In the footsteps of heroes

By Dennis Howard

This is a story about a hero. He was my brother, but he could just as easily have been yours. It is also the story of the last few months of a life that seemed ordinary in most respects but, in fact, turned out to be quite heroic — as would any life that followed in the footsteps of our Lord as He walked His last steps up the hill to Calvary.

I was the last one in my family to see Eddie as he traveled across the country on a troop train headed for Korea. It was early February, 1951, and I was in Kansas City starting my career as a Catholic journalist. I was a writer for The Sun Herald, the last attempt to publish a lay Catholic daily newspaper in the United States.

I was awakened at 1 in the morning by a telegram from Eddie. He was coming through St. Louis on a troop train. He said it would arrive in Kansas City at 1:30 am, and asked me to meet it. I hadn't seen him in a year, so I jumped at the idea.

It took some doing to talk the Stationmaster into letting me down to meet a troop train in the middle of a war. At first he said, "No way. You're not even supposed to know that troop train is here. Your brother could be court-martialed if they knew he sent you that telegram."

My heart dropped as he walked away. Then suddenly he turned and said, "I know how you feel. I have a son in the Air Force. The train is on Track 7. But don't dare tell anyone I said so."

When I got down to Track 7, the train was already in, but it was blacked out — not a light in sight. I walked along until I came to an open door, and poked my head in.

There was Eddie getting ready to cook breakfast for the Army. He greeted me warmly, and enlisted me to start breaking 100's of eggs into huge pots while he put even bigger pans of bacon on the stove to cook.

Edward Howard on one of his last visits home before leaving for Korea.

Soon the door at the end of the car opened and in came Eddie's sidekick, still rubbing his eyes from sleep. He was a young guy who had lied about his age at 17 so he could join the Army.

He looked at the big vat of eggs I had broken, and told Eddie, "Did you forget. Today was the one day in the whole trip that they were supposed to get eggs cooked to order!"

In our enthusiasm, we had goofed. By the time everyone woke up, poor Eddie would have some explaining to do. But there was no way to unscramble all those eggs.

At one point, Eddie and I swapped jackets and caps. He put on my overcoat and my hat — while I put on his Eisenhower jacket and his Army cap. Suddenly we realized how much alike we looked. We could trade places and

the Army would never know the difference.

I felt moved to do that right then and there, but then I realized that Eddie was going in my place, not the other way around.

We reminisced about all our experiences growing up, but time passed and we soon heard the clang of the cars as the engine hooked up. It was time for me to go.

A fog had descended over the whole station. As I stood there waving, the train slowly moved away as Eddie and his buddy disappeared into the fog with each chug of the engine. That was the last I was to see of Eddie and his buddy. The vision of the two of them disappearing into the fog is with me yet.

We exchanged letters at least once a week as February moved on into March and April.. Meanwhile, I followed news of the war at the paper with each day's dispatches from Korea.

Then suddenly his letters stopped and soon the last few I sent were returned with the news that Eddie was missing in action.

The last one he received from me was a letter quoting Psalm 91, "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, and no harm shall come thee. . . He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."

That certainly gave me hope that he might survive his capture.

Strangely, he went missing on the same day that my adventure in Catholic daily journalism ended -- April 28, 1951. That remains for me a day to remember.

All we were told was that the hill he was on was overrun by the Chinese and retaken the next day. There was no sign of Eddie.

Unfortunately, that was all the news we got of Eddie for the next 59 years.

We sat through the prisoner exchanges, hoping and praying that his name would be on the list of returning POW's. We listened through two long lists, but still no Eddie!

We tried repeatedly to get more information from the Army, but all we got was a letter about a warehouse fire in St. Louis in which all records were lost.

My mother died in 1994 at age 93, still hoping and praying that someday Eddie would return. She bought a stained glass window and a pew in our parish church in Queens in his memory, and I will never forget how the light fell across the church at her funeral.

It came right down through Eddie's window and across his pew and lit her coffin as she lay there. I took it as a sign that they were together at last.

I thought that was the end of Eddie's story until a few weeks ago when my son, Thomas, found a Korean War website where you could search for information about missing POWs.

