 And the Angel answered and said unto the women, fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said, Come, see the place where he lay.

Today I had the privilege of attending the Sunrise Service on the historic USS Missouri. Chaplain Boney was the speaker and the message was about the resurrected Christ, that He lives and that He has risen.

The Chaplain started his sermon recognizing the USS Arizona, which lies just a few hundred meters from the Missouri. He pointed out that it was a symbol of defeat for the U.S. on that infamous day of 07 December 1941, and that “Mighty Mo,” where we sat, represented victory.

The USS Missouri was the ship that was used for the signing of the surrender between the Japanese and the Americans at the end of WW II. The point that he was making is that Christ overcame death. He turned apparent defeat into victory, and the symbol of that victory was the empty tomb.

I was impressed with the analogy. He continued making the comparison. He talked about the women at the tomb who were instructed to go tell the disciples and Peter that the tomb was empty. I cannot help but think how Peter must have felt when just a few day before the Savior told Peter that he would be offended because of him. Peter said that he would not, and Christ told him that before the cockcrows that Peter would deny him three times.

We see Jesus being questioned by Caiaphas the High Priest. This questioning led Christ to be crucified. Peter is in the process of denying his friend and Master. At the poignant point of the story, Peter bitterly denies Christ three different times, and perhaps we can see Jesus in the courtyard catching Peter’s eye as the cockcrows.

All of us have made mistakes in our lives. We all say and do things we wish we could take back. We despise ourselves for our weaknesses, and many times, we go through life without forgiveness. This was the message of Easter. The Atonement and resurrection were at the core of what Jesus went through during that Holy week.

May we not forget his sacrifice and may we like Peter who, though he denied the Christ, remained steadfast the rest of his life, and became a symbol of faithfulness, loyalty, and determination.

Religious Concepts, Principles, and Stories



Reading the Ten Commandments to soldiers from 5/21 the Battalion, 7th Infantry Division, Mount-Sinai, Egypt. Courtesy of Vance Theodore.

A Soldier's Prayer

Psalm 91:1-2 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: My God; in him I will trust.

God, I've never spoken to you, but now I want to say "How do you do?"

You see, God, they told me you didn't exist, and like a fool I believed all this.

Last night from a hasty position, I saw your sky; I figured right then and there they had told me a lie. Had I taken time to see things you made, I'd have known they weren't calling a spade a spade.

I wonder, God, if you'd shake my hand. Somehow I feel that you will understand. Funny I had to come to this hellish place before I had time to see your face.

Well, I guess there isn't much more to say. But I'm sure glad, God, that I met you today. I guess contact will soon be made. But I'm not afraid since I know you're near.

The Signal: Well, God, I'll have to go. I like you lots, this I want you to know. Look now this will be a horrible fight. Who, knows, I may come to your house tonight.

Though, I wasn't friendly to you before; I wonder God, if you'd wait at your door. Look I'm crying, me shedding tears. I wish I had known you these many years.

Well, I have to go now, God goodbye. Strange, since I met you, I'm not afraid to die. (Soldier's Prayer – Author Unknown)

This soldier's prayer was given to me in 1987 while I was stationed in the Sinai as part of a Multinational Peacekeeping Force of Observers. I remember the soldier's comment of how this prayer had helped him during the hard times, and firefights in Vietnam.

What helps us during difficult times? Do we turn to God or like the soldier in the prayer, does it take hellish circumstances or difficulties, until we turn to him? Perhaps, we are not much different from the soldier in Vietnam who was waiting on the Lord.

Battle Prayer

After the invasion of Normandy, the Allied forces were at an impasse. The Third Army under the command of General George S. Patton, Jr., had been suffering inclement weather from September to early December.

On 8 December 1944, General Patton called his Third Army Chaplain by telephone. He asked Chaplain James H. O'Neill if he had a prayer for good weather.³⁰ Chaplain O'Neill wrote this prayer on a 3X5 card:

“Almighty and most merciful Father, me humbly beseech Thee, of Thy great goodness, to restrain these immoderate rains with which we have had to contend. Grant us fair weather for battle. Graciously hearken to us as soldiers who call upon Thee that, armed with Thy power, we may advance from victory, to victory, and crush the oppression and wickedness of our enemies and establish Thy justice among men and nations.”³¹

After writing the prayer, he made a Christmas greeting card for General Patton that said, “To each officer and soldier in the Third United States Army, I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty, and skill in battle. We march in our might to complete victory. May God’s blessing rest upon each of you on this Christmas Day, G.S. Patton, Jr, Lieutenant General, Commanding, Third Army United States Army.”³²

Chaplain O'Neill having finished the draft note and prayer for General Patton took it and went over to Patton’s Headquarters to meet with him and get approval for its distribution. Of course, we know the outcome—the prayer was distributed to every soldier and officer in the Third Army by 14 December 1944, the weather cleared and the Allied forces had a week of clear weather to bomb Hitler’s forces which led to the successful completion of their mission and ultimately to Patton’s advance to Luxemburg, Germany in January, 1945.³³

However, what was interesting about this story is General Patton’s conversation about prayer with Chaplain O'Neill in Headquarters that day. He said, “Chaplain, how much prayer is being done by the Third Army?” Chaplain O'Neill parried, “Does the General mean by the chaplains or by the men.” “By everyone,” replied the General. To this the Chaplain countered with, “I am afraid to admit it, but I do not believe that much praying is going on. When there is fighting, everyone prays, but now with this constant rain—when things are quiet, dangerously quiet—men just sit and wait for things to happen. Prayer out here is difficult.

Both chaplains and men are removed from a special building with a steeple. Prayer to most of them is a formal ritualized affair, involving special posture and a liturgical setting. I do not believe that much praying is being done.” Patton went on to say, “Chaplain, I am a strong believer in prayer.” Patton then acknowledged God’s goodness to the Third Army. They had not retreated, they had not suffered defeats. He gave credit to people back home and it was their prayers that helped them in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy. Patton ended the conversation by saying that it was time for men to pray for themselves. “There is within him a world of truth and power that is higher than himself.”³⁴

The prayers of the Third Army were answered and on 20 December 1944. With the end of bad weather, Patton’s Third Army rushed north to the Saar Valley to help those in the battle of Bastogne.

Prayer did indeed affect the outcome of Patton’s mission as attested by his own words. “Well, Padre, our prayers worked. I knew they would.”³⁵

Captain of our Souls

*Out of the night that covers me, Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be for my unconquerable soul.
In the fell clutch of circumstance, I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeoning of chance my head is bloody, but unbowed.
Beyond this place of wrath and tears Looms but the horror of the
shade,
And yet the menace of the years finds, and shall find me, unafraid.
It matters not how strait the gate, How charged with punishments the
scroll, I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul.
(William Ernest Henley; 1849-1903)³⁶*

The other day, I had the opportunity to attend an activity honoring those of Hispanic Heritage. The speaker was a local from Fairbanks, Alaska. She began her talk by thanking the military for their unselfish service. In her simple but elegant words, she expressed the feelings of her heart. Many in the audience had tears in their eyes.

During her talk, pictures of Hispanic soldiers who have lost their lives in service to their country since 9/11 were displayed. It was a sobering moment. It reminded me of the world that we live in. It made me think that indeed we do live in a troubled world, as spoken of by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1. Recently I talked to soldiers who are troubled about their world. They want to do what is right. They would willingly give their lives for their country, but they are confused about what life is all about and what the future has in store for them.

In a troubled world, what many need is an anchor to their soul and a guide to help them through difficult circumstances. In the poem *Invictus*, by William Henley, the author depicts the individual as the captain of one's soul, the master of their fate. In reality, we should let God be the captain of our souls and the master of our fate.

We can let Him guide us through troubling times so that we can then be the master of our circumstances to withstand the perilous times that we live in. Then we can say with conviction that it does not matter how difficult the challenge in our lives. We can find solace in a troubled world by letting God anchor our lives and provide light for our unconquerable souls.

Forgiveness

Luke 23:34 Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

George Herbert, an early 17th-century poet, wrote these lines: “He that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass if he would ever reach heaven, for everyone has need of forgiveness.”³⁷

It was a great Senior Leader’s conference. We enjoyed seeing Seward, Alaska, and in spending time with our counter-parts from Fort Richardson. On the way home, as can happen, there were maintenance problems with the plane so we were rescheduled on another flight to Fairbanks. By some odd quirk of the computer, many in our party received the same boarding pass with my name on it but with different seat numbers. I joked with my wife, Christine, that it would be funny if they all flew and we did not get to fly. Sure enough, as we were getting ready to board the plane, the attendant told us that the flight was full and that she was sorry.

She redirected us to the flight counter and five of us from Fort Wainwright stood patiently as others who were on the same flight argued with the attendant and angrily complained about the airline’s poor service. I watched the young woman at the counter as she quietly explained the situation. This did not seem to appease the crowd. Finally, she said, “Could you please forgive us?” Those simple words took the wind out of the sails of the angry crowd as she gave out complimentary miles, and five-dollar food vouchers.

We can take offense so easily when we can do nothing to change the outcome. And sometimes we are too stubborn to accept a sincere apology. It was that young woman’s sincere apology that changed the mood of the crowd.

“Too err is human; to forgive, divine.”³⁸

In God We Trust

Joshua 24:15: But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

As I turned the corner while walking down the hall to my office, a friend of mine asked me if I had heard how the Girl Scouts had taken God out of their oath. I replied, “No I haven’t.” “Pretty soon, Chaplain, they will be taking God off the back of the dollar bill, and we will only be left with ‘in “we” trust’.” He chuckled and quickly walked off down the hall. It took me a moment to comprehend just what he was saying. “In we trust,” does that mean we will only trust in “we”? What would the world be like if we only trusted in “we”?

How many times have I personally asked God for help? If we take God out of our lives, in moments of grief or doubt, where would our comfort come from? “Oh my God!” said in a moment of wretched uncertainty, perhaps would be exchanged by a moment of pain without hope. The question “Is God dead?” which invoked an outcry in the sixties would not be a thing to ponder. “So help me God,” would be replaced with “So help me.” “God willing” would be replaced with nothing. The removal of God from the Pledge of Allegiance would change it from “one nation under God.” to simply “one nation.” God, that being from whom all hope, comfort, and faith, is derived, would be replaced with a simple humanistic “we.”

The Chaplain’s regimental crest carries the Latin saying, “Pro Deo et Patria” (For God and Country). If we took God out of our motto, maybe there would be no Chaplaincy. The concept of rendering unto Caesar those things which are of Caesar and unto God those things which pertain to God, would have no validity.

As I turned into my office, I shuddered to think what would happen if God was replaced in our lives or simply removed from the symbols that have made this country great. I did not verify if, indeed, what the soldier said was true. However, I hoped that it was not.

Perhaps, our country is moving towards a state of “we.” If this is so then an Old Testament scripture (Joshua 24:15) would be an appropriate reminder to a country that has always believed in God. “As for me and my house, ‘we’ will serve the Lord.”

Love

John 15:13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

This type of love takes a great deal of sacrifice. Normally, the love we think about is that of relationships. I have often wondered about the concept of love as it pertains to relationships. As I sit here typing this thought, I can hear a song in the background called, "All you need is love." What is it that evokes such a strong emotion between people, for a country, or of one's friends? Love is usually what we all want; however, at times, it seems difficult to achieve.

Unfortunately, the opposite of love is hate. There are many opposites in life: love and hate, anger and joy, pain and pleasure. Perhaps it is the human condition to experience opposites so that we can, as reasoning beings, make correct choices. Currently a good friend of mine and his wife are in the process of a separation. In trying to solve their problems they are not able to get past the hurt. The thought of love, kindness, hope and forgiveness which saves relationships is not present. They can only feel their hurt and not see the other's point of view.

Principles found in Deuteronomy 6:5 "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might," could help. Our human tendency is to focus on the side of pain and hurt. It is difficult to look at problems and think rationally when we are hurt. "If you love me, keep my commandments" John 14:15. A focus not solely on ourselves might help us in our endeavor to solve life's difficult situations. It can also free us so that we can examine ourselves without letting the pain and hurt get in the way.

Love will continue to be a highly sought after emotion. Hopefully, different points of view can be continually examined so that differences can be worked out and so that love can prevail.

Mount Sinai—The 10 Commandments

Exodus 20:1-17 –The Lord reveals the Ten Commandments

As we finished ascending the steps up to Mount Sinai, a mountain in the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt, soldiers from the 5/21 Infantry Battalion from the 7th Infantry Division were sitting on the top of the mount enjoying the view of the valley below.

We talked for a while, and then one soldier asked me if this was the spot where Moses received the Ten Commandments. I replied that, “it was one of many sites that could have been Mount Sinai. Nevertheless, that this was one of the most popular sites.” Another soldier queried me about the Ten Commandments. He nonchalantly asked if they, the Ten Commandments, were applicable today as they had been those many years ago.

I replied that in my opinion the Ten Commandments were not merely suggestions and that yes they were as valid today as they were at the time of Moses. We then read them: (KJV)

1. Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.
2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.
3. Thou shalt not take the name of thy Lord in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. Honor thy father and thy mother that your days may be long.
6. Thou shalt not kill.
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
8. Thou shalt not steal.
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness.
10. Thou shalt not covet.

There was silence for a moment. For many of my men, this was the first time they had heard or read the Ten Commandments. Most of them knew about them, but did not know of their content. I believe the spirit was there on the Mount with those soldiers that morning. I also believe that the Ten Commandments made an impact on their lives that day.

National Day of Prayer

Today is the National Day of Prayer. Two of my favorite stories about prayer are the following:

"Unbeknownst to the Battalion Commander, he was being followed by the Brigade Commander to his office. It looked like the Brigade Commander wanted to talk with him. The Battalion Commander entered into his office and the Brigade Commander quickly followed. He was met by the adjutant, who informed him that the Commander was busy. 'He can't be, I just saw him enter his office.' said the Brigade Commander. The adjutant calmly informed him that he was busy. Seeming not to hear the adjutant, the Brigade Commander quickly went through the office door, and as quickly came out shaking his head, and quietly said, 'I didn't know that he was that kind of man. I guess there was someone more important than I talking with him.' The Battalion Commander was engaged in a moment of prayer."³⁹

Prayer can be an important aspect of our daily lives, and certainly many of the great men and women of our country have used it. For example, after the campaign of Gettysburg, President Lincoln was asked by General Sickles why he appeared to be so calm. Lincoln replied:

"Well, I will tell you how it was. In the pinch of your campaign up there, when everybody seemed panic-stricken and nobody could tell what was going to happen, oppressed by the gravity of our affairs, I went to my room one day and locked the door and got down on my knees before Almighty God and prayed to him mightily for victory at Gettysburg. I told Him that this war was His, and our cause His cause, but we could not stand another Fredericksburg or Chancellorsville. Then and there I made a solemn vow to Almighty God that if He would stand by our boys at Gettysburg, I would stand by Him, and He did stand by our boys, and I will stand by Him. And after that, I don't know how it was, and I cannot explain it, soon a sweet comfort crept into my soul. The feeling came that God had taken the whole business into His own hands, and that things would go right at Gettysburg, and that is why I had no fears about you."⁴⁰

As we think about prayer, let's remember that it can be a powerful force as we serve God and Country.

