



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

What has happened to Christian manhood?



A picture of Pastor Ovadal's father, four months after spending fifteen months in three Nazi POW camps.

Ralph Ovadal pastors Pilgrims Covenant Church, Monroe, Wisconsin, USA and also hosts The Heart of the Matter radio programme. The broadcast includes a short news and commentary segment. The rest of the seventy-three-minute programme features a wide range of guests from many different nations discussing a broad range of issues.

Our brother's stand is biblical and non-ecumenical. While many important matters on this programme are discussed, it is especially concerned with those things which affect Christian liberty and "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

The following article is taken from his e-mail "Newsletter".

What has happened to Christian manhood?

"Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the LORD do that which seemeth him good," 2 Samuel 10:12.

What can explain the sad state of Christian manhood today? Why are so few willing to honorably serve, let alone sacrifice or risk anything for the cause of our Lord? Why are so few willing to do their duty for the King of Kings and His heavenly kingdom?

The sacrifice and service by unbelievers on behalf of earthly kingdoms and temporal liberty ought to make us blush by comparison. Here is a picture of my dad, four months after spending fifteen months in three Nazi POW camps, including Stalag Luft III during the "great escape." Dad was on two forced marches, one during the worst German winter in fifty years. He was transported on grossly overloaded boxcars two different times (no food, no water, no heat, no facilities; strafing, people deathly sick, etc.). He also spent five days in a Nazi interrogation camp. The last two camps Dad was in were near, too near, military targets; so bombs were constantly falling around the camps and shrapnel coming through them. While he was in Stalag III, one of his friends was shot in the head by the SS while Dad was standing by him. Dad was put in the last camp — which was built for 30,000 — along with 100,000 POWs and political prisoners whom Hitler was planning to use as a bargaining chip and, failing that, liquidate.

Eva Braun actually had a hand in foiling that liquidation plan. It took a fierce battle between SS troops and elements of Patton's 3rd Army to free Dad and those with him on April 29, 1945. The problem was, the POWs were right in the middle of the fight. As Dad put it, "We just laid on the ground and took it from both sides." My dad was flying missions with the 8th Air Force as a tail gunner during the worst time of the war when the Luftwaffe was at its peak. Dad's bomb group had fighter cover for only a portion of each mission and a number of times had no fighter cover at all, such as on a grueling twelve-hour mission to Bordeaux, France. A pilot on that mission said it was worse than the infamous Schweinfurt mission.

The gunners had to fight off wave after wave of fighters all the way in and out. Dad's plane



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sustained damage from enemy fighters a number of times on various missions. Out of eleven missions, it sustained category A flack damage on three, in addition to the mission it was shot down on.

In spite of seeing his friends die in droves, burning to death, being blown apart by flack or by fighters; in spite of seeing B-17s go down in a manner which did not make it possible for anyone to bail out, Dad volunteered for an extra mission. When I asked him why, he simply said, "Because they needed someone."

In 1950, Dad was back in uniform for the Korean War. My dad never joined a veterans' group, and he never talked much about his experiences in the war, much less did he boast about them. He has shunned any praise for what he did, always saying he was just doing his duty.

Even during the war he never put in to be credited for the enemy aircraft he shot down.

Others did that for him, but he had no interest in doing it himself. Recently, I told Dad that the government had a POW medal for him. His response was typical: "Boy, they're giving out medals for everything these days."

As an adult, I was able to get Dad to finally tell me things which his posterity should know. During an unguarded moment, he did relate an incident that I think gives great insight into the character of man it takes to win a war. When he was first captured in January, 1944, Dad was locked up in a cold, bare cell in an old castle. He was deprived of sleep, food, and water for several days as he was interrogated, this prior to being sent to the other interrogation camp I mentioned. Finally, a German guard brought him a cup of hot tea and held it out to him. My nineteen-year-old dad — imprisoned, alone, tired, cold, hungry, thirsty, and thousands of miles from home — looked the guard in the eye and told him, "I don't like tea."

The angry guard threw the tea in Dad's face.

My father did all the things I mentioned and much more while yet an unsaved man. (He was converted to Christ in 1976.) He hazarded his life even though he did not have the blessed assurance Christians have of eternal life. With zeal, courage, and unflagging devotion, he fought a good fight for liberty, family, and country doing above and beyond what was asked of him.

May God send us men with such zeal for His work today. May God raise up young men who will run to the battle, not for fame or fortune, but because the Lord is calling them to be men and because the church "needs someone."

Sadly, there seems to be very few men today, young or otherwise, who will serve the Lord with the courage, tenacity, and zeal with which my dad served his country.

I fear too many of them like tea.

Pastor Ralph Ovadal.