

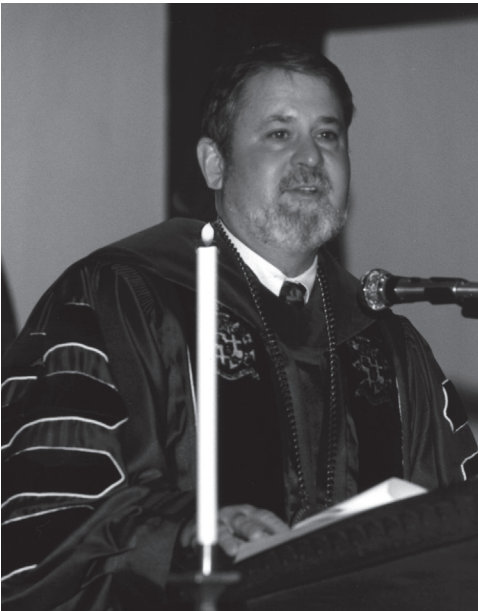
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SPECIAL ISSUE

The Never-Ending Defense of Liberty



The following remarks were delivered by Dr. Larry P. Arnn, the President of Hillsdale College, at an All-School Convocation and Prayer Service on September 14, 2001, a day proclaimed by President Bush to be a National Day of Prayer.

Today at this hour President Bush is attending church services in Washington, D.C. He has asked the news media to announce this fact, and to make known the whereabouts. This is no small act of courage. We know that those who attacked our nation on Tuesday morning were aiming for the two places he was most likely to be. Although they struck with devastating effect, happily they missed the

house where every president since Adams has lived, and they missed its current resident.

The President has invited us to join him in prayer at this hour. We are here to pray for those massive numbers who have been killed, and for the much smaller number who have been injured. The toll is awesome to contemplate. It has often been repeated in these last four days that the death toll will be much greater than that at Pearl Harbor. It will likely be a sixth or more of the death toll in the whole of the Vietnam War. It will approach the number killed at the Battle of Gettysburg. Each of the dead leaves behind many grieving loved ones. We have seen them on television in the last 24 hours, suspended between hope and despair. These dead and wounded, and their families, are much more than sufficient reason to pray.

We are also to pray for our country. There is profound reason to do that too. Here at Hillsdale we have had a striking coincidence. At the moment of this travesty we were in the midst of one of our largest conferences. This conference concerned the Second World War, the greatest military conflict in history. Among us were several of the greatest historians of that conflict, and a number of people who fought in it with particular bravery.

A theme began to emerge on Sunday night when the great and famous historian Stephen Ambrose argued that the twenty-first century

will be the greatest and most peaceful in history because of the victory won by the “greatest generation.” Several of the veterans of the war picked up this theme. Though they were not so sanguine as Professor Ambrose, they expressed the hope that no one would have to undergo what they themselves endured in the sky above Guadalcanal, crouched behind a sand dune at Omaha Beach, crawling among the sharp rocks at Iwo Jima.

On Wednesday morning, down at Hillsdale Academy, we heard three speeches by veterans. One was given by Major General Robert Ploger. On the morning of June 6, 1944, he was a 29-year-old Lieutenant Colonel. He came ashore on Omaha Beach with the job of blowing up a wall. The explosives arrived some hours after he did, and so he spent a morning under fire, being wounded, and waiting. His account of that fighting was methodical and riveting.

After the speeches that morning, we went up to the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority house with these veterans to have lunch. It was a lovely atmosphere, and we are grateful to the Kappas for their hospitality.

In the middle of the lunch, Cliff Witte, himself a combat veteran and a brave man, came to me. He said that General Ploger had received word the previous evening that his son and daughter-in-law had been killed on the airplane that was hijacked and flown into the Pentagon. The couple had been married only a few days before, and were en route to Hawaii for their honeymoon. General Ploger had spent a sleepless night, unable to travel, unwilling to tell. He had got up the next morning and had done his duty without complaint. I had the hard job of offering condolences at his loss on behalf of the College. When I did so, he broke down immediately.

What must he have been thinking? It is a compound sort of tragedy. We can tell from the statements of the veterans who were here, and from the historians who are close to them, how they take their consolation. None of them came here to exult in his own glory. Their speeches typically ended with statements like “War is hell” and “I remember so well those who died.” Then they would say that they fought in the hope that such fighting would not again be needed. Having instructed the world with great sacrifice in the awfulness of war, perhaps the world would find a better way. Who can blame Professor Ambrose for harboring that same hope? And then, while these veterans were all here, our country was attacked and one of them lost a son and a daughter-in-law

on the way to their honeymoon.

