

It Was for Freedom

The young man in the framed photograph below is not me—although I will admit he bears a resemblance. Allow me to introduce you to my uncle, James Young Jones Jr., who served in the United States Army immediately after he graduated from high school in West Point, Georgia, in 1943.

I wish I could tell you that Uncle James took me fishing or taught me to play football at family reunions, but I never knew him. He was killed in action on December 26, 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge. He was only 20.

He was buried in Belgium, but when the war ended the Army moved his remains to a cemetery in Georgia. My mother has his Purple Heart medal, along with a letter of condolence that President Roosevelt sent my grandparents.

I have the 48-star flag that was draped over his coffin. His picture is on my dresser. I look at it every day.

We didn't talk much about Uncle James when I was a child because the mention of his name would make my grandmother cry. That made me all the more fascinated with his legacy.

Here was a guy who looked like me and had my same first name. We even shared the Jones cleft chin. Yet he had given his life on one of the most famous battlefields of World War II. When I was a kid I often wondered if I would share Uncle James' courage or if I would have to use it in combat.

Some people consider the death of a young soldier a tragic waste. Filmmaker Michael Moore, for example, has used his mock documentary Fahrenheit 9/11 to suggest that the soldiers who are dying in the Iraq war are the needless casualties of a conflict that he claims is only about oil, corporate greed and President Bush's personal vendetta against Saddam Hussein.

That's insulting to anyone whose relatives died to protect the world from tyrants. Nobody in my family shares Moore's cynical view of the current war on global terrorism. My father—who served in the Navy at the end of World War II—taught me that some people have to lay down their lives to preserve peace.

I know the subject of war is a touchy one, even among people of faith. I have some Christian friends who are opposed to the conflict in Iraq and others who believe that military action is never justified. Judging by the letters Charisma received during the last election, our readers are divided on this issue too.

I hate war, but God sometimes ordains military force to deal with wicked people. The apostle Paul told the Romans that government is “a minister of God” that “bears the sword” and acts as “an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil” (Rom. 13:4, NASB).

God used the military of the United States, along with other Allied forces, to stop the spread of Nazi terror in Europe in the 1940s and to restrain Japan's plan for world domination. More than 450,000 American soldiers died in that conflict. If we had adopted Michael Moore's views during World War II, most of Europe would be speaking German today.

More than 1,200 American soldiers have been killed in the Iraq war. When I watched the TV reports of Iraqis voting in January—to participate in the most significant democratic election in the history of the Middle East—I knew our soldiers didn't die in vain. Their sacrifice shouldn't be mocked or trivialized.

Was it God's will for President Bush to overthrow Saddam? Were we supposed to ignore the fact that this barbaric Iraqi dictator had shot, gassed or tortured more than a million helpless people? History will prove, I believe, that U.S. intervention was both moral and necessary.

I am not suggesting that we should rush to war on flimsy evidence or that every action the U.S. military has taken in Iraq is justified. All Americans should be outraged by the behavior of the few out-of-control soldiers who abused the prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo—and Christians should be the most vocal in demanding accountability for those atrocities.

But those abuses don't negate our responsibility to defend freedom when righteousness demands that we act. Somebody has to fight.

Somebody also has to pray. It irks me that cynicism about the war has infected many Christians—and weakened our commitment to pray for our soldiers.

I hope our cover story—which shows how God protected a Marine battalion in the early days of the conflict—will inspire you to intercede for those on the front lines.

There are many young men and women like my Uncle James in Iraq now, trying to protect a fragile Iraqi democracy from terrorists. Let's honor all our soldiers—and pray for their protection and swift return home.