Prayer from our Leaders

1 Thessalonians 5:16-17 Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing.

*Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed, the motion of a hidden fire that trembles in the breast. Prayer is the simplest form of speech that infant lips can try; Prayer is the sublimest strains that reach the Majesty on high.*⁴¹

George Washington, as he resigned his commission as General of the Continental Army on December 23, 1783, had this to say about God and the interests of his nation, "I consider it an indispensable duty to close this last solemn act of my official life by commending the interests of our dearest country to the protection of Almighty God and those who have the superintendence of them into His holy keeping."⁴²

Abraham Lincoln, concerned about the division of the nation during the Civil War, spoke these words: "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom, and that of all around me, seemed insufficient for the day."⁴³

President George W. Bush had this to say about prayer and the American people, "I am sustained by the prayers of the people in this country. I guess an appropriate way to say this, it's one of the beautiful things about America and Americans from all walks of life is that they're willing to pray for the President and his family. And that's powerful. It's hard for me to describe to you what that means. It's--let me just say this: It's a leap of faith to understand."⁴⁴

Prayer is a powerful force in our lives. It can come when we are driven to our knees like a Lincoln or at the end of a career like George Washington or from the American people for their president..

It can be the soul's sincere desire uttered out loud or a prayer carried in one's heart; or, it can be heard by many of our military leaders who constantly ask God to protect our brothers and sisters in harm's way who are fighting the war on terrorism.

Prayer can be simple, yet earnest, in context with the answer provided by a sweet comfort assuring one that it will be all right. Whatever its purpose or context, prayer is a powerful tool in the spiritual battle armaments of a Soldier, and it is a tool that one can utilize to reach God on high. It was used by our past commander-in-chiefs of the armed forces.

Prayer in the Military

"Chaplain, I am a strong believer in prayer. There are three ways that men get what they want: by planning, by working and by praying. Any great military operation takes careful planning or thinking. Then you must have well-trained troops to carry it out: that's working. But between the plan and the operation there is always the unknown. The unknown spells defeat or victory, success or failure. It is the reaction of the actors to the ordeal when it actually comes. Some people call that getting the breaks; I call it God...God has His part, or margin in everything. That's where prayer comes in." *LTG George S. Patton* ⁴⁵

I would say that as a military, prayer does play an important part in what we do. All of us plan and work. We work the plan and execute decisions on a daily basis. When God is not an important part of our lives, that is when we tend to get into trouble. The unknown can spell defeat or victory as attested by General Patton. How we handle our daily events spells out our success or defeat.

Prayer can focus our thoughts, not just mere words that come from our lips, but hopefully, words that come from our heart. Not just a litany of words, learned as a child, but the struggle with words that express what we are feeling and thinking. God is not interested in the eloquence of our words, but in the heartfelt communication of our soul.

Therefore, prayer helps us by focusing our plans and by directing our thinking.

Prayer of a Child

1 Thessalonians 5: 16-17 Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing.

God, Are You There?
I'm way down *HERE!* You're way up *THERE!*
Are You sure You can hear My faint, faltering Prayer?
For I'm so unsure of just how to pray.
To tell you the truth, God, I don't know what to say.
I just know I am lonely and vaguely disturbed,
Bewildered and restless, confused and perturbed...
And they tell me that prayer helps to quiet the mind
And to unburden the heart for in stillness we find
A newborn assurance that *SOMEONE DOES CARE*
And *SOMEONE DOES ANSWER* each small sincere prayer!
(Helen Steiner Rice)⁴⁶

Today I received a telephone call as the duty chaplain to go to the Bassett Army hospital and visit a six-year-old boy, Tim who had pneumonia. The mother requested a chaplain to pray for her son.

My wife and I went to the hospital. Upon entering his hospital room, we saw Tim a small young boy, lying in his hospital bed with a stuffed green alien Martian at his side. I imagine it was there to give him comfort. He told us that it was his favorite stuffed toy and that it hung on a tack in his room. We greeted the mother and had a pleasant time talking to young Tim.

We asked Tim where he was from and he said Ohio. And, as only a young six year old can do, he proceeded to tell us about how he liked to ride on roller coasters. He explained how this year he was just tall enough and how his head could reach the height bar so he could ride. He also commented that he could not wait until he was eight then he could ride the squid. I could imagine what that ride must be like.

I enjoyed talking to Tim and it was apparent from his attitude and conversation that he was on the mend. We visited for a few more minutes. I noticed that Tim was very conscious about keeping his right arm very still, trying not to move it. The right arm had the IV drip in it. I bet it must have hurt. As we were about to leave, I asked Tim if he wanted to pray. He shook his head NO. I chuckled because I knew that Tim did not want to move his right arm. Tim attended Sunday school, and I could read his mind. He did not want to have to fold his arms while I was praying.

His mother instantly said that yes he would like you to pray. I assured Tim that he could just lay there and did not have to do anything. We prayed. There was a sweet spirit in the room. After the prayer, we began to leave and Tim smiled and waved his left hand as we left. I think that Tim appreciated the prayer. I know that I enjoyed it. I am sure that *SOMEONE DOES ANSWER* each small sincere prayer.

Protection

Psalm 91:2 I will say of the LORD, he is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust..

In Psalm 91, it talks about trusting in the Lord so that you will be protected. As I touched the ground with my right foot, I knew instantly that I was in for pain. The Sergeant Major was yelling, "Are you okay?" I laid there thinking how many times had I been told not to reach for the ground with my feet while preparing for a parachute landing. I slowly got up, told the Sergeant Major I was okay, and hobbled off the drop zone.

Later that day, I made the pilgrimage to the hospital. My left foot was x-rayed and I was told to return within 72 hours. This is the time allotted so that swelling will go down. I faithfully returned, and was seen by the good doctor. On his window ledge were the trophies of other paratroopers, casks that said such things as: "Death from above," "Rangers lead the way," and realistic renditions of parachutes gliding through the sky. I felt that I was in good hands. We joked for a few seconds, and he told me that I had hyper extended my toes, and that I would be in a wooden shoe for about two to three weeks. I dutifully listened, took the medication and returned to duty.

As I think of Psalms 91, I am grateful for the ability to trust: to trust in a nation, to trust in our military leaders, and to trust in God. However in trusting, we also learn from our experiences. You can bet that "don't reach for the ground" will be engraved upon my mind the next time I see the green light and jump from an airplane as I hear the word "Go!"

This story is about jumping from an airplane with a parachute. The term "don't reach for the ground," means not to extend your toes to touch the ground first. You need to hit the ground with both feet firmly meeting the ground.

Staories from the Bible—Stained Glass Windows

Last week as I was preparing for the day, I took some time to walk through the chapel sanctuary. On the walls of the chapel are stained glass windows with scenes from the Bible of famous characters. I don't know how many of you have read a Reader's Digest, but in that magazine is a section called *Today's Heroes*. These stories from the Digest talk about heroic experiences performed by ordinary people who did extraordinary things. To me, the individuals in the stained glass windows are yesterday's heroes who can still inspire, give one faith, help lift one's spirits and help ordinary people do extraordinary things.

I wonder how many of you have been in our chapel and have taken the time to look at these windows. They are truly magnificent. They were donated by the Soldiers on Post during the early 60's when Fort Ord, California was a basic training camp. The construction is of various colored glass laid in cement. The cement has the feel and look of granite. They must be of considerable weight. Each stained glass window depicts a biblical story. And in that story, the key character is a warrior. His features strong, his arms and body are muscled, and his face has the appearance of strength and determination. Each individual is clothed with the amour and clothes of that period.

As I walk through the sanctuary the early morning rays of the sun shine through the glass and David the King of Israel comes alive. The story of David and Goliath is depicted. You can see the stones, one of which is used to slay Goliath. I wonder about my own Goliaths that I have in my life. Can I slay them as David did?

In the afternoon when the sun is at its highest, I again like to take the opportunity to walk in the chapel for a few moments. The brilliance of the sun and the interaction of light on glass find Daniel the prophet a prisoner in the lion's den. The lions look fearsome as the light shines on their golden manes. Here Daniel, the trusted King's advisor and man of God, is in peril of his life. Daniel does not forsake his God, and the lions' mouths are closed. As the light strikes Daniel, I think of Daniel's faith and how faith can shut the mouth of life's fiercest lions.

It is getting late now. It's toward the end of day. I take one last walk through the chapel as I prepare to go home. The last rays of the day's sun are shining through the windows. It is a soft brilliance. I stand and look at Job kneeling.

As the sun plays gently on Job's features, I can almost see his pain. I wonder how many of us could have endured his tests. Job endured, he never denounced God. He had an abiding faith in the Lord.

As you have guessed, the stained glass windows in the chapel mean a lot to me. I don't really know if the soldiers enjoy them as much as I do or if they have inspired the infantry soldiers who have passed through the sanctuary over the last thirty years.

However, the light of the day plays magic on the figures and if you walk into the chapel, I am sure that you can be inspired too. It's almost as if David, Daniel and Job come alive.

The stories of the Bible have been precious to many. I pray that we can take the time to re-read these stories, and as a military, apply the principles learned from these stories to our daily lives.

These stained glass window were in the 2nd Brigade Chapel 7th Infantry Division on Fort Ord. The chapel is no longer used in this capacity and is part of Monterey State University, California.

The Burning Bush

Exodus 3 1-2 Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Hored. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and beheld, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.

As we were beginning to leave St. Catherine's, a Greek Orthodox monastery that sits at the base of Mount Sinai in Egypt, Father Makarios asked me to stop by his office. He came out and presented me with a piece of the burning bush. In the Old Testament, the Lord appeared to Moses in the bush where he told him to bring Israel out of Egypt. The scriptures say that although the bush burned it was not consumed. According to the monks at St. Catherine, the bush is still alive and the monastery is its keeper.

I thanked Father Makarios for the gift. As I was getting the soldiers ready to return to South Camp where we were stationed as part of a Multi-national Peace Keeping force, in Sinai Egypt, I asked the infantry soldiers if anyone wanted a piece of the burning bush. Before I knew it, soldiers were crowding around me asking me for a piece of the branch. I hurriedly gave it to them. I was left with a 1-inch sliver from the 10-inch branch that the Monk had given me.

As we rode back to South Camp on the bus, I pondered about the religious symbolism of the burning bush. I did not really know if it was the actual bush. However, my soldiers, who did not frequently worship in traditional churches, were fascinated by this symbol of history and wanted a piece.

Symbols do have a tremendous impact on individuals. For many Christians, it is the Cross. For the Jews, one symbol is the Star of David. Religious symbols grace many churches and temples. They are, to many, a representation of something divine, a symbol that has a spiritual meaning.

I wonder what the Soldiers will do years from now when they look at their piece of the burning bush. Will it remind them of God's goodness and mercy? Will it help them to enter into His house of worship? Or, will it just be another piece of wood that means nothing and gathers dust in an old box of memories.

Military Remembrance and Other Holidays



WWI Cemetery Verdun, France. Courtesy of Vance Theodore

Father's Day

Malachi 4:6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.

I have always found this scripture in Malachi to be interesting. It ends the Old Testament. (King James Version) A simple yet profound scripture says to “turn the heart of the fathers to their children and the heart of the children to their fathers.” How appropriate as we celebrate this day, Father’s day.

Let’s turn our hearts and minds to our fathers. The scriptures are full of famous fathers.

Adam: Father of us all.

Abraham: Regarded in the Old Testament as founder of the covenant race. He personified the father of the faithful, and was promised that his seed would be numerous.

Job: A man of patience.

Solomon: Built the Temple of the Lord. The King of wisdom.

Zacharias: The father of John the Baptist—Who walked in righteousness before the Lord.

Joseph: (the earthly father of Jesus) A man who must have been great with understanding and love when he found out that Mary was with child.

The father of the Prodigal Son: Emphasis is usually placed on the son, but we can see the loving attributes of a forgiving and accepting father who took his son back after spending his inheritance in riotous living.

Let’s turn our minds to another father. Admiral Byrd was alone at the Ross Barrier in the midst of a terrible Antarctic storm. The temperature was 72 degrees below zero, the stove in his meager shelter was faulty, and carbon monoxide threatened his life, but he did survive and lived to write a book about it called, “Alone.”⁴⁷

While keeping his lonely vigil in the Antarctica, he meditated about the

role of a father and wrote these words.

He said, “At the end only two things really matter to a man regardless of who he is, and they are the affection and understanding of his family. Anything and everything else he creates are insubstantial, they are ships given over to the mercy of the winds and ties of prejudice. But the family is an everlasting anchorage, a quiet harbor where a man’s ship can be left to swing in the moorings of pride and loyalty.”²⁴⁸

As we commemorate this day, let us not forget another Father who watched in silent agony as his Son lay down his life so that we might all live. On this Father’s day, may we all turn our hearts to our fathers and remember.

Father's Day—Like You

*I've been watching you, dad ain't that kool?
I'm your buckaroo; I want to be like you.
And eat all my food and grow as tall as you are.
We like fixin' things and holding moma's hand
Yeah, we're just alike, hey, ain't we dad.
I want to do everything you do; so I've been watching you.
(Song by Rodney Atkins, Watching You)⁴⁹*

The other day I heard a song on the radio by Rodney Atkins about a father and his son. The dad in the song talked about his four-year old saying a four-letter word. He asked his son where he learned to talk like that. His son replied that he had been watching him, and he wanted to do everything his dad did and grow up to be just like him.

upon returning home the father went to the barn and bowed his head and prayed real hard. He said, "Lord, please help my stupid self." Then he saw his son before he went to bed-kneeling, praying, and talking to God like they were old friends. He asked his son where he'd learned to pray like that and the son responded that he had been watching him.

Fathers can have a significant effect on the lives of their children. My own father spoke behind the pulpit for many years. I remember one particular sermon that he gave in which he said, "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day." (Edgar A. Guest 1851-1959)⁵⁰

So, Dads, let's remember the influence that we have on our children. And on this Father's Day, let's keep in mind the impact of our actions, knowing that our kids and others are watching us.

Independence Day

Matthew 11:28 Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

As a chaplain, I finished the military graveside ceremony honoring a veteran who had served in World War II and twice in Korea. He was wounded in both wars. I could not help but be grateful for the sacrifice and service of twenty-four years that he rendered to his country.

As I watched the senior non-commissioned officer give the American flag to the widow and say “On behalf of a grateful nation...,” my heart went out to her because she had been through this ritual before. To the right of her husband’s grave stood the marker of her son, PFC..., United States Marine Corps, killed on Hill 404 in Vietnam, “The Rock Pile.”

At the ceremony’s end, this gracious lady, who had given so much, was surrounded by her loved ones.

As we begin this month, and as we celebrate our day of independence, I am thankful for all who have served their country, and who have sacrificed not only their time, but also their lives, “for the price of freedom is never cheap.”

Memorial Day—A Solemn Day

*A moth-eaten rag on a worn eaten pole
Doesn't seem likely to stir a man's soul,
But it was the deeds that were done
Beneath that moth eaten rag
When that pole was a staff and that rag was a flag.
(Sir Edward Bruce Hamley)⁵¹*

As we think of Memorial Day, let us not forget our service members in the military, over six thousand, who gave their lives in the last few years in Afghanistan and Iraq. Those who have paid the ultimate price in the service of their country. Their deeds will not be forgotten.

Our American service members in the Armed Forces have been buried in over 25 cemeteries throughout the world as memorials to their sacrifice to maintain our freedom. During World War I and II, over 125,000 American soldiers were buried on foreign soil.⁵² As lasting testaments to their courage, and their valor, they remained interred on foreign soil and their white headstones are silent reminders of the solemn sacrifice of their lives that they gave so selflessly.

A few years ago a chaplain friend and I toured some of the battlefields of World War I in France with our back packs, a few French francs, and some food. We spent the night in the Ardennes forest where some of the fiercest fighting took place in WWI. We slept in bombed out craters thinking about what these brave soldiers must have felt. We visited the war memorials honoring the war dead and were amazed at their sacrifice.