It is a traditional sentiment from many of the greatest Americans, from George Washington to Alexander Hamilton to Abraham Lincoln, that America is a kind of experiment, an experiment to be conducted by every generation. It seems that this has not changed.

Benjamin Netanyahu, who lost a brother to terrorists during Israel’s bold and courageous Entebbe rescue mission in 1976, stated a truth on television yesterday that we must all now come to face. He lives in a country where such truths are well known. He said that Tuesday’s attack is not the worst that can be done. He said that some later attack could be nuclear or, I might add, chemical or biological.

The Taliban, who are likely the attackers here, as they have been before, are sheltered by Afghanistan, a very hard place to fight, and by Pakistan, a nuclear power, and by Iran, which has an army larger if less capable than our own. It required six months to transfer the forces to Kuwait that ultimately defeated Iraq’s Republican Guard in the Persian Gulf War. These forces were being transferred to a place where they were welcome, and even then those in the Pentagon thought the transfer had been accomplished in a remarkably short time. The heavy division that led the charge north into Iraq has since been disbanded. Its soldiers are now civilians. Its tanks are in mothballs. Given these facts, it will not be easy to confront the present danger. We must summon our courage.

Those who have launched this attack believe that we Americans are weak and cowardly materialists. It is important to note that these attackers are not Arabs or Muslims. Arabs and Muslims are as a group no more capable of such atrocity than anyone else. These are particular people, inflamed by hate, driven by demented ambition. They believe that they can use the tools of modern science to destroy the material implements that, they believe, are the sole source of our pleasures and our safety. We know now beyond doubt that they are very ruthless.

This is not the first time that such people as this have formed a mistaken impression of us. It is easy to mistake the love of freedom for lack of virtue. It is easy to mistake the love of peace for cowardice. But these are mistakes, and we now have before us the hard job of proving so once again.

There was an ultimate comfort enjoyed by those who fought the Second World War. It came from two sources. It came from the knowledge that we have the means of our own survival in

our own hands, if we have the courage to use them. It came more profoundly from the knowledge that in the fullness of time, right makes might. God is on the side of those who serve Him in faith and humility.

In a lovely article in today's *Wall Street Journal*, Melanie Kirkpatrick explains what happened in New York City on Tuesday. The people flocked to help, to the hospitals, to the Red Cross centers, to the soup kitchens. And also they flocked to the churches. Those who attacked that great city think of it as a monument to money. It

is in fact a place where churches, some of the oldest and most beautiful in the world, abound on nearly every block. In New York, one can always find a place to pray. They are praying there now.

Let us join them. Let us pray for faith and the courage that comes from it. Let us take increased devotion from these honored dead and from their predecessors, who gave the last full measure of devotion. Let us take courage from this devotion. God is good, and He will be our shield. 🕊

*On September 9-13, 2001, Hillsdale College held a seminar entitled **One of Freedom's Finest Hours: Statesmanship and Soldiership in WWII**. Nine historians and five veterans gave presentations. Following are excerpted reminiscences of three of the veterans.*

***Roland R. Witte**, a 1940 graduate of the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce at the University of Pennsylvania, was a naval aviator in the struggle for Guadalcanal, including the Battle of Santa Cruz. He received the Distinguished Flying Cross and two Presidential Citations. Following the war he worked for Lockheed and Hughes aircraft companies.*

washed the burning wreckage overboard. The destroyer then resumed its position as if nothing had happened.

As we waited for entry into the landing pat-

...As we approached the American task force [on October 26, 1942, following an air battle with Japanese fighter planes and a torpedo attack on a Japanese cruiser], we observed the USS Hornet dead in the water and our own carrier, the Enterprise, skillfully dodging what was the fifth and last bombing attack of the morning.

I recall observing a remarkable piece of seamanship: A wounded Japanese plane crashed atop the forward turret of one of our destroyers, engulfing the bridge as well as the turret in flames. The destroyer's skipper immediately increased the ship's speed and turned into the swells. The third swell swept over the bow and

tern, a Japanese fighter came at us with a 2000-foot advantage in altitude. But instead of pressing his attack, he put on a beautiful display of aerobatics – slow rolls, lazy eights, loops, etc. He was either trying to impress us or scare us to death. We went into a defensive maneuver, and bless his heart, he never did attack – remember,



we were out of ammunition....

