



NOW when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, ⁷ There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. ⁸ But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? ⁹ For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. ¹⁰ When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, *Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. ¹¹ For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. ¹² For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. ¹³ Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.* (Matt 26:6-13)

You may never have heard of a young soldier named Rodger Young, but one platoon of infantrymen owe their lives to him; and so do we owe much gratitude to him for making our freedoms more sure by his service to our Country on a far away island in the Pacific Basin. I believe it to be a biblical principle to remember those who have sacrificed their resources and lives on our behalf. Jesus justifies the remembrance of personal virtue in the profound demonstration of honor and worship paid him by the woman who anointed His divine Head with precious ointment at the house of Simon at Bethany. So, I believe appropriate that we should honor those heroes of the past who have given their “last full measure of devotion” (Lincoln) in the preservation of our Constitutional Liberties.

My mother used to sing, among many others, a song about some fellow named ‘Rodger Young,’ in the mid- to late forties. At that time, I had no idea who Rodger Young was, or of what he did. But the tune, “The Ballad of Rodger Young,” a ballad written in his memory by Frank Loesser and first performed in 1945, lived in my memory for years to come.

How surprised I was to hear the tune played by the West Point Military Band on the Plain as a cadet at West Point almost twenty years later. It had come to be viewed as the Infantry song. My interests were spurred by that experience both out of curiosity as well as a compulsion to memorize the historical backgrounds of all the marches that the military band played, or starve at the evening meal.

I believe it is very sad that so few Americans remember him and what he did for us. Time does not diminish the debt of gratitude for the sacrifices of love and death made for us by simple men and women who were distinguished as heroes in an instant of time - perhaps as surprising to themselves as to us for their courage. Here are the words to the Ballad:

The Ballad of Rodger Young

Frank Loesser

Oh, they've got no time for glory in the Infantry. Oh, they've got no use for praises loudly sung. But in every soldier's heart in all the Infantry Shines the name, shines the name of Rodger Young.

(Shines the name, Rodger Young! Fought and died for the men he marched among. To the everlasting glory of the Infantry. Lives the story of Private Rodger Young.)

Caught in ambush lay a company of riflemen Just grenades against machine guns in the gloom. Caught in ambush till this one of twenty riflemen Volunteered, volunteered to meet his doom.

Volunteered, Rodger Young! Fought and died for the men he marched among. In the everlasting annals of the Infantry Glows the last deed of Private Rodger Young.

(It was he who drew the fire of the enemy That a company of men might live to fight. And before the deadly fire of the enemy Stood the man, stood the man we hail tonight.)

On the island of New Georgia in the Solomons Stands a simple wooden cross alone to tell. That beneath the silent coral of the Solomons Sleeps a man, sleeps a man remembered well.

Sleeps a man, Rodger Young! Fought and died for the men he marched among. In the everlasting spirit of the Infantry Breathes the spirit of Private Rodger Young.

The ballad names Rodger Young as a private soldier, and indeed he died as a private soldier; but he was sent to the Solomon Islands as a Staff Sergeant and squad leader. So, why was he demoted? That is part of his heroic tale.

Rodger Young was a shy and diminutive young man born in Tiffin, Ohio, on April 28, 1918, from which he joined the National Guard at the age of twenty. Having been injured in a basketball game in high school, Rodger suffered a partial loss of hearing that increased with time.

His National Guard unit was activated during World War Two and Rodger found himself and his National Guard unit being posted to the Solomon Islands (Guadecanal) where thousands of lives were given in fighting the Imperial Forces of the Empire of Japan. Prior to being posted to a forward battle line on the Island of New Georgia, Young discovered that his hearing was almost completely gone. He worried for his performance of duty – feared that his lack of proper hearing might jeopardize his performance as squad leader for the squad of men who were his friends from his own hometown. He reported to the Commanding Officer and requested demotion to private because he could not hear. The Commander believed it to be a ploy to being sent home; however, the medical staff confirmed his loss of hearing. The Commander informed

Young that he would be sent home. But Rodger insisted that he remain with his platoon to which the Commander reluctantly acceded.

Having been posted to New Georgia for the offensive, Young's platoon was on a mission to reconnoiter the enemy deployments on New Georgia. On July 31, 1943, at around 4 PM, his platoon came under heavy machine gun fire from a forward gunner's position overlooking the elephant grass through which the platoon was moving. The entire platoon was pinned down and could neither advance nor withdraw. Darkness was only a few hours away at which time the platoon knew the Japanese would be searching them out. Their situation was perilous. The entire platoon could have perished that night.

As the platoon leader evaluated the impossible odds, a soldier began crawling from the rear toward the head of the unit. It was Rodger Young. As he crawled past the platoon leader, the lieutenant tried to grab his leg to hold him back; but Rodger shook loose and continued forward past the forward elements of the platoon. The lieutenant repeatedly called for Young to come back; but Rodger looked back and grinned, "Sorry, Sir, you know I am hard of hearing."

Rodger advanced to within fifty feet of the machine gun nest. Knowing full well the consequences, Rodger Young raised up on his knees, one of which had been hit by gunfire, and hurled a grenade into the nest as the machine gunner's bullets ripped through his chest.

Now I know the meaning of a song about Rodger Young – a young fellow whose mention was just a name to me in the past. Private Rodger Young represents perhaps thousands of heroes of whom we may never know, or hear about. Heroic actions have been performed on battlefields in which every member perished and no one remained to remind us of the great sacrifices made.

Private Rodger Young was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor on 6 January 1944. He knew nothing of the recognition, but we who enjoy our freedoms do remember, now that we are informed of his story.

There are a number of parks and military cemeteries that recognize Young's sacrifice. One such park was named for Rodger Young in Erie, Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, though the park is known as Young Park, the installation plaque only mentions the name of the mayor of Erie and the city council – Young's name is omitted leaving the children who play there in ignorance of his valor, courage, and sacrifice. Remember him!

The tumult and the shouting dies;
The Captains and the Kings depart:
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

Far-called, our navies melt away;
On dune and headland sinks the fire:
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

~ from RECESSIONAL, Rudyard Kipling