**WAR STORIES**

***The Brotherhood of Christian Soldiers***

I love the story of America. Reading history books about my beloved nation teaches me great lessons I have both learned and carried through my life that have made a difference in who I am. As Spanish philosopher George Santayana famously said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” I don’t want to be doomed, so I study history, both secular and religious.

One such story that has been burned into my memory that has helped me in my Christian walk is taken from the Revolutionary War. Most Americans know, or at least should know, of the Continental Army under General George Washington being camped at Valley Forge during the bitter winter of 1777-1778 in the war with England. The ragged army was freezing to death with virtually no clothes and little food. Hundreds of young men died that winter of influenza, typhus, typhoid and dysentery. One night a teenager in that army was standing as sentry. He had no stockings to keep his legs and feet warm and no blanket to hold off the sub-zero blast of wind. Like so many he knew he would probably die at his post that night bravely doing his duty.

That soldier suddenly saw a very young but very distinguished looking officer approach him who wore the insignia of a Major General. He stopped in front of the nearly frozen teenager and did something almost unheard of in that day. He took the boy’s musket and said, “Go to my hut and there you will find stockings, a blanket and a fire. Warm yourself, then bring the blanket to me. Meanwhile I will keep guard for you.” The soldier obeyed and after getting warm he returned to his post, handing the General his blanket. The officer cut his blanket in two and gave half to the boy.

Fast forward 46 years to 1824. A banquet was being given in honor of the Marquis de Lafayette who had returned from home in France to revisit the battlefields of his youth when he had fought alongside George Washington to secure the freedom for America. It was partly through his powerful influence that France came to the aid of the young nation fighting for its liberty. At that party walked in an old looking man in his 60’s with gray hair and bent back, carrying an ancient musket and a ragged blanket over his shoulder. He stepped up to the Marquis and suddenly stood erect and gave the old Continental Army salute. Lafayette immediately returned it. He then learned who this old man was. “Sir, I know you don’t remember me but you saved my life one bitter winter night by taking this musket and then giving me this blanket. I thank you sir.” Tears poured down the faces of both men.

War stories. Only those who have fought on battlefields, or in foxholes, or from naval combat would understand each other and what they experienced in days of war. I have sat mesmerized listening to soldiers tell of their days of fear when the bullets whizzed, the bombs exploded, the fire burned, and the sights and smells of death were everywhere. While I can sympathize, I cannot empathize, for I was not there. I’m on the outside looking in. It is their war stories, not mine.

But as I watch them tell those stories when in the company of others who are veterans, you can feel the “esprit de corps” (i.e. feeling of fellowship and pride shared by a common cause together). It is a sacred thing to watch. Such a fellowship is to be envied as we feel that “tie that binds” such veterans who have endured great struggles together.

Few of us have been in war. We have no war stories to tell, no “band of brothers” experiences to share. Or do we?

Are not disciples of Christ called to enlist in the most historic moment in all of history? Are we not soldiers called into combat “*against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*” (Eph. 6:12)?

Are we not to “*Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses*” (I Tim. 6:12)?

Have we not been “*enlisted as a soldier*” and then called to “*endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*” (2 Tim. 2:3-4)?

Knowing this old soldier was about to fight his last battle after many years of campaigning, General Paul began telling his war stories to Lieutenant Timothy who had been a “*fellow soldier*” and “*faithful son*” through many battles together. With memories flooding his soul from battles fought and won he wrote his young comrade these final words:

*“The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing”* (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

When General Douglas MacArthur gave his farewell address to the cadets at West Point on May 12, 1962, after having fought in World War 1, World War 2, and the Korean War, he said to these fresh faces who were about to enter into the Vietnam War: “The shadows are lengthening for me. The twilight is here. My days of old have vanished — tone and tint. They have gone glimmering through the dreams of things that were. Their memory is one of wondrous beauty, watered by tears and coaxed and caressed by the smiles of yesterday. I listen then, but with thirsty ear, for the witching melody of faint bugles blowing reveille, of far drums beating the long roll. In my dreams I hear again the crash of guns, the rattle of musketry, the strange, mournful mutter of the battlefield. But in the evening of my memory alwaysº I come back to West Point. Always there echoes and re-echoes: ***Duty, Honor, Country***.”

Only those who have fought in battles for Christ will have war stories to tell. I don’t want to be on the outside looking in when Paul, John, Timothy and so many others are telling their stories in heaven. May God give me the courage and faith to “*fight the good fight of faith*” so that I can be among that band of brothers sitting at the nail-scarred feet of Captain Jesus.

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