That afternoon, I was on station in a patrol above our task force when I picked up a call from the Hornet requesting fighter assistance. I immediately headed in that direction, expecting orders from the Enterprise to proceed. No such orders came. Reaching the halfway point, I even looked to the Enterprise's bridge to see if they were sending me blinker signals. Nothing. I had no alternative but to return and resume my station, and I learned later that six Japanese torpedo bombers had attacked the Hornet....

That night was dark as could be, depth charges going off all around, damned lonely. But the next morning was beautiful. Looking out across the water, I could hardly believe the events of the previous 24 hours had occurred, except for the fact that the destroyer abeam of us was missing its bow. Cleanup operations continued as we steamed for New Caledonia for repairs, and later in the morning, following services, 54 body bags were slipped into the waves....

***Bernard F. Link** joined the U.S. Marine Corps in 1943, participated in the invasion of Iwo Jima on February 19, 1945, and was wounded on the third day of that battle, during the assault on Mt. Suribachi. A graduate of Wayne State University, Mr. Link went on to work for Ford Motor Company and Old Line Title Insurance, headed a real estate investment and finance organization, and became president of the Grand Rapids Teachers Credit Union.*

...Of all my memories from 1945, one of the most gut-wrenching is that of witnessing my first burial at sea. A Marine from Detroit had died of his wounds on our hospital ship en route from Iwo Jima to Guam. When we learned of his death, a few of us went topside to witness the brief ceremony. It was 10 p.m., and all of the ship's running lights were off because of the threat of submarines. So it was pitch dark on deck, except for an occasional break in the clouds that let through an eerie ray of moonlight.

As we gathered at the railing with the

Chaplain, two of the ship's crew brought out the Marine's body, placed it on the burial plank, and covered it with an American flag. As we stood in silent tribute, the Chaplain gave a brief eulogy and the sailors raised the plank. Out slid that gray canvas bag from under its star-spangled shroud, plunging toward the sea and vanishing forever. Each of us standing there battled with our private thoughts, trying to keep the flood of emotions from bursting through our exterior armor.

For some reason, witnessing that event had a more profound effect on me than many of the other tragedies I witnessed. I can't really explain why. Maybe it was the overwhelming finality of it. Even after the others left, I stood at the ship's railing, thinking about how only a few of this Marine's buddies had been there to see him off, and about his mother and father, who wouldn't even receive news of his death for another week or two. How many more times, I wondered, would this lonely scene be repeated before the last hospital ship left Iwo?

I can never think of that experience without recalling the German U-boat sailors' song:

*There are no roses on a sailor's grave,
No lilies on an ocean wave.
The only tributes are the seagull sweeps,
And the teardrops that a sweetheart weeps....*



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Al Hassenzahl enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1942. After completing Officer Candidate School, he volunteered for paratrooper duty. He parachuted into Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944, as a member of the 101st Airborne Division fighting also in Holland, Bastogne, and Germany. Mr. Hassenzahl earned several decorations, including four Battle Stars, the Bronze Arrowhead, a Purple Heart, a Bronze Star, a Silver Star, and a Presidential Unit Citation.

...My outfit jumped into Normandy about 1:30 a.m. on D-Day morning. None of us had any combat experience up until that time. On D-Day plus three, I was hit pretty hard, and I wouldn't be speaking to you today if it wasn't for one of our platoon sergeants, a very good friend of mine. His name was Joe Zettwich, he was from Pennsylvania, and his nickname was Punchy, because he was an excellent light-heavyweight boxer. At the risk of his own life, Punchy came out where I was injured and dragged me to cover. I was evacuated to Utah Beach, and then back to England where I was hospitalized for seven weeks.

In late July, the 101st and 82nd Airborne returned to England to get needed replacements and equipment. In late August I rejoined my company, and a few weeks later we received orders for "Operation Market Garden" in Holland, attached to the British Second Army. Over the next 72 days, we drove a corridor to the Rhine River...

From there we were removed to France, again to receive replacements and equipment. But after about two weeks, on the 15th of December, we learned that the Germans had launched a fierce offensive on our eastern lines of defense. So with very little preparation, we loaded onto cattle trucks and drove all night, arriving the next morning at Bastogne, Belgium.

To show you how ill-prepared we were to go into a major battle, when our battalion marched as ordered to a nearby village called Noville, through a crossroads called Foy, tankers from

the 10th Armored, parked in the center of the road, were handing us loose 30-caliber ammunition so that we could load the clips in our M-1 rifles. Once in Noville, we were completely surrounded by the Germans. What saved us was a thick fog that prevented the enemy from seeing us. Still we were pounded extremely hard. Finally we got orders that if we could batter our way back through Foy, to within range of the American lines at Bastogne, we would get artillery support. Unbeknownst to us, meanwhile, Bastogne had been surrounded too.

