

THEY ARE CALLED THE GREATEST GENERATION.

THEY FREED A CONTINENT FROM THE GRIPS OF A MANIACAL DICTATOR. THEY RID THE WORLD OF FASCISM. AND THEY PRESERVED DEMOCRACY FOR ALL OF US.

THIS WEEK MARKS 70 YEARS SINCE THE DAY WHEN ALLIED FORCES LANDED IN FRANCE TO BEGIN THE LIBERATION OF EUROPE.

IN THE EARLY MORNING HOURS OF JUNE 6, 1944, ON THE BEACHES OF NORMANDY, THERE WAS A YOUNG MAN...

A GRADUATE OF MIAMI HIGH AND THE UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI, THE SENIOR PASTOR AT WEST FLAGLER BAPTIST CHURCH...

HIS NAME WAS JOHN G. BURKHALTER.

HE WAS AN ARMY CHAPLAIN WHO WENT ON TO SERVE IN THE KOREAN WAR, ACHIEVING THE RANK OF LIEUTENANT COLONEL ALONG WITH NUMEROUS MILITARY HONORS AND WHO IS BURIED AT ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY.

IN THE AFTERMATH OF D-DAY, HE SENT A LETTER TO HIS WIFE BACK HOME IN MIAMI THAT WAS LATER PUBLISHED BY THE MIAMI DAILY NEWS.

TO DESCRIBE THE EVENTS OF THAT DAY, LT. COL BURKHALTER BEGAN BY WRITING:

“WHEN MY PART OF THE DIVISION LANDED, THERE WERE IMPRESSIONS MADE ON MY MIND THAT WILL NEVER LEAVE IT.

JUST BEFORE LANDING WE COULD SEE HEAVY ARTILLERY SHELLS BURSTING ALL UP AND DOWN THE BEACH AT THE WATER'S EDGE UNDER WELL DIRECTED FIRE.

AS I STOOD IN LINE WAITING TO GET OFF THE LCI TO A SMALLER CRAFT TO GO INTO SHORE, I WAS LOOKING TOWARD LAND AND SAW A LARGE SHELL FALL RIGHT ON A LANDING CRAFT FULL OF MEN.

I HAD BEEN PRAYING QUITE A BIT THROUGH THE NIGHT AS WE APPROACHED THE FRENCH COAST BUT NOW I BEGAN PRAYING MORE EARNESTLY THAN EVER.

DANGER WAS EVERYWHERE; DEATH WAS NOT FAR OFF.”

LT. COL. BURKHALTER THEN EXPLAINS THE GREAT DISADVANTAGES THAT ALL THE MEN FACED.

“THE ENEMY HAD A LONG TIME TO FIX UP THE BEACH.

THE BEACH WAS COVERED WITH LARGE PEBBLES TO PREVENT TANK MOVEMENTS, AND MINES WERE EVERYWHERE.

THE ENEMY WAS WELL DUG IN AND HAD SET UP WELL PREPARED POSITIONS FOR MACHINE GUNS AND HAD WELL-CHOSEN PLACES FOR SNIPING.

EVERYTHING WAS TO THEIR ADVANTAGE AND TO OUR DISADVANTAGE, EXCEPT ONE THING, THE RIGHTEOUS CAUSE FOR WHICH WE ARE FIGHTING - LIBERATION AND FREEDOM.

FOR THE MOMENT OUR ADVANTAGE WAS IN THE ABSTRACT AND THEIRS WAS IN THE CONCRETE.

THE BEACH WAS SPOTTED WITH DEAD AND WOUNDED MEN.

I PASSED ONE MAN WHOSE FOOT HAD BEEN BLOWN COMPLETELY OFF.

ANOTHER SOLDIER LYING CLOSE BY WAS SUFFERING FROM SEVERAL INJURIES; HIS FOOT WAS RIPPED AND DISTORTED UNTIL IT DIDN'T LOOK MUCH LIKE A FOOT.

ANOTHER I PASSED WAS LYING VERY STILL, FLAT ON HIS BACK, COVERED IN BLOOD.

BODIES OF INJURED MEN ALL AROUND.

SAD AND HORRIBLE SIGHTS WERE PLENTIFUL."

LT. COLONEL BURKHALTER CONCLUDES HIS LETTER BY SAYING...

"AS I LOOK BACK THROUGH HECTIC DAYS JUST GONE BY TO THAT HELLISH BEACH I AGREE WITH ERNIE PYLE, THAT IT WAS A PURE MIRACLE WE EVEN TOOK THE BEACH AT ALL."

YES, THERE WERE A LOT OF MIRACLES ON THE BEACH THAT DAY. GOD WAS ON THE BEACH D-DAY; I KNOW HE WAS BECAUSE I WAS TALKING WITH HIM."

GOD WAS INDEED WITH THOSE MEN.

THESE WERE ORDINARY MEN, WHO DID EXTRAORDINARY THINGS, BECAUSE THEY

BELIEVED IN A CAUSE GREATER THAN THEMSELVES...

THE PRESERVATION OF FREEDOM FOR ALL.

THEY FACED PURE EVIL IN THE EYE, AND THANKFULLY FOR US, THEY DID NOT BLINK.

I'LL CONCLUDE BY ECHOING THE WORDS OF A FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT WHO THIRTY YEARS AGO STOOD AT POINTE DU HOC TO HONOR THE ARMY RANGERS WHOSE DAGGERS CONQUERED THE BEACH THAT DAY.

THEY ALL KNEW THAT SOME THINGS ARE WORTH DYING FOR.

THAT ONE'S COUNTRY IS WORTH DYING FOR...

AND DEMOCRACY IS WORTH DYING FOR, BECAUSE IT'S THE MOST DEEPLY HONORABLE FORM OF GOVERNMENT EVER DEvised BY MAN.

THEY LOVED LIBERTY.

THEY WERE WILLING TO FIGHT TYRANNY...

AND THEY ALL KNEW THE PEOPLE OF THEIR COUNTRIES WERE BEHIND THEM.

WE ARE STILL BEHIND THEM, AND THAT'S WHY WE ARE HERE TODAY.

SEVENTY YEARS LATER, WE HAVE LOST MANY OF THE "BOYS OF POINTE DU HOC" AND THE "MEN WHO TOOK THOSE CLIFFS..."

OLD AGE HAS FINALLY CAUGHT UP TO THEM.

BUT NO AMOUNT OF TIME CAN EVER DIMINISH THEIR VALOR.

AS WE PAY TRIBUTE TO THESE MEN...

LET US HONOR THEIR BRAVERY AND HONOR THEIR SACRIFICE BY REMAINING ETERNALLY VIGILANT IN THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM...

AND ETERNALLY GRATEFUL TO THOSE WHO FOUGHT ON D-DAY.

MAY GOD BLESS THEM, AND MAY GOD CONTINUE TO BLESS OUR COUNTRY.