In visiting the Aisne American National Cemetery in France where American soldiers are honored who died in WWI, we were impressed with the solemnity of the area. Row upon row of white crosses, embedded in immaculate lawns, surrounded by trees and beautiful shrubbery, bore testimony of the fallen. Names upon names of service members, units, and hometowns spoke of a different time. In preparing to leave the National Cemetery, the curator stopped to talk with us. He knew we were US Army chaplains, and as we were about to depart he said, “this really is a sacred place.”

So I would challenge all of us to remember Memorial Day as more than a three day weekend. It is a solemn day, a sacred time, dedicated to remember our war dead, and to realize that the price of freedom is never free.

Memorial Day—Blessed are the Peacekeepers

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.

The wind blowing against our battle dress uniforms as the sun went down was a nice backdrop for our evening worship service. At the end of the worship service, the soldiers, who were a part of the multinational peacekeeping force stationed in the Sinai, walked slowly back to their duty stations, which happened to look over the Red Sea.

I enjoyed talking to the men that evening, especially the verbal banter that went back and forth as they left the religious service to get back to duty. The wind had picked up so we decided to stay put for a few hours more, and eat with the platoon while waiting for the wind to calm down. The way down the hill was treacherous, and we did not want the wind to help us in our descent.

As we prepared for dinner, my assistant and I walked over to the other side of the observation post to get a better look at the setting sun. As we were passing one of the huts, I glanced down at a cement memorial marker set in the red granite rock, which read, “Blessed are the peacekeepers for they shall be called the children of God.”

Soldiers from one of the rotations had left it in tribute to their fallen comrades. I reviewed what I knew about the marker that silently reminded all who passed by that soldiers had died in an accident on the mountainside. The brakes on a 2 1/2 ton truck had failed and both the brakes and the treacherous mountain road provided the cause for their death—a sad tragedy. We were quiet as we walked by. The memorial was set away from the rest of the observation post and seemed to demand a certain amount of respect.

The years passed by and, as usually happens, you run into soldiers with whom you served. At a newcomers briefing, a young soldier called out my name. He was a Private First Class when I knew him in the Sinai. We shared the usual talk about careers, and where he had been. He was now a Sergeant First Class. While talking to each other we reminisced about our time in the Sinai. He said, “You know, that really was a great mission. They didn’t think that grunts like us were good at peacekeeping. I think we did a good job.” Of course, I was interested in what he was saying, and asked him what he meant. “Well, when we finished our rotation, I knew that we had helped to maintain peace between two countries that

didn't much care for each other—that meant something to me.”

As I finished talking to the soldier, I thought about that memorial marker on the side of the hill far away in the Middle East, “Blessed are the Peacekeepers.” They were soldiers who had given their lives in the service of their country.

During this Memorial Day, many markers throughout the world attest to the service of our brave men and women in uniform who, sadly, did not come home. However, like this young soldier, they understood what it meant to serve—that is, it meant something.

Perhaps, during this Memorial Day weekend we can pause for a few moments and remember those who died in the service of their country. It meant something to them and it should mean something to us.

Memorial Day—Just a Reminder

Just a reminder about Memorial Day. Memorial Day or Decoration Day is a U.S. holiday that was first observed on May 30, 1868 in remembrance of the dead from the civil war. Flowers were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers to honor those who gave their lives for their country. It is now celebrated on the last Monday of May in memory of the dead service men and women of all wars.⁵³

As we prepare to enjoy the Memorial Day weekend, let's not forget those who gave their lives so that we can enjoy the freedom that we have today.

Perhaps, one of the finest speeches honoring our war dead was given by President Lincoln when he dedicated a national cemetery on the battlefield of Gettysburg where over 7,000 soldiers had died.

He said,

“We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that this nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract.

The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living rather to be dedicated here to that unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.”⁵⁴

During Memorial Day, as Lincoln so poignantly pointed out, let us all remember and dedicate some thought to the brave men and women who struggled and consecrated their actions with their lives. Let us remember so that “we the people” can enjoy the freedoms that their sacrifices warranted.

Memorial Day--Lest We Forget

IN FLANDERS FIELDS the poppies blow, between the crosses row on row, that mark our place; and in the sky the larks, still bravely singing, fly scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the dead. Short days ago, we lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow.

Loved and were loved, and now we lie in Flanders fields. Take up our quarrel with the foe: To you from failing hands we throw the torch; be yours to hold it high. If ye break faith with us who die We shall not sleep, though poppies grow in Flanders fields. (John McCrae)⁵⁵

Today we take a few minutes from our busy lives to honor all service-members who have given their lives in the service of their country.

We can all read the history of Memorial Day—when it began after the civil war and how it became a national holiday. However, I would just like to make it personal for a few moments. As a young boy, one of my first impressions of World War II came from my father. During the war, he was a B-17 mechanic on the flying fortress. I remember a picture of my father with his friends in their leather flight jackets that my dad kept in his scrapbook. The picture of these young men in uniform was full of life. They were comrades in arms. I asked him who they were. He told me they were his friends during World War II. I asked him where they were now. He replied that many of them did not make it back after the War. He was quiet for a few moments, and then we went about the day.

Some of our brightest and best have given their lives in the service of their country. A young spouse said this about her husband that died in combat: “Dying in the service of your country isn’t near as hard as loving someone who has died in the service of their country.” (author unknown)

Therefore, during this Memorial Day, let’s stop for a few moments to honor their memory so that we do not break faith with those who died.

Mother's Day

Proverbs 31:28 Her children rise up and call her blessed.

I can think of no other person who is as influential to the rearing of children as mothers. In the scriptures it says “Here children arise up, and call her name blessed.” Unfortunately, for many, Mother’s Day can find us scurrying to buy a gift or to send at the last minute a card.

We do this to honor Mothers and hopefully we do it to remember them.

When I think of most Mothers the following comes to mind:

- Mothers are courageous
- Mothers are kind
- Mothers make homes happy
- Mothers are resourceful
- Mothers teach valuable lessons
- Mothers have a special capacity for sacrifice and love
- Mothers are fun

My mother passed away when I was thirty. I still appreciate her humor and the sacrifices that she made for our family. William James, the poet, once said, “that the greatest use of a life is to spend it on something that will outlast it.”⁵⁶ Mothers are pretty good at doing that.

Mother's Day—Blessed is Her Name

Proverbs 31:28 Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.

Today we celebrate Mother's day. I remember a few years ago, when I bought my daughter a rock tumbler kit. It came with a variety of stones, some were square, others were jagged with all sorts of colored rocks.

The object was to put the stones in the tumbler, turn it on and wait for the rocks to tumble, and through time come out smooth and bright. The only problem was the horrible noise that the rock tumbler made. In fact, it was so loud that I told my daughter to take it down to the basement so we would not have to listen to it. Over a period of weeks, the tumbler did its work and the rocks came out beautiful.

Being a mother is like the rock tumbler. Mothers through the ages have had all sorts of children: rough, smooth, jagged, with various colors, and different personalities. One thing that all mothers have in common is that they love and want what is best for their children. However, the road of mother-hood is not always smooth, like the tumbler, it takes time, energy and love. In fact, it is a life-long process, and with much work the product brings great satisfaction.

*The holiest words my tongue can frame,
The noblest thoughts my soul can claim,
Unworthy are to praise the name
More precious than all other.
An infant, when her love first came,
A man, I find it still the same,
Reverently I breathe her name,
The blessed name of mother. (George Griffith Fether)⁵⁷*

Yes, the concept of motherhood is blessed. May that process that takes time, thought, and love be forever cherished and deemed worthy of pursuit.

New Years—Resolutions

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.

“...the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well.” (The Olympic Creed: Baron Pierre de Coubertin-first Olympic Games Athens 1896)⁵⁸

As we start a new year with our different resolutions, the important thing is to avoid becoming discouraged within the first few days and giving up until the next new year.

Resolution is the act or determination to solve something, normally over a period of time. So as we start this new year with our hopes and dreams; let's not become discouraged, but let us press forward with the desire to do well. Happy New Year!

New Years—Starting Something New

Scripture: Luke 21:19 – In your patience possess ye your souls.

Starting a new year is always stimulating. It is throwing out the old and welcoming the new. It is like getting a new pair of tennis shoes. As a young boy, I loved my canvas PF flyer high top sneakers. I really believed that I could run faster, jump higher and stop on a dime—just as the commercial promised. Yes, beginnings are always satisfying.

However, what usually happens is that we set lofty goals, and through the course of a few weeks, we stop, give up, and return to the status quo. We become impatient, and stop trying. We get back into our comfort zone and wait until the next year.

Starting something new always generates excitement and to a certain degree commitment. Perhaps, with the energy and commitment of the new year, we can work just a little bit harder. Perchance we can do more than we think we can. Instead of trying to set goals that we stop after a few weeks, maybe we can make goals that we can achieve and readjust the bar just a little higher.

Thanksgiving—An American Holiday

Psalm 100:4 Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

“There is one day that is ours. Thanksgiving Day is the one day that is purely American.” O. Henry⁵⁹ It is the one day in which we remind ourselves of our blessings. It is a time of family and friends. It is a time of football games, and the smell of food wafting through the house.

As a truly American holiday, it reminds us of not just what we should be thankful for, but of how diverse and rich our country is. Perhaps as O. Henry alluded—Thanksgiving helps us to celebrate our rich heritage, as we remember and give thanks for our blessings.

Thanksgiving—Be Grateful

Psalm 95:2 Let us come before the Lord with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms.

The proclamation for the first national Thanksgiving Day in the new Republic was issued October 3, 1789, as follows:

"Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor; and Whereas both Houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me to recommend to the people of the United States a Day of Public Thanksgiving and Prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favor of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceable to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.

*Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the twenty-sixth day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of the great and glorious being, who is the Beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be." Signed by George Washington, President 3 October 1789.*¹⁶⁰

As we celebrate thanksgiving in the 3rd Infantry Division 2nd Raider Brigade, let's not forget to be thankful. I remember vividly as a small child on Thanksgiving Day waiting for dad to give the prayer. All we could think about was eating. Unfortunately, we had a tradition in our family where we expressed thanks for what we were thankful for before we could eat. As you can imagine, it was quick. Now years later, I do the same with my own family. How easy it is to forget to thank God for our many blessings. May we all have a grateful heart and remember, as even the father of our country remembered nationally, to give thanks before God...*For all the great and various favors, which He has been pleased to confer upon us.*

Thanksgiving—Oh Yes

May your stuffing be tasty...

May your turkey be plump...

May your potatoes -n- gravy have nary a lump...

May your yams be delicious...

May your pies take the prize...

May your Thanksgiving dinner, be yummy, lip smacking, mouth-watering and on time...

(Author Unkown)

Thanksgiving, the word starts my taste buds to sing and my stomach to reminisce about all the many wonderful Thanksgiving dinners that it has experienced through the years. Yes, Thanksgiving is a balm to my soul, and an exercise in not controlling appetites, but in enjoying the full measure of my creation as it pertains to taste.

This is a somewhat selfish but satisfying rendition of one meaning of what Thanksgiving means to me. However, in the spirit of Thanksgiving, I took the opportunity to ask some of our Soldiers what this day means to them. Their comments are insightful and worthwhile for this weeks “Just a thought.”

Their comments were;

Good time to spend with family and friends; I am thankful for all the good Lord has given me; football and the food; time of year to think about the blessings that we have in our lives; a time to be around happy people and friends; a time to give back and thank the good Lord for what he has given us; football, turkey bowl and lots of food; I love pie; start of the holiday season; a time of reflection and thought; fellowship, friends and family.

Not to let Thanksgiving be just a day of gluttony, it is a day that we give Thanks. We give thanks to our God, for our loved ones and our country. I would be remiss if I did not thank God for the many wonderful blessings that he has given us and continues to give us.

May the Lord continue to bless our Soldiers, our unit, our families and comfort those who are far away on foreign soil protecting our freedoms as we enjoy this Thanksgiving day.

Thanksgiving—Tradition

Psalms 100:1-5 A Psalm of praise.

Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with a gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

One tradition in the Army on Thanksgiving Day is where senior leaders serve junior Soldiers in our dining facilities. They are giving thanks to our Soldiers for their service to their country. You will find the same tradition for those serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Senior NCOs pulling guard duty so their Soldiers can eat and enjoy a Thanksgiving dinner.

On Thanksgiving Day, our dining facilities around the world will be open, where our cooks carve intricate ice sculptures and prepare ornate dinners with all the fixings that are associated with this dinner. There will be turkey bowls, unofficial, where Soldiers will compete in one of our countries favorite past times—football. Families and friends will meet and eat together and give thanks for the many blessings that they have received throughout the year.

However, as we enjoy our thanksgiving feast, may we all stop and give thanks to our men and women in uniform who cannot be with us. May we remember what they are doing so that we can safely enjoy the many blessings of this day.

Valentine's Day

Ah yes, Valentine's Day, a day for celebration, and gift exchanges between loved ones. According to tradition, a young priest started this holiday in the 3rd century. Legend states that Valentine was a priest who served during the time of Emperor Claudius II.

The Emperor decided that single men would make better soldiers than those with wives and children. He, therefore, forbade marriage of single young men. He wanted them for his soldiers.

Valentine thought this was unjust, so he secretly married young lovers. For his defiance of the Emperor, he was jailed. During his time in jail, he fell in love with the jailer's daughter and on the day of his execution, 14 February, he wrote her a letter, which he signed, "from your Valentine."⁶¹

So, we see how from a legend or a tradition, "from your Valentine," is still in use today. Moreover, during the middle ages, St. Valentine was one of Christianity's most popular Saints.

The concept of Valentine's Day is wonderful. I hope that we all took the time to send a note to the individual we love and signed it "from your Valentine."

Veteran's Day—Mighty MO

Psalms 121:1-2 - I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.

The recent promotion ceremony of one of our officers on the USS Missouri was impressive. Just standing on the ship where the promotion took place gave one a feeling of history and what was accomplished on her decks through the decades by the men and women who served on her. In fact, the grandfather of the officer who was promoted had served on the USS Missouri during World War II.

One thing that impressed me was the raising of the U.S. flag and the folding of it by the Commanding Officer and the officer who was promoted. We who were there were privileged to witness the raising of the flag, and like so many US flags before her, Old Glory had the honor of flying over Mighty MO.

The flag was then lowered and folded. The person in charge commented on what the folding of the flag meant. He meticulously picked off any strings from the flag that were exposed. While the two officers folded the flag he explained (one explanation) that the thirteen folds represented the 13 colonies of the United States. He talked about the stars on the flag and instructed the Commanding Officer that when he received the flag to point the apex of the flag for two seconds towards heaven and then give thanks to God. He reminded all of us present that day that the flag was folded in a triangle to honor those who served in the revolutionary war in reference to the three cornered hat.

A moving ceremony, which I am sure meant a lot to the officer that day who was promoted. We who had the opportunity to hear the history of the ship, witness the promotion, and be part of the flag raising, were reminded of why we serve.

On this Veteran's Day, let us all pause for a moment and remember why we serve and give thanks to those who have served before us, who serve now, here and abroad; and, as always, give thanks to God.

Veteran's Day—Why we Serve

In honor of Veteran's Day this month, the following story comes from a chaplain who served at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. He wrote:

"It was raining 'cats and dogs' and I was late for physical training. Traffic was backed up at Fort Campbell, Ky., and was moving way too slowly. I was probably going to be late and I was growing more and more impatient. The pace slowed almost to a standstill as I passed Memorial Grove, the site built to honor the soldiers who died in the Gander airplane crash, the worst redeployment accident in the history of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault).

