

"Writing the truth
as I see it;
trying not to
offend
those who will
disagree."

The truth as I see it™

Idaho Common Sense™



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“Earn this. Earn it.”

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Who are the men and women we honor each year on Veterans Day? An anonymous person offered the following description – “A veteran is someone who at one point in life wrote a blank check made payable to the United States of America for an amount of ‘up to and including my life.’” What makes them write this check, make this promise, show this love of country, this loyalty to country? Could you or I write this check?

The 1998 movie “Saving Private Ryan” offers us a glimpse of these values, this character. It chronicles a squad of Army Rangers sent behind enemy lines to find Private Ryan, his family’s sole surviving son. It was based on the true story of Fritz Nilrod who lost two brothers at Normandy and whose third brother was missing in action in Burma, making him his family’s sole surviving son.

Per military protocol, any sole surviving son is to be removed from combat. The Rangers saved Private Ryan, but at the cost of American lives. He and the soldiers who died saving him showed us the same character displayed by an Airborne private during World War II’s Battle of the Bulge in the winter of 1944-1945. The Germans had broken through Allied lines in the Belgian Ardennes, “bulging” into France. American forces were retreating at a rapid pace. To bolster the manpower and improve the morale, members of the famed 82nd Airborne were sent.

A lone Airborne soldier was digging a foxhole along a road as an American tank destroyer was retreating, fleeing ahead of the advancing German army. The tank destroyer stopped where the private was digging and the private asked, “Are you looking for a safe place?” When the tankers said yes, the Airborne soldier responded, “Just pull up behind me. I’m the 82nd Airborne, and this is as far as the bast—s are going!”

One Airborne soldier. The German army. No problem. He symbolized the pride and the power of the United States of America. Duty, honor, country.

A similar event occurred during Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982. United States Marines were sent to Lebanon as peacekeepers. In early 1983, three Israeli tanks tried to run a road block at Rayan University Library in southern Lebanon that was manned by a unit of Marines.

Marine Capt. Charles B. Johnson ran toward the lead tank, stood in the middle of the road, drew his pistol, held it at the 45 degree “ready” position and said, “If you come through, it will be over my dead body.”

As he escorted the tank off the road, the other two tanks tried to run the road block. The captain jumped onto the second tank, grabbing the Israeli tank commander. The tanks turned around.

One Marine. Three tanks. No problem. He symbolized the pride

and the power of the United States of America. Duty, honor, country.

What did these men possess that the rest of us do not? What do we owe them for their sacrifices, for the sacrifices of their families who live with the constant fear of opening the door to hear, “I am sorry to inform you . . . ?”

And what of Private Ryan? The movie ends with him an old man, visiting the grave of the captain who died returning him to safety. Etched in his brain all these decades were the dying words of Captain Miller, “Earn this. Earn it.”

With tears running down his cheeks, he turns to his wife pleading, “Tell me I have led a good life. Tell me I’m a good man.” He wanted to know if he earned what those men died to give him. Aren’t we all Private Ryans?

Have we earned what 30 million American veterans gave us? Have we earned what over 650,000 Americans died to give us?

Tomorrow morning look in the mirror. “Have I earned this? Have I earned it?” Thirty million veterans deserve an answer. More important, you deserve an answer.