Saving Private Ryan

A Few Related Thoughts…

“You have been bought at a great price!”

—St. Paul (1 Corinthians 6:20)

“Know and appreciate and forever be humbly grateful to those both dead and alive who did it for you.”

—Ernie Pyle, combat journalist with troops in Normandy, June 12, 1944

“What has happened to me and my battalion would be scoffed at… as being impossible. Why the few of us left alive—are alive—is something to figure out in church. I've seen as many of my very best friends killed beside me… I never in my wildest dreams knew such terror could grip your very soul. God alone brought me safely through this far—of that, I'm sure.”

—Capt. George Montgomery, 82nd Airborne Div.,

U.S. Army, D-Day, in a letter to his fiancé

“There are no atheists in foxholes.”

— (Common expression)[[1]](#footnote-1)

“The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you… Let us all beseech the blessings of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.”

—Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower

Supreme Commander, Allied Expiditionary Force,

in official D-Day address to all Allied servicemen

“I’ve done all I can. Now it is up to you.”

—Eisenhower, to a soldier on the eve of D-Day[[2]](#footnote-2)

“Lord, I pray, please let me do everything right… I really think I’m too young for this.”

“Lord, Thy Will be done. But if I’m to die, please help me die like a man.”

—Pvt. Dwayne Burns & Sgt. Elmo Jones, 505th & 508th Parachute Infantry Regiments,

U.S. Army, immediately prior to their jumps on D-Day[[3]](#footnote-3)

“While I am absent from home, fighting the battles of our country,… endeavoring to secure for each and every citizen of every race, the rights guaranteed to us in the Declaration of Independence… I have children growing up that will be worthy of the rights that I trust will be left for them.”

—47th Ohio Regiment officer, in a letter

to his 10-year-old son, U.S. Civil War[[4]](#footnote-4)

“Americans at the end of the twentieth century are also children of that heritage. Whether we are worthy of it will remain a matter of constant re-examination.”

—James McPherson, military historian

“We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread... They offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances—to choose one's own way.”

—Viktor E. Frankl, ***Man’s Search for Meaning***

“I shall have done my duty to the utmost of my ability. No man can do more, and no one calling himself a man could do less… You must not grieve for me, for if you really believe in religion and all that it entails, that would be hypocrisy... The universe is so vast and so ageless that the life of one man can only be justified by the measure of his sacrifice. We are sent to this world to acquire a personality and a character to take with us that can never be taken from us… With the final test of war, I consider my character fully developed. Thus, at my early age, my earthly mission is already fulfilled, and I am prepared to die… You will live in peace and freedom, and I shall have directly contributed to that, so here again my life will not have been in vain.”

—V.A.F. Rosewarne, British RAF pilot, in his last letter

to his mother before his death in World War II[[5]](#footnote-5)

“It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have been done better. The credit belongs to the man in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood… who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who have never known neither victory or defeat.”

—U. S. President Theodore Roosevelt

“It’s good to be reminded that there are such men… We sometimes forget, I think, that you can manufacture weapons, and you can purchase ammunition, but you can’t buy valor, and you can’t pull heroes off an assembly line.”

—Sgt. John Ellery, veteran of Omaha Beach, D-Day

16th Regiment, 29th Infantry Div., U.S. Army[[6]](#footnote-6)

“The true-life stories of Christian heroes resemble our own experience: they fought and won; they fought and lost. And then, repentant, they returned to the fight.”

—St. Josemaria Escrivá (***Christ is Passing By***, 77)

“Are we worth dying for? Are we worth being crucified for? God’s answer is “Yes”. Our question to ourselves must be, “Is God worth living for?”

—Bishop Robert W. Finn, Diocese of Kansas City--St. Joseph

# For further reading…

***D-Day, June 6, 1944*** by Stephen Ambrose (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

***The Longest Day: The Classic Epic of D-Day*** by Cornelius Ryan (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

Maj. James A. Harvey III, “Catholic Military Chaplains: America’s Forgotten Heroes”. <http://www.tfp.org/tfp-home/focus-on-history/catholic-army-chaplains-americas-forgotten-heroes.html>.

***Gaudium et Spes***, #24. Documents of Vatican II.

1. Attributed variously to Fr. William T. Cummings, a Catholic military chaplain in the Battle of Bataan in; Lt. Col. Warren J. Clear, also at Bataan; and Ernie Pyle, a combat journalist who reported from the frontlines in Europe, North Africa, and the Pacific islands, where he died in battle. Variations of the phrase were used long before World War II. See <http://listserv.linguistlist.org/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0609D&L=ads-l&P=15696>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Quoted in Stephen E Ambrose, ***D-Day: June 6: 1944***, 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Quoted in Ambrose, 196; 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Capt. Ephraim S. Holloway, quoted in James M. McPherson, ***For Cause & Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War***, 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Full transcript available at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Airman%27s_Letter_to_His_Mother> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Quoted in Ambrose, 359. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)