Because it was close to Veteran's Day, a small American flag had been placed in the ground next to each soldier's memorial plaque. My concern at the time, however, was getting past the bottleneck, getting out of the rain and getting to PT on time. All of a sudden, infuriatingly, just as the traffic was getting started again, the car in front of me stopped. A soldier, a private of course, jumped out in the pouring rain and ran over toward the grove. I couldn't believe it! This knucklehead was holding up everyone for who knows what kind of prank. Horns were honking. I waited to see the but-chewing that I wanted him to get for making me late.

He was getting soaked to the skin His Battle Dress Uniform (BDUs) were plastered to his frame. I watched-as he ran up to one of the memorial plaques picked up the small American flag that had fallen to the ground in the wind and the rain, and set it upright again. Then, slowly, he came to attention, saluted, ran back to his car, and drove off.

I'll never forget that incident. That soldier, whose name I will never know, taught me more about duty, honor, and respect than a hundred books or a thousand lectures. That simple salute -- that single act of honoring his fallen brother and his flag—encapsulated all the Army values in one gesture for me. It said, "I will never forget. I will keep the faith. I will finish the mission I am an American soldier."⁶²

This story should remind all of us why we serve. Let us all to take a few moments on Veteran's day to remember those who served their country and those who continue to serve so unselfishly.

Other Inspirational Thoughts and Stories



Washing clothes (pink uniforms)—Euphrates, Iraq. Courtesy of Vance Theodore

A Change of Heart

1 Samuel 16:7 ...for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

During Desert Storm, I was fortunate to witness a change in a young soldier where the feeling of gratitude was not expressed in language or emotion but in a change of heart. I was a member of the 3/37 Armor Battalion, 1st Infantry Division. It was considered a breach battalion, because we were to breach the berm that Saddam Hussein's armed forces had erected in the desert as part of his defensive network. The battalion's M1A1 tanks were fitted with tank plows and part of our mission was to create lanes that were cleared of mines so that the 1st Infantry Division could follow on.

However, as you Infantry men know, the first to go out were the scouts. Our Scout Platoon, made up of Bradley Fighting Vehicles crossed the berm early to provide recon for the battalion. I remember at 3:00 a.m. visiting each Bradley Fighting Vehicle as they were doing their battle checks. You could see the glow of the green light as they were checking their systems preparing for battle.

As I passed each Bradley, the crew would ask for a word of prayer. We would gather for a few seconds, pray, and then I would proceed to the next Bradley moving quickly down the line. However, at one of the Bradley's I heard a voice whispering my name, "Chaplain come here." About ten meters from one of the Bradley's, I found a soldier standing there waiting to ask me a question. He wanted to know if I had a Bible. I assured him that I did and gave it to him. He then asked if I had one of those Bibles that had a metal plate in the cover. I told him that I did not, and that I thought they were only used in WWII. He then wanted to know if I had a cross. I responded that I did. He asked for one, and put it around his neck. He then asked if I had a Rosary. I said I did. I gave it to him, and he put that around his neck. He then wanted to know if I had a Star of David. I said I did not, but I did not believe that he was Jewish. He replied that he was not, but said that he was just trying to play it safe. So with a Bible in his Battle Jacket and crosses around his neck, I prepared to leave. The soldier said his thanks and I continued on with my journey down the line, chuckling to myself about his need for insurance.

You all know the outcome of the battle, and we were indeed grateful to God for his protection, but more important to me was that soldier's change of heart. You see before the battle was fought and the outcome

was known, many soldiers from the 3/37 Armor battalion attended religious services weekly. There was not a day, it seemed, that soldiers were not asking if we could worship. I remember vividly doing religious services for the scout platoon. The young soldier who wanted the religious items before the battle, never came to religious services but would sit on the outskirts of the service listening. We talked but he did not seem interested in worship. However, when the conflict was over and the dust had settled and the Dogs of War were quiet, it was that soldier who now came to worship. He had a change of heart. I don't really know what happened to him after our return to the states, but I do know that there was a change in his heart and that he was grateful to God, "for his unspeakable gift."

As we serve our country, let us not forget to be grateful for the many wonderful blessings that we receive daily. Maybe when we look back like this soldier did on his war-time experiences, we will be grateful for the many blessings that we have received while serving our country as soldiers, and if needs be, have a change of heart.

A Merciful God

While we were stationed in Germany, my son and I visited Normandy, France and the beaches where D-Day occurred on June 6, 1944. We made the local tour and saw the monuments and were impressed with what happened there many years ago.

While we were resting in one of the local historic churches, we struck up a conversation with an older gentleman who was sitting quietly on a pew. I noticed that he was an American and that he seemed to be in quiet contemplation. He told us that he had been a pilot during the Normandy invasion. In fact, he had been one of the first pilots over the area to drop his paratroopers. He had journeyed with his wife to Normandy on the 49th anniversary of the event. He did not want to return on the 50th anniversary due to the crowds. He commented that when he flew his C-47 over the beaches of Normandy that he could smell the fear of the young men that he was soon to deposit over the Normandy countryside. He often wondered what had happened to those young paratroopers that day many years ago. He came to that church to remember.

On June 6, 1944, the Germans had been advised that no invasion would occur, due to continuously stormy weather. Yet, on the morning of June 6, there was a break in the weather. The skies began to clear, which allowed the troop landing carriers and the Allied planes visibility for their landing and airborne operations.

It was reported that the landings caught the Germans off guard. However, they quickly reacted. Eight years after the invasion of Normandy, Eisenhower commented on that day, "this day eight years ago, I made the most agonizing decision of my life... the consequences of that decision... could not have been foreseen by anyone. If there were nothing else in my life to prove the existence of an almighty and merciful God, the events of the next twenty-four hours did it... The greatest break in a terrible outlay of weather occurred the next day and allowed that great invasion to proceed, with losses far below those we had anticipated."⁶³ General Eisenhower believed that God had intervened.

As I think of the WW II pilot remembering Normandy, and what happened there, I don't believe it was a coincidence that we met him in that church in Normandy, France. He was sitting there on a pew remembering and perhaps praying for those paratroopers that had exited from his plane on 6 June 1944. Maybe, he was thanking God, that He had, indeed, intervened many years ago, to protect their lives.

A Soldier's Heart

1 Samuel 16:7 The Lord seeth not as a man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

Today is Super Bowl Sunday. Normally, we are sitting home with the goodies and waiting for the big event, i.e., the clash between the Titans.

Televisions are tuned, and friends and families together cheer their teams. However, today we are here in Grafenwoehr, Germany doing gunnery, war fighting, and enjoying the brisk cold weather.

As a young man, I use to admire the strength of the defensive lineman and cry out in simulated pain when they made contact. Now as an older man, I cringe to think about what that sudden impact between these line-men must feel like. I would be embarrassed to stand by them. They truly are at the top of their physical game. I will never have their ability or their physical stature, but I still enjoy watching.

As I get older, it is comforting to know that the Lord looks at our hearts instead of our outward appearance. He knows who we really are, and he loves us just the same. I strongly believe that when God measures a soldier, he puts the tape around the heart instead of the chest. He looks at who we are and understands us better than we understand ourselves.

Therefore, as we enjoy the Super Bowl, or just living our lives in quiet solitude, remember that the Lord is watching us and is interested in our hearts.

A Starfish—It Mattered

Proverbs 11:18 But to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward.

Thursday, the 94th Army Air Missile Defense Command's (94th AAMC) main body moved from building 1507 to Hickham Air force base for deployment. It was good to see family members and friends saying goodbye to one another, and staff sections that were not deploying shaking their soldiers hands and wishing them God speed and good luck.

In watching the AAMC depart, I thought that saying goodbye was such a little thing. Perhaps, it is the little things in life that really are the most meaningful, and important.

The following story talks about small things that do matter. "One day, an old man was walking along a beach that was littered with thousands of starfish that had been washed ashore by the high tide. As he walked he came upon a young boy who was eagerly throwing the starfish back into the ocean, one by one. Puzzled, the man looked at the boy and asked what he was doing. Without looking up from his task, the boy simply replied, "I'm saving these starfish, Sir".

The old man chuckled aloud, "Son, there are thousands of starfish and only one of you. What difference can you make?"

The boy picked up a starfish, gently tossed it into the water and turning to the man, said, "I made a difference to that one!"⁶⁴

What we do on a daily basis does matter. It may have seemed a little thing flinging the starfish back into the sea. But, the consequences are great. A little lubrication is a little thing, but the best made machines will not run far without it. Doing physical training is a little thing, but if it is not done daily, the Army would cease to function physically. Discipline and order may seem a little thing, but if not practiced our organization would cease to be combat ready. Leadership may seem a little thing, but if not done correctly, a unit can fall apart.

Robert Collier said, "Success is the sum of small efforts repeated day in and day out."⁶⁵

Perhaps, it is the sum total of the little things that can add up and become significant to an individual, a family and a combat unit.

Adversity

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

There are times when life is difficult. Many of us have been tried in the crucible of affliction with things that seem difficult to change or to overcome: illness, loneliness, getting passed over for a promotion, or the death of a loved one. When we face adversity we often ask: Why did this happen to me? What have I done to deserve this? or Why am I being punished?

Perhaps, if we could look at adversity differently our perspective might change to: What am I to do? What can I learn from this? What are my blessings? or What is the will of the Father?

We need to have confidence in what He is doing with us, and act as if we know it, and exercise faith in Him.

Adversity is something that we all experience. How we confront it, and deal with it on a daily basis can predict our sense of well-being and happiness.

It is my prayer that adversity will strengthen us as we deal with it, instead of how it deals with us.

Amazing Grace

Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found was blind but now I see. (John Newton, 1779)⁶⁶

Last week my wife and I went to see the movie “Amazing Grace.” It is the story of William Wilberforce who, at the young age of 21, was elected to parliament (House of Commons) and spent the rest of his life leading the fight to abolish slavery. For twenty years, he put forth bill after bill against slavery and finally in 1807 the British Empire abolished the practice of man’s inhumanity to man.

His story is one of courage and persistence. He saw an injustice and spent his life trying to correct it. He was familiar with John Newton who wrote the hymn Amazing Grace. John Newton had once been a slave trader who converted to Christianity. His sorrow over what he had done turned him towards the pulpit. Wilberforce was instrumental in getting John Newton to tell his story. John Newton was influential in helping the young Wilberforce choose a life of politics over the ministry.

Set in the historic times of the American Revolution, the French wars, and the British Empire’s dominance as a world power, Wilberforce wears his life out, literally, in the service of something greater than himself.

It is amazing when we can see clearly in life. When we have direction and we are not lost. I think that is what inspired me most about watching “Amazing Grace.” It was good to see someone do something noble and to believe in something so strongly that he would sacrifice his time and his talents so that the abolition of slavery could come to pass.

Our lives may not be as dramatic as William Wilberforce’s, but we all serve. How we serve is perhaps the key.

Anti-War

Isaiah 2:4 - They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

A few weeks ago, I attended a conference in which the speaker commented about a woman he met who was against war. She was especially against those who wage war. To her, they were unethical people, immoral and misguided in their professional pursuits as men and woman in uniform.

He made a comment that I thought was true. He said that most of the people, in the military, that he knew were against war. He then went on to talk about firefighters who are anti-fire. They are a group of men and women who are professionally trained and equipped to put out fires, rescue people and aid against natural disasters. He talked about the police as being anti-crime. The police are a group of law enforcement officers who maintain law and order to protect society from harm.

As I was sitting there, I could see where he was going. We in the military are anti-war. We are a tool of diplomacy that the government uses to stop war. As professionals, when called upon by our country to wage war, we fight wars to put an end to tyranny, to re-stabilize countries, to protect freedom and to promote democracy.

As an anti-war institution, when called upon, we execute war in a manner that will hopefully be as humane as possible. William Tecumseh Sherman, a Civil War General, on 19 June 1879 gave his famous "War Is Hell" speech to the graduating class of the Michigan Military Academy. In his speech, he said, "There is many a boy here today who looks on war as all glory, but, boys, it is all hell."⁶⁷ I think General Sherman understood the concept of anti-war. He wanted to return the United States to normalcy and peace, as soon as possible.

I believe the professional soldier who has been in combat can understand what the prophet Isaiah meant when he said, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

As an institution, I would say that we are anti-war. The greatest generation during WW II understood the concept of anti-war. They believed, and rightly so, that freedom isn't free and that, there are times, when we are called upon to fight so that we can have peace.

Christ without Hands

Galatians 6:9 Let us not be weary in good doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

Christ has not hands but our hands to do His work today.

He has no feet but our feet to lead men in his way.

He has no tongue but our tongues to tell men how he died.

He has no help but our help to lead men to His side.

What if our hands are busy with other work than His?

What if our feet are walking where sin's allurements is?

What if our tongues are speaking of things his lips would spurn?

How can we hope to help Him or hasten His return?

(Christ Has no Hands but Our Hands – Annie Johnson Flints)⁶⁸

A story is told, most likely an urban legend, that at the end of World War II a small French village was bombed by the Allies by mistake. In the city town square was a statue of Christ. It stood with its hands stretched out. On the pedestal of the statue were written these words “Come unto me”.

When the town was being reconstructed after the war and the statue was being reassembled, all of the pieces of the statue of Christ were saved except for the outstretched hands that could not be found. It was suggested that new hands be made, but the townspeople said no, wanting to leave the statue without hands.

According to the story, in that small village is a statue of Christ without hands. On the base of the statue, it reads, “Christ Has No Hands-No Hands But Ours.”

I have always liked this narrative of Christ without hands. Though this story cannot be substantiated, it reminds me of how we should help others. Do we have a “Yes” attitude when we are asked to serve or do we have a “No” attitude? Can people read our countenance as not being willing to help or is it a countenance of you are bothering me?

The statue of Christ in the small town before WW II said to follow him, after the war it sent a message to let our hands be his hands as we help others.

Direction

Proverbs 3:6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

In the novel, *The Chosen*, by Chaim Potok, a Jewish father cries out to the Master of the Universe as he addresses Him in prayer on behalf of his son who has a brilliant and capable mind. He says, “A mind like this I need for a son. A soul I need for a son. Compassion I want from my son, righteousness, mercy, strength to suffer and carry pain. That I want from my son. Not a mind without a soul.” His son, speaking of his father says, “He taught me to look inside myself, to find my own strength, to walk around inside myself in company with my soul.”⁶⁹

I wonder how many of us take the time to walk around inside of ourselves in company with our souls. When we are in the company of others do we compromise our values when we get in a tight situation? Do we have the courage to stand fast on what we believe? Or are we like the chaff which falls from the wheat kernel that is blown by the whim of the wind. Do we walk with our souls? Can we find strength and live in the company of our soul?

Jeb McGruder who was sentenced to ten years by Judge Sirrica for his involvement in Watergate had this to say about a walk with his soul, “My ambition obscured my judgment. Somewhere between my ambition and ideals, I lost my ethical compass.”⁷⁰

We in the infantry know how easy it can be to get off course. How easy it is to be off a 100 meters, when we shoot the wrong azimuth.

It is my prayer that we will have the courage to walk with our souls and that...God...will grant us wisdom to know what **direction** we need to take in life.

End of Life

Psalm 23:4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil: for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

As I finished reading from the Psalms, Gustavo passed away. As a chaplain, I had been called to be with the World War II veteran during his last moments. Clair, Gustavo's wife, was still holding his hand, saying what a good person he had been. I could see the powerful love that this woman of 81 years held for her husband and wondered at the trials, joys and experiences these two people had shared over the years.

As I walked down the hall and out the hospital, I briefly examined my own life. I had just shared in the passing away of a loved one; and in a sense, I was given a glimpse into the future. I thought of my own life, and getting ahead didn't seem so important. Maybe, it would be better to spend a little more time with the kids, go out and look for a bike for my son, or enjoy my wife's garden with her.

