



AND *they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death."* (Rev 12:11)

I place no higher premium on any qualities of character more than upon Courage and Sacrifice. They are the hallmarks of the soldier dedicated to his country and the profession of arms. Sacrifice, in particular, demonstrates some of the highest virtues that exemplified our Lord and Savior.

I will recount only a few stellar examples of courage and sacrifice to give our souls pause for thought and reflection.

The first example is of a young color bearer of sixteen years of age who participated in the bloody Battle of Shiloh which began on 6 April 1862 near Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee. The Confederate forces had attacked the Union Army of the Tennessee under General Ulysses S. Grant. On the first day of the battle, the Confederate assault drove the Northern Army from the field, but with heavy casualties on both sides. At the beginning of the charge across fairly open pastureland, the Confederates came under a barrage of artillery and light arms fires from the retreating Union troops. The entire Confederate line hesitated and many in the line sought the minimal cover of the high grass and logs along the way.

The young Color Bearer arose from the field and began to advance toward the enemy lines seemingly oblivious to the grave danger of grapeshot and musket fire. The veteran Confederate soldiers hugging the ground called to him to retire the Colors back

to the line; but the young Color Bearer instead drove the Colors into the ground well ahead of the line and shouted back, "I cannot. The Colors are fixed. Move up to the Colors." This inspired a continuation of the advance, but the young boy was shot as he clung to the Colors. I believe Christ has likewise called us forward to His Colors instead of having us cringe for cover in the tall weeds of this world.

Another military example of my point today occurred in Vietnam in a small village not far from the city of Hue. An infantry company had been ordered to the village a week earlier to 'pacify' its inhabitants. A perimeter defense had been established. Of course, the terror inflicted on any villagers who befriended the Americans was quite successful at de-pacifying them once the Americans withdrew. A medical aide station was set up and many locals given limited medical treatment. One soldier demonstrated kindness to the villagers, and even gave a keepsake to a young 14 year old girl. It may have been the only act of kindness she had recently received.

Early on the morning of their planned evacuation of the village, while it was yet dark, a Vietcong squad struck through the perimeter defenses and began lobbing grenades at the inner defense works occupied by soldiers. One soldier jumped the barricade and began a chase after one of the assailants. Little did he know that sappers had placed explosive booby traps in that very field. The enemy knew their location, and the villagers had been warned of them, but these were reserved for the personal use of maiming Americans. The soldier stepped on one of the explosive devices which triggered a high impact shell which blew his legs off at the knees. He lay helpless in the field calling for help. The medics considered the situation too dangerous to try to approach in the darkness, but the 14 year old girl ran out to the soldier dodging the booby traps in place. When she arrived by his side, she urged him to follow her. "I have no legs," the soldier shouted to the girl. "I can't move!" The young girl grabbed the soldier by both hands, placed them over her shoulder, and said, "That's OK, soldier. I be yo' legs." And she dragged him back to the lines of safety. I need not remind any veteran of the Vietnam War what fate likely awaited the young girl for this act of mercy when the VC came back into the village. *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.* (Luke 9:23-24)

Another incident of which I have first-hand knowledge occurred during the last days of the Islamic revolution in Iran. The United States State Department had ordered an evacuation of dependents from Iran; but it was impossible to convince any commercial airliner to enter Iranian airspace due to the danger of losing their aircraft. But we did procure a certain 'commercial' airliner to come to pick up dependents. The identity of that plane must remain confidential. When 269 women and children were boarded at Esfahan International Airport, the aircraft began to taxi for takeoff. But the Islamic hordes had learned of the planned departure and came over the walls by the thousands and surrounded the aircraft on the tarmac demanding the "American spies get out!" It could have been a tragic situation except for a courageous Airfield Commander, LTC Naseroleslam of the Iranian Army taking hold of the matter. He came out on the tarmac with a loud speaker and told the mobs to move back and the aircraft would return to tie-down and the Americans would disembark. This they did.

LTC Naseroleslam went up to the tower and told the ATC controllers to tell the American plane to taxi out onto the runway and make an immediate takeoff. They refused out of fear of the Muslim horde. But LTC Naseroleslam grabbed the mic and issued the clearance – the aircraft departed as directed. What price did LTC Naseroleslam pay for this act of mercy and courage? The mob found out what trick he had played on them. They took him and beat him to a pulp. They pulled out his beard and hair. They locked him away in a prison fit for pigs. *I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them*

that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. (Isaiah 50:6) My Iranian friend could easily have been killed for this gesture of grace and mercy; but his relatives were able to 'buy him out' of prison soon after. He appropriated to himself a US Army Chinook helicopter and flew his family to Incirlik Airbase in Turkey and received asylum from the US Consul there. He is now in Alabama and I have witnessed his entire family coming to Christ.

Courage is multiplied by the power of ten when it is acted upon in self-sacrifice. When was the last time you took courageous action in sacrifice for another, whether large or small? Perhaps your sterling metal has yet to be tested, but rest assured, the times will come when it shall be. *"And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you."* (Matt 10:18-20 (KJV))