When we arrived at Foy on the way back, the

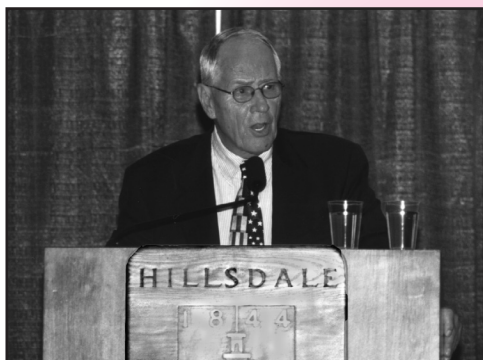


fog was just beginning to lift, and we discovered that Foy was now fortified by a German strongpoint. A fierce firefight occurred, and we lost a lot of people. So did the Krauts. But during that fight, my dear friend Punchy was hit. Strangely, he was hit in much the same place I had been hit six months earlier in Normandy, when he had saved my life. Joe Reed, our first sergeant, and I carried Punchy across the road and loaded him onto a half-track. And I'll never forget what happened then. I told Punchy, "Punchy, you're going to be okay," and he answered, "I don't think so." Punchy died in that half-track later that day.

Now I'd like to fast-forward to mid-June of 1994, the 50th anniversary of D-Day. Three of my old comrades and I flew over to Brussels, rented a car, and went to visit all of our old battlegrounds. When we got to Bastogne, we found the Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery, and I

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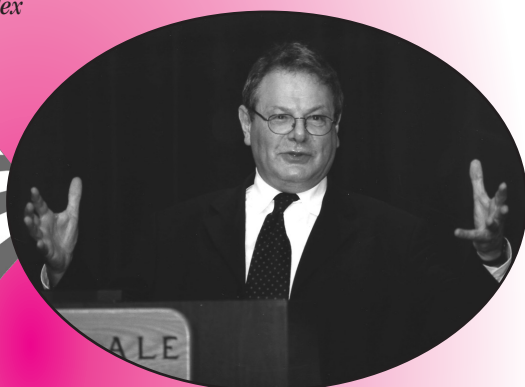
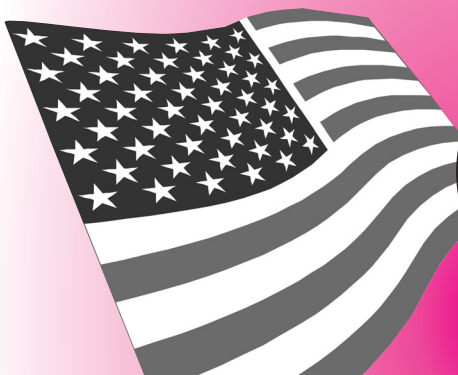
One of Freedom's Finest Hours: Statesmanship and Soldiership in WWII



Historian Stephen Ambrose addresses a crowd of over 1,000 at the Hillsdale College Sports Complex



Dr. Ambrose and sophomore Courtney Giammaria



Martin Gilbert, official biographer of Winston Churchill, addresses a standing-room-only crowd in Phillips Auditorium



Robert Ploger, veteran of the D-Day landing on Omaha Beach, talks with juniors Amy Foster and Wynter Shierman



Director of Seminars Timothy Caspar, President Larry Armn, and Historian John Lukacs



Martin Rodgers, veteran of Pearl Harbor, speaks at Hillsdale Academy, Hillsdale College's K-12 model school

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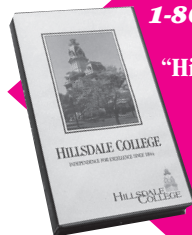
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found Punchy. All I can find words to say right now is that it was a traumatic moment....

A few months ago I read *Flags of Our Fathers*, by James Bradley, the son of John "Doc" Bradley, a Navy corpsman who accompanied the 5th Marines 28th Regiment at Iwo Jima. Doc Bradley was one of the six soldiers who raised the American flag on Mt. Suribachi, and one of three of those six who survived the battle over that God-forsaken, eight-acre piece of rock.

An unknown Marine, after the battle of Iwo Jima, carved a slogan on a rock that stands outside of the temporary cemetery there, where thousands of men were initially buried. In conclusion, it's my great pleasure to repeat these words to you now. And listen up good!

*When you go home
Tell them for us and say
For your tomorrow
We gave our today* 🇺🇸

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