I knew Gustavo and Clair for only a short time. Perhaps they shared with me life's real meaning. Someday, I will walk down that same road. Hopefully, when that day comes, I will have learned to appreciate the important things in life.

As we share life together in the military, may we slow down and appreciate that which we have. And may He be with us as we journey down life's road.

Equinox

Isaiah 40:31 But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.

The average runner sprints until the breath in him is gone; But the champion has the iron will: that makes him carry on. For rest, the average runner begs, when limp his muscles grow; but the champion runs on leaden legs His spirit makes him go. The average man's complacent when he does his best to score; but the champion does his best and then he does a little more. (Author Unknown)

This weekend was the Equinox marathon. Over four hundred people gathered from all parts of Alaska to participate in it. It was a beautiful day yesterday, much like today. While I was warming up for the run, I bumped in to Mark Wood, a superior court judge in Fairbanks, who was also running. We exchanged the usual banter. I asked him how many times he had run the Equinox, a marathon that goes from 500 ft. to 2500 ft.

He replied, "this was his 27th time," I marveled at how someone could run and train for such a grueling event year after year. It had to be something more than running for time. This was my second time. The first time, I was ignorant of the pain that I would suffer, the second time I was nervous because I knew what was in store for me. After the run, with cramped legs and a weak body, I saw Mr. Wood again, we smiled and shook hands and then went our way.

During the 26 miles, I think I began to understand why Mr. Wood ran the event. I was enjoying myself. Though the journey was rough and, at times, I was in intense pain, I knew that there was an end, and I was completing the journey with a group of people who had a similar goal in mind. Though I did not know them, we had the same purpose. At the end, my heart had changed and I looked at the marathon differently. You might say that I was becoming a convert to the race.

Another experience in my life impressed upon me how one's heart can change and how it relates to the gospel. As a young boy of about eleven, I grew up in a musical family. My father was a violinist and taught music in the local school district. I had a good friend by the name of Mike Fox. He came from an orthodox Jewish tradition and his father and my father were music teachers together. I would often go to Mike's house

to practice and to play the violin. I remember vividly his house. It was a religious home. They had a “Kosher” home and religion played a significant part in Mike’s life. When we ate lunch, it was all kosher food. I thought it was interesting to eat on different plates. When we would enter into Mike’s room, he had a mezuzah on the door. He would touch it when we would enter into and exit his room. Of course, I would ask him what he was doing. He said that it was a Jewish thing. One day his mother could see that I was curious about the small silver object on the door and explained that inside of it were scriptures and that these scriptures were written upon their hearts.

Years later, I found out that one of the primary scriptures was Deuteronomy 6:4 which says “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words I command thee, shall be in thine heart.”

Yesterday I became a convert to the marathon. How do we become a convert to the gospel and have it written our hearts? Maybe the answer is that the gospel can not be written in our hearts unless we study the gospel in our minds so that we can understand it in our hearts.

Family, God and Country

Matthew 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

During the Sunday service with the trainees on Sand Hill at Fort Benning Georgia, an older gentleman was asked to speak. He was in his late seventies. He had served during World War II, the Korean conflict and Vietnam. He retired as a thirty-year veteran. He talked about his rigorous training in ranger and airborne school during the early fifties before he deployed to the Korean conflict. He had the attention of all the young trainees.

As he began to weave his message, he talked about a comic strip he had once seen of a goose about to eat a frog. The caption said, “to never let go.” It showed the frog with its hand around the neck of the goose. He cautioned the trainees to never give up when the going got tough. As he was about to sit down, he stopped and returned to the podium. “Oh, by the way,” he said, “The most important things in life are Family, God and Country, and each one of them comes first!”

I thought about that for quite a while. How could that be? Each one of them comes first? Perhaps his message is true. Years of his experience makes me want to believe.

Farewell

John 14:2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

Today, I had the privilege and honor of performing a graveside service for an American soldier killed in Iraq. As I was walking away from the cemetery, I got a final glimpse of the soldier's family as they got into their cars and left the hallowed grounds of the cemetery.

They put on such a brave face, and talked and reminisced about their son. How proud they were of his service and what he had meant to them. His fiancée cried softly in the background during the service. They wanted him buried in a cemetery that was close to his unit so his friends, "comrade in arms", could visit him.

I pondered as I walked slowly to my car—how many in the future would make the journey to pay respects to a friend, a member of their squad, who didn't make it back. Life would go on, and the years would soften the memory of a lost friend, but the memory to a parent would remain, and the loss a constant reminder of what might have been.

Fellowship of Pain

Psalms 25:18 Look upon mine affliction and my pain...

Albert Schweitzer called it the brotherhood of pain.⁷¹ This fellowship was seen as a binding force that brought people together who had suffered the same tribulations, went through the same experiences and felt the same pain.,

This week the 5/21 Battalion of the 7th Infantry Division went through a rite of passage and in a sense many felt that same brotherhood ascribed by Schweitzer: the long road marches, the blisters, the heat, combatives, land navigation and the obstacle course. It was interesting to note what it was that helped to bond that fellowship.

I believe to a small degree it was:

Caring—patching up blistered feet.

Laughter—when a fellow comrade was getting his face stuffed with a cloth as a silencing technique.

Team Leaders—taking charge through the Leaders Reconnaissance Course.

Complaining—when is this going to end?

Dirt—every one's covered with it.

Graduation—rite of passage has ended.

Marching Home—to a three-day break.

Yes, that which bonds troops, families, and friends may very well be associated with this concept—the fellowship of pain. The last five days, we have all walked down the same road...and have seen under the sun, that the race was not to the swift, but to those who simply endured and learned more about themselves, their friends, and the mission of the 5/21 Infantry Attack Battalion.

Four Pieces of Candy

Psalms 91:2 I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.

As the captured Iraq soldiers raised their hands towards the sky, my men covered them with their M-16s (rifles) pointed towards them providing an atmosphere of intense feelings. Suddenly, one of the Iraq prisoners reached quickly into his pocket. The squad leader yelled at the prisoner and motioned with his weapon to stop what he was doing. I could feel the tension in the air.

Trembling, the Iraqi soldier slowly pulled his hand from his pocket and very carefully opened his palm. Inside of his palm were four pieces of candy, which he presented to the squad leader. The tension from the group evaporated and a smile graced the features of the young squad leader as he accepted the candy and prepared to take the prisoners to a prisoner relocation drop off point.

I was proud of my men that day, but realized how fragile life can be, and how situations in life change according to circumstance.

God Be with You

*God be with you till we meet again,
Keep loves' banner floating o'er you,
Smite death's threat'ning wave before you,
God be with you till we meet again.
(Jeremiah E. Rankini—4th Stanza)⁷²*

We had just finished singing the last verse of *God be with You till We Meet Again*. The small deployment worship service had ended and the brigade was getting ready to deploy to Iraq for a year's tour of duty. The families and soldiers were slowly dispersing. The emotion of the song was still with me as I helped to put away chairs before departing from the aviation hangar where just moments before, hundreds had gathered to hear messages from leaders, receive briefings about readiness, and get last minute instructions concerning departure.

I wondered about the safety of the men and women who were deploying. They were departing to serve their country and many would be in harm's way. However, I prayed fervently that God would indeed protect them, and that we would meet again in better circumstances.

Still, whenever I hear *God Be with You*, I think of those who have served or who are serving far away from home, often in difficult situations, missing loved ones and uncertain about their future. I believe that God will be with them wherever they might be. I also pray that He will protect them and bring them safely home.

Gossip

James 3:5 Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth.

As a young boy, I enjoyed reading the sayings or the thought of the day that my mom would attach with a magnet to our refrigerator. Many times, they were religious, and at other times just thoughts. Over the years, one saying from the refrigerator has stayed with me. It was a jingle or a song that had a catchy tune about gossip. In fact, my second grade teacher taught the song to me. This jingle, though unusual in its style, comes rushing back into my memory whenever I think about or I am tempted to gossip.

The jingle goes like this, *“Gossip, gossip evil thing much unhappiness it brings, if you can’t say something nice, don’t talk at all is my advice.”* (Childhood Song, Origin Unknown) Funny how a jingle like this can stay with you for decades and other things, like the sermon you hear on Sunday, escapes retention.

Perhaps there is something in this jingle that we can all benefit from. Gossip and rumors are usually spread as fact. They are first embraced and then believed. We may think that we are passing information that is factual but when examined is proven to be false.

How many times have we with good intentions said something, not knowing if it was really true? Usually, the source that tells us may be credible or maybe it is a friend that we trust. However, once said, it is difficult to retract. Gossip, in the beginning, may be fun to spread, but it can be very damaging to friends, families and relationships.

Like a pillow filled with feathers, once the feathers escape the pillow case and the wind catches them, it is almost impossible to put back. We can later find out that the rumor or gossip was false but the damage and hurt has already occurred.

Gossip is an evil thing, and if we cannot say something nice, it is probably best to not say anything at all.

Grief

Psalms 23:4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

As the HUMMER approach the medical evacuation company where we were stationed, evacuating injured Iraqi soldiers for medical care, I heard the doctors and nurses yelling, "Chaplain!" They were gathered around one of their fallen comrades, a doctor, who had been hit by a mine.

It was obvious that he was dead. The pain of that moment was intense. Many of the medical professionals had worked with this fine young man. And, it was apparent that their grief was hard and the shock evident on their faces.

We gathered around their comrade, and then as if by a silent code, we all grabbed each other's hand. We bowed our heads and we prayed for this young man. We prayed for his family. We prayed for his co-workers, and we prayed for the comfort of the Lord.

Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil was different that day. *For thou art with me* meant something. *Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me* did truly happen.

That day the Lord comforted the men and women of the medical evacuation company. The shortness of life and the unexpected took place, and the reality of war raised its ugly head.

However, the compassion of friends and the feelings that were apparent during those short minutes will always be remembered.

Hanoi Taxi—Last Flight

On 6 May 2006, the first aircraft to return Vietnam prisoners of war arrived at the National Museum of the United States Air Force in Dayton, Ohio. The C-141 dubbed “the Hanoi Taxi” was one of the first C-141 Star lifters to land in Hanoi in February 1973 to airlift our POWs back to freedom.

As one of many C-141s used to transport more than 500 American prisoners of war back to freedom, on 5 May 2006 it made its final flight as the last C-141 Star lifter still serving in the Air Force. Crewmembers from the Reserve Command’s 445th Airlift Wing flew the air craft from Wright Patterson Air Force Base to the museum where it will remain as a testament of the courageous young men who braved captivity, some for years, waiting to be repatriated to their country.⁷³

Of interest in the news article were the following quotes:

"We sat there and just kind of looked out the window and did a lot of recollection," said Bill Robinson, 62, Madisonville, Tennessee. He was shot down in 1965 and freed in 1973.

"As I'm getting old, I realize I am part of history," he said. "It definitely was a re-enactment, a wonderful feeling."⁷⁴

The Hanoi Taxi made its last flight and will rest for all to remember its deeds at an air museum. It represented freedom for those men who were in captivity in Vietnam, bound but not ruined; lonely, but not forgotten; humbled, but not destroyed. Yes, the Hanoi Taxi was well named—the Freedom Bird.

Harmony

Isaiah 55:6 Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near.

The great conductor, Arturo Toscanini, of the Philharmonic Orchestra related this story that I thought was inspiring. One day Toscanini received a letter on a crumpled up brown piece of paper from a sheepherder in Wyoming. The letter said, that the sheepherder listened to the Philharmonic Orchestra on an old radio with a battery that needed to be replaced, and that the two most prized possessions that he had was that old radio and his violin. He related to Arturo Toscanini, that the batteries in his radio were going weak and that his violin was out of tune. He asked Toscanini if the Philharmonic Orchestra could play an A so that he could tune his violin. The sheepherder's letter touched Toscanini, and so at the next broadcast of the Philharmonic Orchestra, they started the program off simply by playing a pure A.⁷⁵

The point of the story is that sometimes our lives, like the sheepherder's violin, can get out of tune. More often than not we get busy and the violins in our life remain unplayed and untuned. However, when it is time to tune up our lives, do we hear that pure A? Perhaps, we hear the A played loud and clear when we read the scriptures, pray, worship, and serve God.

Like the sheepherder, do we need someone or something to sound a pure note in our lives? Reading the scriptures, praying and worshipping are ways in which we can maintain our spiritual fitness and keep our lives intune with God.

Honor

Job 27:4-6 My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.

“I have been asked what I mean by word of honor. I will tell you. Place me behind prison walls--walls of stone ever so high, ever so thick, reaching ever so far into the ground—there is a possibility that in some way or another I may be able to escape, but stand me on that floor and draw a chalk line around me and have me give my word of honor never to cross it. Can I get out of that circle? No, never! I'd die first!”⁷⁶ Karl G Maeser

Like Dr. Maeser, do we have a circle of honor in our lives? Like Job, in the Old Testament, will we die before we remove our integrity? What is it that keeps honor in our lives or, as the saying above implies, embedded in the constitution of our moral fiber that causes us not to break? What is our circle of honor? Does it matter what the consequences are or how difficult the decision. Can I stay within the circle of my honor when it is so easy to walk out and nobody would know but me?

In the Old Testament Job was asked to curse God and die because he had lost everything. Can we maintain our honor when it seems that everything is going against us or when everyone else is doing it?

Maybe our word of honor is something that we need to think about. What are the circles of honor in our lives? Perhaps, if our honor is not in tact, it is time to take out our chalk to redraw our circle.

I dentity–All Aboard!

Proverbs 16:3 Commit thy works to the Lord and thy thoughts shall be established.

Where do we get our identity? Is our identity attached to what we do, or who we know? Is it attached to what people call us or what we wear on our uniform? Perhaps, that is part of it.

When I had been in the military for about seven years, my wife asked me what happened to my old self. Perplexed, I asked her what she meant. Her reply bothered me. Where was my cheerfulness, and care for the family? I no longer laughed. I was always tired, and I didn't seem to enjoy life very much. Annoyed, I pondered what had happened.

Unfortunately, my identity was attached to the fast train of the Army that never stopped. Once I stopped to see where I was going, I began to reattach my identity to other things besides the train: to spirituality, to family and to friends.

The train is still just as fast. However, now I try to watch what I bring aboard.

If

As I boarded the helicopter, I noticed that my commander was reading from a small devotional booklet that I had given him titled, “A Light Fighter’s Faith.”⁷⁷ It was a series of poems, scriptures, and devotions that were collected by the parents of George Bowler Tullidge III. They developed a small booklet of devotions for their son who was a sergeant in the 507th Parachute Infantry battalion, 17th Airborne Division during WWII.

This book of poems and scriptures had helped him during hard times, and continued to be printed for military personnel, in later years, to assist them through difficult situations. It is dedicated to their son, Sergeant Tullidge, who gave his life at the age of twenty in the invasion of France, June 8, 1944.

Through the ear phones, my commander began to read a quote titled “If” from this booklet to all those on board the helicopter:

If

*If you think you are beaten, you are;
If you think you dare not, you don't.
If you'd like to win but think you can't,
it's certain that you won't.*

*If you think you'll lose, you've lost,
For out of the world we find
Success begins with a fellow's will;
It's all in the state of mind.*

*Life's battles don't always go
To the strongest and fastest man;
But sooner or later the man who wins
Is the man who thinks he can. (Walter D. Wintle)⁷⁸*

When he finished, he said, “I like that quote.” I thought to myself that he epitomized the meaning of the poem. He was a commander who believed that life’s battles are not always won by the strongest or the fastest, but to those who believed no matter the challenge. He believed in the message of “If.”