There we found the barest information about Eddie. Then came more news about the remains of the missing that had been returned and the possibility that he might be among them. I sent DNA samples to a forensic lab in Hawaii, but it will take a year or more to find out if his remains ever were returned. Some are still being held in North Korea.

However, we did learn more about what happened to Eddie after his capture, based on information provided by other POWs who survived the same journey he took.

They are also a reminder that when Jesus asks us to follow Him, that can mean walking all the way up the hill with Him to Calvary.

In the two months after his capture, Eddie went through a long ordeal, slowly being moved north in a series of marches reminiscent of the famous Bataan death march from World War II.

The only thing the POW's were given to eat was a thin gruel made of rice and millet. They had to eat it or die. There was no fresh water to drink or to bathe. The only water came from mud puddles left along the road by the occasional rain.

Nearly all of them suffered from malnutrition and dysentery, and many died along the way. That was how Eddie died on July 8, 1951 somewhere near the Yalu River that forms the border between North Korea and China.

Local villagers reportedly buried him by the side of the road.

I still pray for his young buddy whom I met that night on the troop train in Kansas City. I don't remember his name, so I have no way of finding out what happened to him. But they both taught me something about what it means to be a hero.

It doesn't require some grand heroic act that will write your name in the history books. It takes simple acts of daily courage to accept the things that God sends us as challenges every single day.

Do we greet them with honor and fortitude and faithfulness to what God calls on us to do. Or do we complain about every little setback and disappointment — questioning what God expects

of us amid life's difficulties. How often do we say: "Why me, Lord." And how often do we rise to each occasion by doing the very best we can.

How willing are we to risk our lives, our honor, and our fortunes to advance the values on which our nation was founded.

My brother was a hero for one reason. He walked faithfully in the footsteps of Our Lord — our Supreme Hero who gave His Life for us on the cross so that all of us might share in His glory.

Eddie taught me a lot of things as we grew up, but that was the most important lesson of all.

He gave his life so that you and I -- and our children and grandchildren -- can breathe free.

Heroes of Another Forgotten War

Korea became America's "forgotten war" because it quickly slipped beneath the notice of politicians and pundits during the war in Vietnam. But those who lost family members in that war have never forgotten that they died to keep us free.

Unfortunately, there is another war going on that the politicians and the pundits have forgotten. Forty-seven times as many Americans have died in it than in all our other wars put together -- 53.3 million since 1970 – yet there are folks who consider it "politically incorrect" to even mention it.

For 40 years, it has been the costliest war in our history, taking more lives in one year than all our other wars combined. It has killed 31% of the entire generation under 40, yet the Supreme Court chose to shelter it under the pall of privacy. It is also the first major war we are in danger of losing.

It is called the "war against the unborn."

But there is no way to win a war that you are fighting against yourself. America cannot survive another 30 years of abortion. It is not just killing babies, it is destroying our whole future.

At stake is our promise to our children and grandchildren to "secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity." That's the promise all our heroes fought and died for.

What can and should we do to secure it for another generation.

If we do nothing, the war is as much as lost.

But if you personally join us in our continuing effort "to raise a great hue and cry" against the shameful practice of killing unborn children, there is real hope that it can still be won.

Our research shows that with effort it is entirely feasible to reduce abortion by 10% a year and by 66% within 10 years. And eventually end it altogether as part of a new American future.

The Movement for a Better America is a movement of men, women and families dedicated to restoring a culture of life in America by changing hearts and minds. You can help us do that by joining your voice with ours today.

You will be helping to build a new common sense majority based on the family as the fundamental social and economic unit of society and committed to preserving the God-given right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Call it the common-sense, pro-life tea party.

Be a hero. Make a difference.

Let's hear from you today.

Movement for a Better America, Inc., PO Box 472, Mt. Freedom, NJ 07970

(MBA, Inc. is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit corporation. All donations are tax deductible.)

Yes, I would like to walk with you in the footsteps of heroes. I support your campaign to awaken America to the terrible toll being taken by abortion. Please enroll me as a member and send me a copy of your innovative pro-life marketing series on Pro-Life Strategies for the 21st Century.

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