

What Can You Say About A Man

"In stories about the war I try to show all the different sides of it, taking it slowly and honestly and examining it from many ways. So never think one story represents my viewpoint because it is much too complicated for that."

Ernest Hemingway wrote these words and today I want to use his words and my experiences over the last twenty years researching the many aspects of war to tell you about some men, all dead now who deserve to be remembered on Memorial Day. Most gave their lives. All gave their service.

Today, I would like to share the stories of some of the people, who over the last twenty years I have studied who gave what Abraham Lincoln said was the "last full measure of devotion." These are men who it was my great honor to cross paths in researching history. Ernest Hemingway once wrote, "The world is a fine place and worth fighting for."

Thirty-five years ago on many mornings I stood in the freezing cold of the Blue Ridge mountain air in Ararat, Virginia, waiting for the school bus to take me the twenty-five miles to Patrick County High School. As I stood there shivering many times a large green Chrysler rumbled out of the neighbors drive way. Often Patrick County Sheriff Deputy Zeb Scales pulled over and offered me a ride. This ride always included a dialogue of Deputy Scales personal version of Patrick County history especially when crossing the Dan River you would always hear, "I help build that bridge." What I did not know was that I riding in the car of a hero, but we will get back to that.

People argue over the origin of Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day. Some believe that Southern women started it during the War Between the States. No one

argues over why we are here today to remember the women and men who gave their lives in service of this nation.

Not too far from here where the Smith River and Rock Castle Creek come together in the triangle of land formed by the two streams was the home of the first man. Today, it is almost entirely farmland not far from the junction of Elamsville Road and Route 8 about a mile from the Bob White Covered Bridge. Patrick County Educator and Historian O. E. Pilson always believed that Samuel Crowley was one of the first who sacrificed his life fighting for this country. Crowley known as "Long Hunter" was a scout for Andrew Lewis when he came upon a group of Indians and lost his life died on October 10, 1774, at the Battle of Point Pleasant in present day West Virginia before the American Revolution in "Lord Dunmore's War" in what was then Virginia. Crowley is buried in the mass grave at the West Virginia State Park commemorating the battle at the confluence of the Kanawha and Ohio Rivers.

Hemingway again, "It is very dangerous to write the truth in war and the truth is very dangerous to come by. When a man goes to seek the truth in war he may find death instead. But if the twelve go and only two come back, the truth they bring will be the truth, and not the garbled hearsay that we pass as history."

Here is some history close to home for me. On the banks of the Ararat River just north of the border with North Carolina sits the oldest marked grave in Patrick County. The man buried there lost his life in August 1780 during the American Revolution in front of his wife and baby daughter. William Letcher was just thirty years old when a Tory named Nichols took his life. Cornwallis's army was coming through the Carolinas and the pro-British guerrillas thought they could get away with it. They found out later they could

not. Letcher lost his life, but left a legacy that still resonates through our history for he is the great-grandfather of J. E. B. Stuart.

If J. E. B. Stuart came back to visit us today and we visited in his birthplace, there is only one site that is still there from his time and that is the grave of William Letcher, his great-grandfather. Stuart and Letcher both lost their lives just past thirty fighting for what they believed was their own revolution.

Again returning to Hemingway who wrote that, "War is fought by human beings." The image of Stuart is often different from the human being. He was a Christian man, who did not drink, bought his men copies of the scriptures, founded churches, loved his wife and children and even his birthplace in Patrick County. He received a great education at Emory and Henry, graduating from the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, two years at the feet of Robert E. Lee. Stuart got seven years of education in the U. S. Army learning from the Cheyenne, who nearly killed him and an agitator named John Brown, who could have killed Stuart at Harper's Ferry in 1859. Stuart spent three glorious years at the head of the cavalry of the Army of Northern Virginia. When one of George Custer's men killed Stuart, he brought Robert E. Lee to tears. For a Southerner, could there be more said about you than that.

Hemingway wrote, "An aggressive war is the great crime against everything good in the world. A defensive war, which must necessary turn to aggressive at the earliest moment, is the necessary great counter-crime. But never think that war, no matter how necessary, nor how justified, is not a crime."

Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967) served on the Western Front for Great Britain during World War I. Known as "Mad Jack," he single handedly took a German position on the

Hindenburg Line. He became virulently anti-war as did many involved in The Great War, but returned to the front and received a head wound. He wrote a poem called *Aftermath* that I think is appropriate for today.

