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The theme I have chosen is courage in the face of insurmountable odds. I picked a soldier, and two pilots' tales to illustrate my theme. Christians Appy's book part III escalations contained many stories that I could have used, but the three below were very compelling stories. Most people could not have gone through their trials and tribulations and survived.

Dennis Deal was a Lieutenant on his first combat mission in Vietnam. His story was in the chapter about the Central Highlands. He described how he was completely terrified while the battle was raging. "It was Terrifying. I was terrified almost to the point of insanity." Somehow he was able to get past that fear and acted courageously during the fighting. "All you need is one more millimeter than the guys around you and they're okay."

Later during the battle he was sent to try and recover Lieutenant Henry's lost platoon. He was on the extreme right of his platoon with no other American units to his right. While crawling to reach the objective he was flanked by six NVA soldiers and somehow he managed to kill all six of them without receiving a scratch. The odds of him killing six soldiers that are shooting at him without being wounded are almost impossible.

Porter Halyburton was a prisoner of war from 1965 to 1973. What is remarkable about Halyburton is that he was able to endure isolation, interrogation, indoctrination, and torture for eight years. He showed great courage by functioning after receiving wounds, when his plane was hit by enemy fire. He calmly and coolly removed shrapnel from his hand, assessed his situation, and ejected the aircraft.

Once he was captured he was forced into isolation with no contact from other prisoners. "A tree had forced a leaf up between the shutters—a green leaf. I took that as a sign that no matter how isolated I was, God was somehow going to send me a sign." It took an internal courage to want to stay alive. The Vietnamese would place his bowl of rice outside his cell so it would become infested with ants making it inedible.

Halyburton was tortured in an attempt to get him to divulge information or to sign confessions. At first the guards beat him to soften him up. After that the torture began. The torture he described was called max – cuffs. "Your arms were pulled up behind your back and then they put these handcuffs on the upper part of your arm. Then they tied a rope on your wrists and pulled it up; I could actually see my fingertips over the top of my head when they did that. It pressed the nerves against the bone. It was like molten metal flowing through your veins just indescribable pain."

I can't imagine how awful his experience as a prisoner of the NVA was like, but he had an inner courage that was his saving grace. When we describe our servicemen as America's best that is true, and I would say that Porter Halyburton was one of our best.

Luu Huy Chao was a pilot for the North Vietnamese Air Force during the war. He had an unfathomable courage, and is one of only three to attain Ace status. He flew the Mig 17 which was an aircraft that came out of the Korean War. It was slower and did not carry missiles or rockets for armament, and didn't have as sophisticated electronics. He is credited with 6 American aircraft kills.

On one occasion he had to fight four F-105s. He shot down one and the wingman went to low and crashed into a mountain. "I did not hesitate for a moment because I realized I was in a very serious situation." Later he was in a fight with an F-4 and he shot it down. "Once I shot down an F-4 I was no longer scared of any type of American plane." He gained confidence from the fact that if he was shot down it was in his own country unlike the American pilots.

What I liked best about Luu Huy Chao is that he had moral courage. When other pilots from his squadron would try to shoot American pilots that had parachuted he would stop them. He would say, "He won't attack us again. Let him alone." When the other pilots argued he would tell them, "Well we're different." It is easy to kill someone when the adrenaline is pumping, it takes courage not to.

Each one of these men had courage that was tested to the extreme. They also had moral courage which helped them to avoid becoming savages. That is the big difference between professional soldiers and a terrorist.

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