Judging

Matthew 7:3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

To prejudge other men's notions before we have looked into them is not to show their darkness but to put out our own eyes. (John Locke)⁷⁹

Mother Teresa said: If you judge people, you have no time to love them.⁸⁰

It is always easy to judge others. We judge others when we are running and soldiers fall out. We might say to ourselves, "They can't hang." or "They just don't have it in them." As I get older, I find myself being less judgmental.

Today we ran up a steep hill. Before the run we separated into ability groups and began our physical training. As we were going through our warm ups, I told myself that I just didn't feel good today. I looked around at all the soldiers and wondered what they were feeling like.

As we started the run, I dropped back a little so I could get my breath. I knew that the formation would slow down a bit after about 500 meters. It did and I stayed in formation running with the group. I could hear the labored breathing all around me as we ran the steep hill. The talking had died down, and all of us were intent on reaching the goal at the turnaround point. We reached it and turned around. We went for about another mile and the run ended, with a warm down.

The next day I woke up with sore muscles. The running showed me that I was not in shape. I was glad that I had not sounded critical during the run. When we are tired, we tend to be judgmental of others.

In marriage, it is always easier to point the finger of blame at someone than to examine what you are doing. Everyone but you has a problem. Many people keep the same problems and habits for years, like they are old friends. I have always wondered why they keep them. Perhaps, if they get rid of these destructive friends, they will have to replace them with something else. Maybe, they just don't have the energy.

I have always liked the scripture about the mote and the beam. The mote was a small piece of wood, while the beam was quite large. The scriptural imagery of the message is quite clear and always brings the right picture to my mind, to not judge others harshly.

Jump Commands

Psalms 91:1-2 He who dwells in the secret place of the most high shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust.

As fellow paratroopers, our safety checks to get ready to jump are what helps us to exit safely from an airplane and to reach the ground unharmed.

The following written by Chaplain (CPT) Pete Sniffin⁸¹ of the XVIII Airborne Artillery Corps gives our jump commands another meaning which I believe is worth reviewing:

GET READY!! I will always be physically and spiritually fit before my maker.

STAND UP!! I will make a decision to maintain a high moral standard in spite of what others say or do.

HOOK UP!! Through personal prayer, I will maintain a direct line of communication with God.

CHECK STATIC LINES!! I will prepared to make a daily check of my attitudes and relationships with others.

personal inventory of my wellness and faults and prepare to make amends.

SOUND OFF FOR EQUIPMENT CHECK!! I will share my faith with others by word of mouth, deed, and example.

STAND BY!! With belief in our heavenly Father, I will face bravely whatever tests life gives me.

GO!! Whether on land, on sea, or in the air, I will be firm in my resolution to serve God and country.

Exiting an airplane and putting ones knees to the breeze does not have to be a scary experience, if we have done all that we can do, if we check our equipment and if we trust in Him, who is our refuge and our fortress.

Laughter

Ecclesiastes 3:4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.

It had been months since I had a decent shower. The World War II all-purpose stove that I bought at an Army surplus store before deployment to Iraq was doing an adequate job of heating up my MREs (meals ready to eat) and providing me with hot water, heated in two canteen cups, for shaving, a sponge bath, and water for hot chocolate.

Nevertheless, I was craving a hot shower. In letters home, I had commented on this situation to my wife and she had promised to send me a surprise. According to her word, I received a package in the mail, that contained a 5-gallon jumbo outdoor camp solar heated shower. I was ecstatic and could hardly wait to use it. One of the medics noticed my gift and asked if he could borrow it. I said of course, and that I would be back later in the afternoon after my visit for religious services with Charlie Company. I must admit, my mind was not on worship, but on how wonderful a shower would feel.

Upon return to camp, I quickly looked up the medic. He approached me with alarm on his face. I thought that one of our soldiers had died. I asked him what had happened. With shame on his face, he said that he had used the shower and had left it on top of the 577, an armored military evacuation vehicle. He then slowly reached behind his back and gave me the melted plastic shower bag. He quickly explained that after the shower, the driver had started up the vehicle—the shower bag that was placed close to the exhaust pipe had melted. I looked at the melted shower bag with sadness, then burst out laughing, and said, “Well that must have been one glorious shower.” We both chuckled, and buried the 5-gallon jumbo outdoor camp solar heated plastic shower in the sand.

Laughter can be the best medicine. It certainly was on that hot day in the deserts of Iraq.

Letters in the Event of...

As I was rummaging through my desk the other day, I found letters that I had written to my children when I deployed to Desert Storm, Iraq in 1990, in the event I did not make it home.

I was surprised to find them, and had forgotten that I had written them. This was not an uncommon thing. In fact, many soldiers had given me similar letters in the event that they didn't make it home.

I was curious to read what I had written. The children were now grown, and pursuing their own lives. I opened the one to my oldest son. It took me back to another time, and place. It made me think of the type of father that I had been. Had I done enough? Were the many months, and years spent away from home worth it? Did I as a father give as much to my own children as to those I served as a chaplain? It was a sobering thought.

I bundled the letters up and sent them to my children. I thought they might want to know what a father was thinking about before deploying to war. I hope they knew that I loved them and that I feel the same about them today as I did when I wrote those letters.

Leave

Matthew 11:28 Come unto me all ye who are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

I have never thought about leave much during my military career. Nevertheless, It is used for respite or to enjoy time when one is not burdened by the responsibility of work. It is a time when one can get away from one's career and devote oneself to something that is different.

I suppose that you could say it is used to give one perspective. In the military, at the end of the fiscal year, one's unit usually publishes a list of the leave days that soldiers occur. They encourage us to take them. The concept is good; however, we find many taking what is called a working leave. Each year, we all get thirty days. Nonetheless, as the year goes by, leave, for some, can become problematic.

If we do not plan well, it seems to get between living life. For example, "the train" is always running. We plan for training exercises, have briefs, do mission analysis so that we can select the best courses of action. We have meetings ad nauseam, and normally things turn out pretty well.

Meanwhile, leave days seem to accumulate. Some look at leave days when lost as a badge of honor. When asked, "How many days of leave did you lose?" We should answer zero. But, for us workaholics, we proudly raise our heads and say ten or fifteen. We know that deep down inside of us something is wrong.

For those of us who fail to plan, leave can be a problem. I just finished two weeks of leave. It was wonderful. I got away from work and did something different.

We have a home that we go to each year where I can rest from my job and do manual labor. I love working in the yard, fixing the house. It is an old house two-story house built at the turn of the century. It has hardwood floors, and the ceilings are nine feet tall. The house sits on a corner lot with a generous lawn. There is plenty of manual work to do. I enjoy rising in the early morning and working until five or six in the evening. Muscles that have not been used during the year are sore. Trees are cut and pruned. Roofs are mended, fences are painted, and projects are planned for next year's leave.

Leave offers a time when life can change. During leave, I was able to

think clearer. I was able to get a better perspective on life. And during the many hours of labor with my hands, my body was rejuvenated in that I now looked forward to going back to my career.

As He journeyed the Savior stopped for a while from his work to rest with his disciples. Even Christ needed a respite and time to reflect on what He was about to do.

All of us have a need to get away for a while. We need time to ponder, to meditate and to enjoy something that is different.

Perhaps now I will look at leave in a different light. Too bad it took me more than twenty three years to figure it out.

Life's Storms

Matthew 11:28-29 Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls.

God make me brave for this life: Oh, braver than this.
Let me straighten after pain, as a tree strengthens after the rain,
Shining and lovely again.
God, make me brave for life: much braver than this.
As the blown grass lifts, let me rise
From the sorrow with quiet eyes, knowing thy way is wise.
God, make me brave; life brings such blinding things.
Help me to keep my sight: Help me to see alright
That out of dark comes light.
(Author Unknown)

Norman Vincent Peale related the following story. He said that he liked the philosophy of storms expressed by a cowboy who had learned life's most important lessons from Hereford cows. The cowboy related that all his life he had worked on cattle ranches where winter storms often had taken a heavy toll on the herds. Temperatures often dropped quickly on the prairie, freezing rains and snows would howl for days. In these conditions, most cattle would turn their backs to the blasts of snow and freezing rains and drift down range until they came to a barrier fence. There against the fence they would pile up and die.

However, the Hereford cows acted differently. They would head into the wind and freezing rain by standing shoulder to shoulder facing the blast of the storm. The cowboy said, "You most always found the Herefords alive and well. He ended by saying, "I guess that is the greatest lesson I ever learned on the prairies—just face life's storms."⁸²

How do we face life's storms? Do we turn our backs and drift towards the least resistance or do we face them equipped with the tools of faith, prayer, and repentance. Do we go it alone, or do we stand shoulder to shoulder with friends, family, and co-worker; working out life's difficult challenges; learning from our mistakes and getting up when we have fallen?

Perhaps, the cowboy's observance of the Hereford cows could be a good lesson for all of us to learn. When the going gets rough and life seems difficult, turn and face life's storms.

Listening

Psalm 55:17 Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.

When we first arrived at Fort Benning, Georgia, my daughter was having a difficult time adjusting to the new high school. As your children become teenagers, it seems that the military moves become more difficult for them. One day my daughter asked me if I would pray with her about a difficult situation that she was having.

We prayed together and as I finished, I got up to leave the room. Before I got out the door, my daughter asked me why I was leaving. "Well, I said, perplexed, I was done. She then asked, with a surprised look on her face, "Dad, how come you left the best part of the prayer out?" Dumb founded, I asked her what she meant. She quickly replied, that "I didn't do any listening."

Lately, I have been pondering her words. How many of us really listen when we pray? In fact, what part of our conversation is listening instead of talking? I relearned a valuable lesson from my daughter that day about praying and listening.

Loss—Service to Country

Psalm 91:1-2 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the Shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: My God; in him I will trust.

Yesterday, I received the news that one of the black hawk helicopter pilots that was killed on Saturday in Iraq was a friend of mine. I had had many interactions with the husband and wife who were both in the military. My heart was heavy. I thought: how many more young warriors will we lose? It brought home the reality that there are men and women, husbands and wives, son and daughters serving together who face times of separation and peril with fear of combat.

What amazes me most is the dedication of these young warriors who, when called upon leave home, country and family, do it with a willing heart, to serve their country. Many in the armed forces, have served and understand the perils of combat. We should never lose focus that our primary mission is that of service. As it says in Romans 8:28, “We know that all things work together for the good of those who Love God...”

Whether God is an important part of our lives or not, my heart and mind go out to all of our brothers and sister who are serving their country.

May the Lord continue to bless them and protect them wherever they might be. And, if and when our brave young warriors die in that service to their country, may we all remember how fragile life is and that our time here on earth is precious.

Lost

Luke 15:6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me: for I have found my sheep which was lost.

There is nothing that produces more individual fear than to be lost in a desert where there are no navigational landmarks. On a sunny day, one early morning in Iraq, I received a call to visit a unit that was twenty kilometers from my present location. I was told to follow a particular azimuth for about 20 kilometers and I would see the signal antennas of the unit.

My chaplain assistant and I dutifully set out on our course. I had a compass, and was telling my assistant which way to drive. After about twenty kilometers, I could not see any antennas or any sign of a military unit. At that point, I became worried, and like an ocean was before me as far as the eye could see and it was flat. I then glanced down at my compass and got a sick feeling in my stomach. I was using the compass inside of a vehicle that had metal parts. The metal from the vehicle offset the compass and gave out a faulty reading. I said a quick prayer and reasoned that if I shot a back azimuth inside of the vehicle that I should return to my point of origin.

With faith, we backtracked and within about an hour, we were back at our original location. I thanked the Lord, and I never forgot that lesson.

Have you ever been lost? Has your compass ever been faulty? Have you ever been the reason for being lost? In Luke Chapter 15, Christ gives what I like to call the parables of the lost. In fact, it could be called the trilogy of the lost: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. All of these parables have one thing in common, i.e., the feeling of joy that comes over individuals who have lost something and then have found it.

If we feel lost, the gospel can give us that joy which surpasses all understanding. Like when the prodigal son returned to his father, he said, *“For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.”* Luke 15:24

Marathon

The Honolulu marathon is now a memory, and a good one. How incredible to run with 30,000 runners at 5:00 a.m. in the morning. Seventeen thousand runners were from foreign countries, and the spectators standing on the route, throughout the race, were holding flags from the Netherlands, Canada and Japan—cheering on the runners. It was, indeed, an event that will be remembered from start to finish.

Of particular interest, were the water stops where thousands of people drank their water or amino assisted drinks so that they would not dehydrate and so that muscles could replenish themselves from the grueling run. Thousands of cups littered each water station and runners side stepped, ran through, and trampled the steeped piles of paper cups. Runners would drop their drinks randomly which would then splash on other runners' shoes and socks as they ran through the 100 meter water area refreshed for the moment and ready to continue the journey to the end.

All sorts of people ran, from the young to the old, from those in wheel chairs to those who looked to have physical ailments. Some dressed in colorful costumes, others in fashionable running attire. However, all had one thing in mind, finishing the race.

The 94th Army Air Missile Defense Command at Fort Shafter, Hawaii fielded a team of twenty-two runners who trained together for about three months. All finished the race and all were glad that it was over. The next day many had sore muscles and blistered feet, but the satisfaction of having done something out of the ordinary was gratifying.

Water was an important element in the race. It reminds me of the story in the scriptures of Christ coming to the well and asking the Samaritan woman for a drink of water. She questions Christ about getting a drink because the well is deep and he has nothing with which to draw water. Christ then talks to the woman about living water and says, that “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life.” John 4:13-14

I believe that marathon runners can resonate with what Christ was saying. We all thirsted for that which we needed. Perhaps, that day at the well, what the Samaritan woman needed she received—living water or the gospel which quenches all thirst and never ends.

Marriage

Last week we attended the wedding of our second son, Jess. He married a beautiful young woman. On her wedding day, she was radiant in her wedding gown. I could see the love that my son had for her. We all felt great joy as we watched them take each other by the hand as wedding vows were repeated.

As a father, I watched my son make these commitments—when he said yes, I felt a warmth go through my soul knowing that Jess had made the right decision, and that he was entering into a covenant between God, Ashley and himself.

As the wedding ended, we laughed, enjoyed taking pictures and shared each other's company. However, I could not help but think about his life and how excited I was for him. Perhaps, it was the excitement of the moment, but I think it was more than that. For an instant, I believe I could understand how Heavenly Father feels about his children on earth. How he wants what is best for us, that he indeed wants us to make righteous decisions in our lives, and that he gives us our moral agency to choose.

With great joy, we participated in the marriage of our son, and I also felt a little sadness. I realized that I would no longer be a Dad, but a Father, and that I had done the best that I could for my son. Now it was time for him to make those important decisions in his own life, and that I could act as an advisor, if not a friend.

I could only hope that I had done the best I could to teach him to first seek the Kingdom of God, and then after that all good things will follow—in sickness or health, in happiness or in pain.

Medal of Honor

1 Peter 5:5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder, Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

The other day I was reading an account of Army Master Sergeant William Crawford written by Colonel James Moschgat. Crawford died in March 2000, and was a Medal of Honor recipient.⁸³ In the story, Colonel Moschgat relates how as a cadet in the 1970's at the Air Force Academy, he read in a book on World War II an account of heroism of an Army Private by the name of William Crawford. He knew a William Crawford who was a janitor at the Air Force Academy and a WW II veteran. He wondered was this the same man who he saw every day carrying a bucket and a mop cleaning the halls of the academy.