HAVE you forgotten yet?...

For the world's events have rumbled on since those gagged days,

Like traffic checked a while at the crossing of city ways:

And the haunted gap in your mind has filled with thoughts that flow

Like clouds in the lit heavens of life; and you're a man reprieved to go,

Taking your peaceful share of Time, with joy to spare.

But the past is just the same,—and War's a bloody game....

Have you forgotten yet?...

Look down, and swear by the slain of the War that you'll never forget.

On the night of March 15, 1944. The night was clear and cloudless. Ten year old Clarence Hall heard noted a low flying plane, a bomber circling over the countryside. The plane heading north swung to the west. Suddenly, a flash around ten o'clock appeared on the mountain. This was Clarence Hall's first recollection of this historical event that would become his hobby. His story is like many other involved in history beginning at a young age with a pivotal event. What Clarence Hall observed was the fire occurring after ten o'clock on that Wednesday night when a B24E Liberator aircraft crashed and burned on impact on 3,000 foot Bull Mountain.

Eleven young men left just after 8 pm on a point to point navigational mission from an air base near Charleston, South Carolina, on a four hour mission to Mount Airy, North

Carolina, to Madison, North Carolina, to Florence, South Carolina and then back to Charleston, South Carolina.

Eleven young men died that night on the night navigational mission: The pilot, Lieutenant Gilbert R. Felts, age 26, of Elkin, North Carolina. The co-pilot, Lieutenant John R. Gipson, age 22, of Logansport, Indiana. The instructor, Lieutenant Aubrey E. Brown, age 24, of Dallas, Texas. The bombardier Lieutenant Wayne R. Alber, age 22, of Manchester, Michigan. The navigator, Flight Officer Howard A. Jennett, age 21, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The assistant radio operator, Sergeant Neale M. Narramore, age 21, of Elmdale, Kansas. The assistant engineer, Corporal Joseph L. Fountain, age 23, of Warren Massachusetts. The engineer, Corporal Charlie B. Herring, age 23, of Oxford, North Carolina. The gunner, Corporal Charles D. Libbey, age 19, of Waukesha, Wisconsin. The radio operator, Corporal Carl E. Pierce, age 23, of Knoxville, Tennessee. The gunner, Private First Class James J. Tiffner, age 20, of Alkol, West Virginia. Today, thanks to Clarence Hall and some of the Veterans there is a marker on Bull Mountain and one at the courthouse honoring these eleven men.

After World War Two Hemingway wrote, "We have waged war in the most ferocious and ruthless way that it has ever been waged. We waged it against fierce and ruthless enemies that it was necessary to destroy. Now we have destroyed one of our enemies and forced the capitulation of the other. For the moment we are the strongest power in the world. It is very important that we do not become the most hated...We need to study and understand certain basic problems of our world as they were before Hiroshima to be able to continue, intelligently, to discover how some of them have changed and how they can be settled justly now that a new weapon has become a property of part of the

world. We must study them more carefully than ever now and remember that no weapon has ever settled a moral problem. It can impose a solution but it cannot guarantee it to be a just one..."

Returning to the car ride to high school I started with I would now like to turn our attention to Korea. Zeb Stuart Scales. Like most people who see war they do not want to relive it, but he was decorated with a Silver Star and a purple heart, which he received for saving an officer and being shot for his valor and multiple Bronze Stars for his service in Vietnam and Korea. When he retired it was with the highest rank a non-commissioned soldier that of Command Sergeant Major, after refusing promotion to officer status multiple times. He was probably the most decorated non-commissioned soldier from Patrick County or possibly the most decorated person of any branch of the military to serve from my home county.

Returning to my neighbor, who I started this talk with never spoke much to me about his military career About fifteen years ago I was showing retired Colonel J. E. B. Stuart IV around Ararat when I spied Command Sergeant Major Zeb Stuart Scales standing in his yard. I pulled in, introduced Jeb Stuart to Zeb Stuart and within moments these two veterans of Vietnam Conflict had transposed themselves into South Vietnam. Colonel Stuart serving as a transportation officer moving men and supplies and Sergeant Major Scales as a military police officer. They spoke of names and places that I could not pronounce as only two men who shared the common experience of war can.

