

As I sat in the sessions of the Winter Conference in Mandan, I looked over the crowd of men and women who served so gallantly in all parts of the world. I still have regrets that I did not offer more in some way when I was younger.

I am sure many of you know the story of Albert Funk Jr. He joined the US Army in 1941 at the age of twenty-five. Albert volunteered as a paratrooper and was stationed in England during much of WWII until D-Day in 1944. That day, the small unit he commanded landed in Normandy, which was forty miles inland. They fought for several days before breaking through enemy lines to rejoin their regiment closer to the coast. He later took part in another operation known as the "Battle of the Bulge." He led a 3-man patrol against a German battery that were targeting all incoming allied gliders. Later, in Belgium, this same company ran into eighty German soldiers and a German officer put a gun to him. Initially, he pretended to comply, but instead grabbed the German's weapon and began firing at the enemy which gave his company time to successfully capture all enemy weapons. Many German soldiers were killed or wounded that day due to his bravery. Albert received numerous awards for his bravery and today is one of the most decorated paratroopers. Following his tour in the military, Albert worked for the VA in Pittsburgh, PA. He passed away in 1992 at the age of seventy-six and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

I know Albert is just one of many who answered the call and so deservedly was awarded the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart with two Oak Leaf Clusters, indicating extreme sacrifice was involved. He was lucky to survive. I think of those who served in all wars and did not survive. It makes me sad. In the past year, Albert Elliot Jr. and Leon Sand, two men from my high school graduating class from the small town of Clifford, passed away. Both men served in the Vietnam War, so it brings it close to home.

With Memorial Day quickly approaching, allow me to say thank you, thank you, thank you to all who served and continue to serve in one capacity or another. You are truly heroes and we are eternally indebted to you. May God richly bless you.

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