According to the narrative, Private Crawford saved his pinned down platoon, and by his own initiative under intense enemy fire, he took out three separate enemy machine gun nests with hand grenades in Altavilla, Italy in 1943. It went on to say that he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor in 1944. However, the story does not end here, after the action in Altavilla, Italy unbeknownst to his Command, he was captured by the Germans and made a prisoner of war. The narrative goes on to explain how while a prisoner of war, he was forced to march with little food for 500 miles in 52 days to stay ahead of the advancing Russian army. He languished in a prisoner of war camp until the end of WW II when he was released by advancing American troops.

Yes, this was indeed William Crawford, who was now cleaning floors at the academy. Upon learning that their janitor was a Medal of Honor recipient, attitudes changed towards Bill Crawford. He took on a fatherly demeanor towards the cadets, and they sought his advice as one who had received its country's highest award.

In 1984, President Reagan gave the commencement speech at the Air Force Academy, and at the conclusion of his remarks, President Reagan presented to William Crawford the Medal of Honor. This time in person, not posthumously as President Franklin D. Roosevelt had in 1944 to his father.

William Crawford died on 15 March 2000 and is the only Medal of Honor recipient to be buried in the Air Force Academy cemetery.

No matter how humble one is or the circumstances of one's life, you never know where people have been, what they have done or how they can contribute to your life.

Bill was a humble janitor and when the cadets learned in 1976 of his war-time experiences, his life changed and became more meaningful. He became involved in the lives of the Air Force cadets. Both, the cadets and Bill, benefited from getting to know one another, even though he still cleaned and mopped the same floors and the same rest-rooms.

Moleskin

Psalms 121 :3, 8 He will not suffer thy foot to be moved; The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and even for evermore.

As the road march ended last Friday, I was grateful that I had put moleskin on the hot spots on my feet. Moleskin is a soft cotton flannel piece of padding that helps to relieve painful boot friction. It is a self-stick adhesive that can be cut from a sheet to the size of a projected hot spot. Hot spots are those places where you think that blisters might occur from friction by the foot with the boot.

Before the road march, I had taken extra care to identify my hot spots. If not taken care of hot spots have a tendency to "talk". I have heard soldiers say that when their feet hurt, their "Dogs" are hurting or that their "Dogs" are talking.

Through painful experience after long road marches, I have been able to identify accurately where blisters will occur and act. However, there are times that I try to convince myself that my feet will not need the aid of moleskin. These are the times that "try my soul" and find me limping.

Road marching is the bread and butter of the infantry. We have been told in our unit that we will meet the 25th Infantry standard for road marching. As we finished the ruck march, I sat on my ruck and removed my boots and socks and examined my feet. I always enjoy the relief that comes through removing my boots and socks, and wiggling my toes in the open air. Much to my surprise, there were no blisters.

Life is kind of like a road march. We prepare for it. We ruck up. If we pack according to the packing list, we bear the weight of the ruck. When it is over, there is a vast sense of relief from tired muscles and shoulders when the ruck is removed. And, if we have prepared properly, we tend not to hobble around for two or three days.

Spiritually, the ruck represents life's challenges. If we prepare, we shall not fear. If we trust in the Lord, we shall not fail. In this analogy moleskin represents the scriptures: when we use them, they can help to protect us and to remind us where "hot spots" may be in our lives.

Morale

The best morale exists when you never hear the word mentioned.

When you hear it, it's usually lousy. General Dwight D. Eisenhower Supreme Allied Commander – Europe WWII ⁸⁴

As a chaplain I sometimes get tired of hearing: "How's the morale chaplain?" As if there is a pat answer to that difficult question.

How was the morale of the woman who was caught in the very act of adultery (John 8:3-11). As Christ was drawing in the sand, they asked him what they should do with her. He responded that "*He who is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.*"

Obviously, their morale wasn't very high because when the Savior arose from his writing in the sand they were not to be found. The woman's morale was high because her accusers had departed. The Savior told her, "*neither do I condemn thee-go and sin no more.*" We don't know what happened to her; however, we hope that she was able to depart from her adulterous affair, and that because of something larger than herself, a belief in the Christ, that she was indeed forgiven.

I wonder what the morale of the ten lepers was like when they saw Christ from afar and asked Him to have mercy on them (Luke 17:12-19). He told them to go and see the priest. While they were journeying to see the priest, they were cleansed. I imagine that their morale was very high. Nonetheless, only one returned to give thanks. Jesus told him that his faith had made him whole. From this, we learn that there was more than just a physical healing. His faith was an important part of the process.

I wonder what the morale of the Christ was during his last week on earth. He knew that he was going like a lamb to the slaughter. He forgave them for what was about to happen. He was the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

Over the years, when my morale is low, my wife tells me to look outside of myself. To be thankful for the many blessing that I have, to be grateful for what the Lord has given me, and to not focus on myself.

The world is not always a fair place. We all have disappointments. We get sick. We want what is best for us. However, I believe that when we begin to look outside of ourselves, to be thankful, and to serve others—morale improves.

Outward Appearance

Samuel 16:7 I look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but he LORD looketh on the heart.

As I was walking to work a couple of weeks ago, I noticed the damage that was caused by a recent rain storm. Of particular interest to me was a tree which had fallen down because of the wind. I passed the tree and wondered at the force that blew it down. After walking past it, I returned to examine the break. The inside of the tree was filled with a sawdust like material. It looked like termites had eaten away the heart of the tree, leaving it vulnerable to the forces of nature. On examining the tree from the outside, it looked healthy and strong; however, from the inside it was weak and failing.

Like the tree, we can appear strong on the outside, but on the inside what are we like? In Samuel 16:7, in the Old Testament, it says that...*man looketh at the outward appearance but the Lord looketh at the heart. Is our heart strong enough to take the raging storms of life?*

I remember a particular 1st Sergeant who constantly gave me grief. Upon entering his office, he would in rather strong language invite me to leave. This happened quite frequently. However, I was convinced that there was something besides his gruff behavior that motivated his actions. After about six months of verbal abuse, he began to show another side. Here was a man affected by war, hurt by relationships and afraid of retirement. His heart was good; however, his exterior was rough and callused.

The Lord understands our hearts. If our hearts are hardened because of bitterness, and hurt, they need to be cleansed. If we appear strong on the outside, but feel weak on the inside, perhaps we need that assurance greater than ourselves that we can be helped. The Savior said, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt 11:28-30).

Someday, I hope to see another tree growing in the place of the tree that was downed by the wind and rains.

Peace for All Times

Romans 14:19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

Our Goal must be –not peace in our time—but peace for all time. Harry S. Truman⁸⁵

As we prepare the battalion with rigorous training, squad ARTEPs (Army Training and Evaluation Programs), and time away from home, might we think of what it is that we do to prepare for peace. And what is that...lets us follow after the things which make for peace.

Obviously, according to the 7th Infantry Division, one of its main goals is to train the best Light Fighters in the world. With this goal, comes the responsibility for being prepared for we all know that peace once lost is not easily regained.

I think of the peace that we strive for in our homes, the harmony that we want at work, and the peace which we all seek for in our hearts and minds. So...like Harry S. Truman, we can all hope for peace for all time and be prepared by training hard, caring for our families, and considering those with whom we work. And maybe the words of Samuel, the Old Testament Prophet, will take on a new meaning for our time as well... *Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast* (1 Samuel 25:6).

People vs. Tasks

Matthew 4:19 Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

A professor from Notre Dame once said this about his career, “I have always been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted, until I slowly discovered that my interruptions were my work. This is the great conversion in life: to recognize and believe that the many unexpected events are not just disturbing interruptions of our projects, but the way in which God molds our hearts and prepares us for his return...”⁸⁶

This quote from Dr. Nouwen, reminds me that paperwork, or our career, is no substitute for people. The other week we said goodbye to one of our officers who retired. I asked him what it was that he enjoyed most about his almost thirty years with the Army. He said, the people, not his job performance or what he did, but the people with whom he served.

So why is it that we put so much of our energy toward paperwork? We spend so much of our time in front of the computer as if it owns us. We get pleasure out of letting others know the many hundreds of email that we receive. Results tend to take priority over relationships. Tasks seem to take precedence over people, and mission trumps everything.

In the Army a few years ago, we heard this trite phrase—Mission first, People always. I still haven’t figured out what that means. But when we hear it, we nod our heads as if we have heard wisdom.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ put people over convention. He healed the sick, the lame and the weary in heart. He taught and gave hope to the multitude, and inspired a nation that there was indeed a purpose for life. He asked the difficult questions of life with dialogue like “Whom do they say that I am?” or “What is it that we should do to have eternal life?” He commanded us to follow Him, and he set the path for millions to come unto Him if we but believe.

So, when we get harried or feel like we have just too much to do. Stop and think what really is important in life. Is it things or concepts, people or tasks, unbelief, or belief?

Praise

Psalm 9:1 I will praise thee, O Lord with my whole heart.

This morning I attended a breakfast for soldiers at Lloyd Elementary School Columbus, Georgia. Its theme was about military children. Parents, who were soldiers who had kids that attended the school, were invited. Major General John W. Hendricks was the guest speaker. One thing that he said impressed me. He said, “Praise works a lot better with children than criticism.”

Unfortunately, in our lives, criticism is much easier to give. It seems to take little energy. While being positive sometimes takes effort.

And yet, praise has a better outcome than criticism, whether it is with children, friends, or professional associates.

Perspective

Psalms 62:12 Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work.

The C-130 (turbo prop transport airplane) landed. We were part of a contingency operation to train a foreign military. Billeted on the ground behind our host country's battalion, we were there for a 30-day training exercise. On the compound was a 10 by 15 square brick building. It had a door, a window, one light bulb hanging from the ceiling, a dirty mattress on the floor, and an open toilet. I asked one of the officers what the building was for. He answered that it was for punishment for those soldiers who went AWOL (absence without leave).

I thought, how sad. Nevertheless, the next day I became aware of a soldier being billeted in that small cinder block building with one small window. Later on in the afternoon, we noticed that a company of soldiers were lining up in two single files. The soldier was escorted from the cinder block building and ordered to run the gauntlet. He received many punishing hits and kicks from his comrades.

Though we might complain about field duty, deployments, or separation, the U.S. military is organized according to the values and norms of our country. It is an institution that is valued based. The words of liberty and justice become more important and relevant when experienced in the context of another culture.

May we always respect the rights of others, and be *just* in how we administer punishments, rewards, and how we take care of our military personnel.

Picture to Remember

When 2nd Lt. James Cathay's body arrived at the Reno Airport, Marines climbed into the cargo hold of the plane and draped the flag over his casket as passengers watched the family gather on the tarmac.

*During the arrival of another Marine's casket last year at Denver International Airport, Major Steve Beck described the scene as so powerful: "See the people in the windows? They sat right there in the plane, watching those Marines. You gotta wonder what's going through their minds, knowing that they're on the plane that brought him home," he said, "They will remember being on that plane for the rest of their lives. They're going to remember bringing that Marine home. And they should."*⁸⁷

"These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph."⁸⁸ (Thomas Paine)

The harder the conflict the more we should think of all those who are serving. May we pray daily for their safety wherever they might roam, and plead with God to return them safely home.

Pink Uniforms

Proverbs 16:18-19 Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.

Before deployment to Desert Shield, Iraq in November of 1990, the 1st Infantry Division was put on alert. Part of the alert was to get your A and B bag ready for deployment. This dealt with packing the necessary clothing and equipment that you would need to go to war. On the list was the number of socks that you should bring. It read to have 10 pairs of brown socks.

In that my socks were rather old, I asked my wife to please buy me ten pair of brown socks at the military clothing store. However, due to the fact that all of the 1st infantry division was deploying, there were not any socks left in the inventory. I then asked Christine, to buy them at a local store. They were also out of stock. Christine, then came up with the brilliant idea to dye my white socks, brown. But she could not find any brown dye so she bought green and red dye which together made brown.

However, much later during the deployment when I had time to wash my uniforms; I noticed that the water in which my clothing was soaking was purple. I had dumped all my uniforms and my socks into a plastic tub and was using my feet with detergent to get my clothes clean. Much to my chagrin, my uniforms turned pink.

Soon, I became the talk of the 3/37 Armor battalion. “Hey Chaplain we like your pink uniforms,” or “Where can we get some of those pink uniforms?” Fortunately, in my next washing, the pink came out and by then I had discarded the dyed socks.

I took all the ribbing in stride and laughed about it, but you never know when you will be humbled. Life has an interesting way of helping one to put life into perspective. Now, whenever pride starts to raise its ugly head, all I have to do is think of my pink uniforms in the deserts of Iraq and it brings life back into focus.

Prisoners of War

There were about 1,000 ragged hungry prisoners of war (POWs) being held at a bombed out water factory in Iraq. It was February of 1991. We had already moved forward into Iraq and had secured our objective. We were tasked to provide food, shelter and security for the prisoners of war in our area of operation until the Military Police could arrive with transportation and take them to a staging area.

The evening was cold, and you could see the prisoners huddled around small fires staring at the fire's flickering light. The smoke of the fires made it surreal in the dark as the men huddled around them. The officers and enlisted men had been separated into groups. We were feeding them with our MREs (meals ready to eat). In fact, we had dipped into our supply and we were running out. Who would of imagined that in a short period we would have over 1000 prisoners of war?

We were cognizant of the fact that these men were the enemy. However, it felt different. We knew that they would be with us for only a short time and then we would move on.

A group of POWs wanted to worship. We found an area for them to worship according to the dictates of their heart. They seemed like humble men, wanting to pray to their God and I witnessed them as they used their prayer beads.

I was proud of my men during that short period of time. They could have been hard, or embittered by the process of war. However, they gave of their food. They built latrines and they gave what they hand in extra socks and clothing.

The scriptures in Matthew 25:35-36 came to mind, *I was hungered and you gave me meat. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you took me in. Naked, and you clothed me: I was sick and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came unto me.*

Protection

Psalms 56: 4 In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust: I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.

I should have known better as I entered the wadi (a valley, or ravine) and saw a squad of my infantry soldiers running up and over a low hill. Instantly, rounds from a T-62 Russian tank, that the soldiers had primed for destruction, were cooking off and zinging around my Hummer. I yelled at my driver to hit it, and we quickly exited the zone of destruction.

I was angry. My soldiers had almost killed me. I got out of the Hummer and ran up and over the hill to see the soldiers staring at me. I could tell by their looks that they were grateful that I was alive. The squad leader, in a deadpan voice said, “Boy, chaplain, you sure are lucky you didn’t get killed.”

I must admit his voiced concern was an understatement, but it hit me that I was lucky to be alive, and that I was blessed to serve with these men. I thanked the Lord quickly for His protection. I also realized that my driver and I had not thoroughly reconnoitered the area. We had blindly driven into a dangerous situation.

Thankfully, that day we were greatly blessed and the Lord, did indeed, protect us.

Recklessness

Psalms 62:8 Trust in Him at all times.

I should have known better as I followed the infantry soldier under the barbed wire. We were replacing their unit as part of a multi-national force that monitored the 1979 treaty of peace between Israel and Egypt. During that day, I was making a site visit to one of the observation posts, and a soldier had invited me to see something of interest.

The first inkling of danger should have been when he told me to walk exactly in his footprints, and not to deviate from the path. Quickly we came to a pit that was filled with unexploded ordinance. I asked him where we were, and he replied that we were in the middle of a minefield. He seemed excited about showing me his find. I calmly asked him how he had safely cleared the path. He took out his bayonet and said that he cleared a path by probing the ground for mines. He again reminded me to match his footsteps as we proceeded out of the field. After this harrowing experience, I thanked him, but in my mind was chastising myself for putting the soldier and me in unnecessary danger.

Trust can be a two-way bridge. However, recklessness can happen when one is not paying attention to the signs that are present in one's life. "Hey chaplain, I want to show you something," (without questioning) was the first hint that something was wrong. The barbwire was the second hint of danger. Also, walking blindly in another's footsteps without really knowing him was another. Eventhough, we returned safely, the consequences of that day could have been disastrous.