To paraphrase Psalms 90:10, the days of our country are eleven score and seven years; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. "Four score and seven years ago our fathers

brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

Hemingway wrote, "If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry."

Men and women of many races today lose their lives defending our nation. On the last day of June in 2005, I parked near a grave overlooking Woolwine, Virginia. With the Blue Ridge Mountains framing the scene, I paused a few minutes due to a thunder and lightning storm rolling over the mountains with a heavy downpour of rain. With the sky on fire and water pelting the ground, I thought of the young man buried in front of me in this beautiful spot in our home county of Patrick. I found a photo of Israel Ingram on the Internet and immediately thought I would like him. His photo showed a young African-American with a nice smile and a friendly disposition. In fact, he was soldier in the United States Army in Vietnam. He made the ultimate sacrifice for his country by laying down his life. He left a young daughter in Ohio and a strong impression on me.

I know many men who fought in Vietnam and survived to live productive lives in Patrick County. I know of many men who carried scares from Vietnam and some who could not handle it. They are all different except for one thing. They were willing to serve their country in a war that ended unpopular and they suffered what no soldiers from this country faced before from their own countrymen when they returned. I think we spent too much time concentrating on those against the war or were unwilling to serve and not

enough about those brave enough to put their life on the line for this country. Today, I have with me a shadow box containing rubbings from the wall in Washington D. C. from Vietnam with seven names of men who gave all and a book telling about their lives.

"When you go to war as a boy you have this great illusion of immortality. Other people get killed; not you. It can happen to other people; but not to you. Then when you are badly wounded the first time you lose that illusion and you know it can happen to you. After being severely wounded two weeks before my nineteenth birthday I had a bad time until I figured out that nothing could happen to me that had not happened to all men before me. Whatever I had to do men had always done. If they had done it then I could do it too and the best thing was not to worry about it."

In Patrick County, we have lost two young men in Iraq. Jonathan Bowling and Levi Barnard. I did not know them well, but I knew of them as both their families had friends of mine in them. Remember them and those we have lost in Iraq and Afghanistan with these words from Hemingway. "Once we have a war there is only one thing to do. It must be won. For defeat brings on worse things than can ever happen in a war."

Major Michael Davis O'Donnell wrote from Vietnam in 1970, "If you are able, save for them a place inside of you and save one backward glance when you are leaving for the places they can no longer go. Be not ashamed to say you loved them, though you may or may not have always. Take what they have taught you with their dying and keep it with your own. And in that time when men decide and feel safe to call the war insane, take one moment to embrace those gentle heroes you left behind."

Hemingway again, "...as they get further and further away from a war they have taken part in have the tendency to make it more as they wish it had been rather than how it

really was." Today let us not just remember those who gave all, but let us remember the men and women who served and came home. Hemingway once wrote, "There is no man alive today who has not cried at a war if he was at it long enough. Sometimes it is after a battle, sometimes it is when someone that you love is killed, sometimes it is from a great injustice to another, sometimes it is at the disbanding of a corps or a unit that has endured and accomplished together and now will never be together again. But all men at war cry sometimes..."

For those of you served especially those of you who went to Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan here is a quote from Theodore Roosevelt, a President and Medal of Honor Recipient. "It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat." Could all the veterans here please stand.

After retiring Zeb Scales continued to serve. He became a deputy sheriff in Patrick County putting his life on the line for the people of this county. Later, he drove the van for the Meals on Wheels program serving his community.

Someone once told me that the only things important in life are the memories you leave. The memory I have of him was being grateful thirty-five years ago when he saved me from hypothermia while waiting for that school bus.

Several years ago, I worked with Patrick County to name that bridge over the Dan River between Claudville and Ararat the Cmd. Sgt. Maj. Zeb Stuart Scales Memorial Bridge, a bridge that he helped build and a bridge that he built for me to understand better men and women who served this country and in many cases lost their lives.

What can you say about a man's life? I could tell you about a man who could wiggle his ears while pinching the blood out of your leg with his toes as he beat you at a hand of cards. I could tell you about a man who showed me how to make molasses from scratch, taught me how to use a chain saw and who made stacking wood an art form. But what I really want to share is that I am a better man for having known Zeb Stuart Scales and those I have mentioned here today and that the United States of America is a better place for his having served it.

**Visit the grave of a fallen hero or a battlefield and when you are there remember these words, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."
John 15:13.**