Fortunately, the lessons from that day have stayed with me. That is—to trust where trust is deserved with questions, and to avoid recklessly following others just because they want to show you something of interest.

Relationships

Deuteronomy 6:5 Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

Last week, we held a single's seminar with about 45 single soldiers. The purpose of the seminar was to give out information on how to avoid marrying a jerk (ette) or in other words how to use your mind without losing your heart. The crux of the program was in examining what love is and how attachments are formed. The five attachments that describe love defined at the seminar were: know, trust, rely, commit and touch. As these attachments progress, in balance, then marriages tend to be more secure.⁸⁹

In thinking about relationships, the opposite of love is hate. There are many opposites in life: love and hate, anger and joy, happiness and sadness. Perhaps, it is the human condition to experience opposites so that we can, as reasoning beings, make correct choices.

A good friend of mine and his wife are in the process of a separation. In trying to solve their problems, they were not able to get past the hurt and were not able to see the other's point of view. Even though it is too late to go back to the beginning of the relationship: what one can learn from their pain is that they married quickly without really getting to know each other. What were their own families like? Were they compatible with one another? What were they like in other relationships? Were their life goals similar? What type of attitudes did they have?

Principles such as Deuteronomy 6:5 "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might," could help. Our human tendency is to focus on our own pain and hurt. It is difficult to look at problems and to think rationally when we are hurt.

A focus on others might help us in our endeavor to solve life's difficult problems. It can also liberate us so that we can examine ourselves without letting the pain and hurt get in the way.

Love and lasting relationships will continue to be a highly sought after commodity. Hopefully, we all can have lasting and caring relationships.

September 11th

Romans 12:12,21 Rejoice in hope; patient in tribulation; persevere in constant prayer. 21. Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Today we celebrate the 5th anniversary of September 11th when tragedy struck the United States. Many of us watched in horror that day as the World Trade Center's twin towers crumbled due to a terrorist attack.

On that fateful morning, more than 3,000 people lost their lives and that event, more than any other, plunged us into war. Today, President Bush and his wife Laura, along with other top officials of the government, laid a wreath in pools of water where the World Trade towers stood. Many gave tearful tributes and said prayers, while others quietly reflected on what took place on that dreadful day.

President Bush said, "It's hard not to think about the people who lost their lives on September the 11th, 2001. You know, you see the relatives of those who still grieve, and I just wish there was some way we could make them whole. So, tomorrow's going to be a day of sadness for a lot of people."⁹⁰

Yes, today will be a day of sadness as we remember. Many who live close to where the event occurred said that they would go to ground zero to reflect and to not forget. I wonder, in our lives, if we don't all need a ground zero? Can we go somewhere, where we can take the time to get away from the business of life and reflect on what we are doing? Is there somewhere we can go to reflect on what is important and where we are going?

Yes, today as a nation we will journey again to ground zero and as a country, remember. Perhaps it is not a bad idea to have a personal ground zero in our lives where we can reflect on where we are going, how we can get there, and what the cost will be.

Sunday

1 Corinthians 15: 55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

All of us at one time or another feel sad, suffer disappointment, embarrassment or get angry. We may experience tragedies such as a death of a loved one. We may have just gone through a divorce or a relationship that we are involved in is not going well. As career soldiers, there can be the pass-over for rank or not receiving the assignment we want. We can have a chain of command that we feel is not fair. It can be anything from poor health, unhealthy relationships, to harmful addictions.

I remember the first time that I was yelled at by a commander. We had been in the field for about three weeks. The soldiers were tired and we were in the midst of company training evaluations. We had just finished a 25-mile road march and we were getting ready to go through a series of tactical battle drills. As the battalion commander was getting ready to sleep for the night, I walked by his sleeping area and innocently asked if we were training the Soldiers too hard. He replied with a sudden burst of anger, screaming at me that we can never train too hard. All I could remember was seeing his eye-brows twitching and the veins at the side of his head extended. I felt embarrassed and hurt that he would reply in such a volatile manner without discussion. He later apologized and we had that discussion. But, it was not a good day for me.

All of us will have our Fridays but there will always be a Sunday. On Friday, Christ walked the Villa Dolorosa (the painful way) where he journeyed to Golgotha (the place of the skull). Here he was crucified, his clothes were bartered for, and He was raised on a Cross where he said, *“Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* He died. He was buried and He rose on the third day.

So all of us may have Fridays in our lives, but the good news is that Sunday will come. May we all look forward to that day.

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

*I looked over Jordan and what did I see
Coming for to carry me home
A band of angels coming after me
Coming for to carry me home.
Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home
Swing low, sweet chariot
Coming for to carry me home. (Tanah Keeta)⁹¹*

This morning I was listening to a CD of one my favorite songs, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.” It was an African American spiritual first sung in 1862 by slaves yearning to be free. The slaves' faith and belief in God, with their trust in the Bible instilled in them a belief that one day they would indeed be free. *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* is still popular today because its message is timeless.

The feeling of the song, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, when sung gives one hope in a world where many injustices still occur. Its message is one of faith in God. We can still, today, like the slaves of old respond to its message—one of Christian love. We can all be inspired by its lyrics. They are performed in a blues/jazz like style that when sung the music, and the rhythm of the beat, inspires and uplift ones soul.

Our souls can still feel heavenly bound, even in our darkest hours and we can all have that belief that one day all will be well.

The Broken Statue of a Paratrooper

Isaiah 1:18 Come now, let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet; they can be as white as wool.

In my office is a statue of a paratrooper rigged with combat gear and ready to exit from an airplane. On it is an inscription that denotes the time that I spent as an XVIII Airborne Corps Artillery chaplain. I had this statue for a few years. I did not display it prominently in my office because it had been broken off at the boots by a Soldier who accidentally knocked it off my bookshelf. I liked the statue even though it laid on its side in my bookshelf collecting dust for a few years. Periodically, I would look at it and say to myself that I needed to fix it.

Last week with renewed energy and a desire to get it fixed, I contemplated how I would do it. So with a plan in hand on Saturday, I went to the store, bought some epoxy glue, some black paint, a brush, and brought a drill and a sharp knife to the office to begin the work.

First, I chipped off the boots and dug out the base from the statue. I then drilled two holes in the base and stuck the statue in the holes to where the pants bloused to meet the boots. Epoxy glue was then added to the drilled holes. I then placed the statue in the glue and waited for it to harden. When it had hardened, I painted the glue black so that it matched the rest of the statue. The paratrooper now stands tall. He looks like he landed in mud up to his ankles. He now has a prominent place back on my bookshelf.

Like the statue of the paratrooper that had gathered dust, sometimes we need to fix our lives. We may have problems that we are ignoring or things about us that need to change. Perhaps, we need to repent or try to look at things differently. We might want to develop a plan, and execute it, so that we can get back on track. It may not be exactly how we want it, but after we have lain on our side for a while, to stand tall and to be back ready to exit from whatever platform to meet life's challenges can be exhilarating.

The Buck Knife

2 Thessalonians 2:15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

A few years ago my father-in-law gave me a buck knife. He, who had served with the Americal Division during World War II, knew the importance of a good knife, especially since I was spending a great deal of my time in the field with the 7th Infantry Division.

The Buck knife, developed by Hoyt Buck in 1902, went through a hardening process that would temper the steel by heating it so that it would hold an edge. The knives were legendary for a trustworthy product.⁹²

My buck knife spent many years with me until I gave it to my son when he became a member of the 11th Calvary Regiment out of Las Vegas, Nevada.

The hardening of the Buck knife is similar to what many of us go through in life. We are buffeted with life's challenges that harden us through life's furnace. When we stay close to the Lord and use him for strength, we become tempered through experience so that we can continue to carry on – and become spiritually battle hardened.

Also when we become tired or dull, we can take out the stone of faith to sharpen our skills of prayer and scriptures to return ourselves to peak performance. Like our spiritual lives, we can remain faithful, steadfast and firm in the spiritual truths that we have been taught.

This was brought home the other day when I was talking to a couple of officers, each convicted in their hearts, about the firmness of their beliefs.

It was refreshing to see men who are not shifted by the daily challenges of life and who are not influenced by the philosophies of the world, but who stand firm in the faith which they have been taught and believe. They are like the Buck knife—spiritually tempered, and ready to face life.

The 1/4 Ton Jeep

Isaiah 40:31 But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Willy's and Ford Motor Company designed and built the ¼ ton jeep for the military. Under the direction of Charles E. Sorensen, over 600,000 of these vehicles were built and produced for the fighting men and women of WWII. It was such a reliable vehicle that its last production date for the military was 1969, and it was not taken out of the military's inventory until the 1980's.

This military vehicle was known for its versatility and ability to get the job done. Many owed their life to its indestructibility. One story of how the name jeep came into being was that GPW, its nomenclature, was slurred to sound like jeep. However, the more accurate history of the name is taken from the service school manual for US Army Instructors on Ford US Army Vehicles (1941) which says that "G" stood for Government and "P" means 80 inch wheelbase Reconnaissance car and the "W" for Willy's.⁹³

The jeep, for all its versatility had one drawback: it was difficult to heat. Normally one would take a piece of three inch hose tape it to the right heating duct and put it under a wool blanket over ones lap. The feeling of heat on a cold morning with the cold air rushing by one's head was indescribable. The driver had a small heating port that would blow on him/her.

Like the jeep, so in life, there are many models or ways of doing things that are effective. The jeep was an effective model of small vehicle transportation for over 40 years.

In the military, discipline is an important vehicle for order. Physical Fitness is an important model for survivability on the battle field, and mental toughness is an important principle of the "warrior's ethos." Spiritual fitness is also an important and effective vehicle for survivability. Those who use it as a model for life, find that they are better able to run and not be weary as they face life's difficulties, and walk and not faint when the going gets tough.

The jeep was a great mainstay of the military. Spirituality will always be a combat multiplier for the military and a positive model and vehicle for good.

The Field

Ecclesiastes 9:11 - I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift.

I remember my first time in the field. I was a member of the 13th Combat Engineers Light battalion, 7th Infantry Division, and we were going through a platoon ARTEP (Army Training and Evaluation Program). I will never forget standing next to the Command Sergeant Major of the unit and asking him if we were going to get sleeping bags for the field training exercise. He laughed and said, "Chaplain, that's why you were issued a poncho liner." Needless to say, I learned how to use that poncho liner so that I could stay warm. I also learned how to tie the bottom of my liner with parachute cord (lightweight nylon rope called dummy cord) so that the warmth of my body would not seep out. And, I observed how to make a quick tent from my ruck sack by throwing my wet weather poncho over the top of my ruck, securing it tightly with dummy cord while lying slightly on an incline so that the water would run down the hill and not pool up underneath me.

My first few years in the military were years of learning, and of getting to know a new culture. I was also trying to figure out a system that is geared towards war, and was getting used to military jargon, field craft, customs, history and that never ending routine of physical training.

After all these years, the military is now like an old shoe that is comfortable, one that has seen many miles. Even though I am not as quick or agile as I was as a young chaplain, I can at least understand the system in which I have chosen to serve.

Two weeks ago when we were in Osan, Korea, we participated in an exercise called Ulchi Focus Lens) For many of us, it was a computer-generated exercise. One day during the exercise, I had the privilege of visiting the 35th Air Defense Artillery Brigade Tactical Operation Center. I spent the day visiting soldiers, their operation, and one of the patriot batteries. It was a hot day, but worthwhile. As the day ended, I realized that I wasn't as young as I use to be, and that I was very tired. The scripture from Hebrews 12:1 came to mind ... "*Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*"

Here Paul, the apostle, is referring to our time here on earth. For many, it is a race. Perhaps in this scripture, Paul is looking at life less as a race more as a journey: one in which we start at birth, we age, and then we

endure to the end. Hopefully, during this journey, God is not left out of the race. We learn so that we can adapt We progress so that we can grow. We are patient so that we can overcome, and finish the race that is set before us.

Tragedy

Isaiah 41:10 Fear thou not: for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

It is sad to see someone who has lost all their worldly possessions. When you witness this, it makes you appreciate what you have. As one young military spouse looked on as her worldly possessions went up in smoke, she commented that she was grateful that she had her family.

In the course of an hour's talk, she kept saying how thankful she was, not only to God, but for the fact that she and her son had escaped the fire that destroyed their home on base.

Tragedy can strike quickly in all of our lives. Many times, it is difficult to understand. Our response is usually to shudder, and utter a silent thank you to God that it did not happen to us.

When times have been hard for me, I like the following scripture: *Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee. Yea, I will help thee; yea, I will hold thee with the right hand of my righteousness (Isaiah 41:30).*

Worship with Father Anderson

3 John 1:4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

We had been in Honduras for about a week, when Father Anderson asked me if I would like to coordinate a Catholic service with the 9th Honduran Battalion. Chaplain Anderson was somewhat of a legend in Central America. He had been a Priest in South America and had conducted services for the poor for many years. He was a kindly man with a bull dog for a pet which the soldiers loved at the Pamerola Air Base—later renamed Soto Cano.

I was a young captain, and felt honored when Chaplain Andersen asked me to coordinate a religious service with the Honduran battalion that was predominately Catholic. He suggested that I invite my soldiers from Charlie Company of the 5/21 Infantry Battalion. We had just recently deployed from Fort Ord to Honduras so I was excited to get out and see a bit of the country. I readily agreed and coordinated the service with the Honduran Battalion Commander. I told the Commander that we could have the service on Sunday morning at 1000, and to please invite those who would like to attend. He agreed.

When Sunday rolled around, Father Anderson and I showed up for religious services at the compound of the 9th Honduran Battalion. Much to my surprise over 200 soldiers were lined up four deep waiting for the Mass to begin. They were probably ordered to be there.

I was a bit surprised. Worship services with our American soldiers were not mandatory, but voluntary. I had about fifteen soldiers from Charlie Company. Father Anderson chuckled at my discomfort and began the Mass. I translated from Spanish to English for my soldiers so that they could follow the Mass. It was a short religious service and the homily was brief. Communion took about a half hour as the hosts were dipped into the wine and the soldiers partook of the Eucharist.

I will never forget the look on Father Andersen's face as we finished the service. He smiled at me and said that, "they do things differently in Honduras."

What I saw at the end of the service made me feel good. Soldiers from two different cultures worshipping together according to the dictates of their hearts. Of course, I wondered about the mandatory attendance of the Honduran soldiers. They seemed to enjoy the Mass and I noticed, after the Mass, how they enjoyed talking and joking with the Catholic Priest. As I ended the day, a scripture came to mind, *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*

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About the Author

Chaplain (COL) Vance P. Theodore (Ret.) was born in Salt Lake City, Utah in 1953. He was commissioned a 1st Lieutenant in 1983. Chaplain Theodore began his career as a battalion chaplain with the 7th Infantry Division (L) at Fort Ord, California. During his 25-year career, he served with the 7th, 1st, and 3rd infantry divisions, and XVIII Airborne Corps. He was also a paratrooper and instructor with the School of Americas now known as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation at Fort Benning, GA. His various assignments took him to places such as Fort Ord, CA, Fort Benning, GA, Fort Riley, KS, Fort Monmouth, NJ, Fort Bragg, NC, Germany, Panama, Honduras, Korea, Alaska, Hawaii, Japan, and Iraq.

Vance is married to the former Christine Clark of Berkeley, California. They are the proud parents of five children: Clark, Heather, Jess, Benjamin, and Logan. They also have three wonderful daughter-in-laws, Ashley, Holley, and Maren, and one son-in-law, Andrew. They have eleven grandchildren.

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