

Courage and Modernity: One's Man's Private War Against Tyranny

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HAD HITLER KNOWN Howard Callaway he would have thought better of starting the war. The Nazi Fuehrer managed to place his jackboot on the neck of a bleeding, prostrate Europe, but the faceless, conditioned masses who made up his *Wehrmacht* could not withstand the fury of conscience-aroused individuals who put an end to the German's dream of world domination. Men whose ancestors subdued a continent with little more than axe and rifle bruised the head of the modern-day serpent. Prominent among Hitler's conquerors were men from southern Appalachia whose fortitude was undiminished by the nihilistic currents of modern thought flowing from the Enlightenment. Due to deeply ingrained habit and the region's isolation, Blue Ridge culture remained nearer the sources of Western life than many of its progenitors. A strange rendezvous awaited one particular personification of that region whose courage was needed at a crucial moment in history.

The West escaped the abyss in 1945. However, many observers of the contemporary scene—most notably the dissident Russian author Alexandr Solzhenitsyn—doubted our ability again to call forth such staunch defenders of liberty. The erosion of our power certainly appears spectacular, but whether our courage can be reawakened and the reservoirs of our strength replenished remains an unanswered question.

In this essay I propose to investigate the influences which molded a man who, al-

though ordinary in almost every recognized sense of the word, exuded courage as pure and unadulterated as an Appalachian stream. Ominous questions—some of them raised by Solzhenitsyn in his 1978 speech at Harvard—emerge inescapably from this investigation. Have we lost touch with the sources of our civilization's greatness? Has the West lost its civic courage? Will we fall victim to the "babble of voices" which preceded Europe's descent into madness in the second quarter of the twentieth century?

I

IN MY YOUTH I remember standing in awe before a large, grey, granite monument, hewn in the shape of a cross, cradled among sturdy oaks in the cemetery of Ivy Green Missionary Baptist Church. Etched prominently in the center of the stone was the U.S. Army's Distinguished Service Cross, a military decoration which I often reverently traced with youthful fingers. I can still remember the trees in the churchyard swaying mournfully as cool winds blew down from Fisher's Peak, whose ominous presence loomed over North Carolina's Blue Ridge range.

The setting was conducive to powerful reflection, even for a child. What manner of man was this uncle of mine whose remains rested so peacefully beneath the clay sod in this isolated region along the spine of eastern America? I had heard the cryptic phrases read by the officer award-

ing the citation: "For extraordinary heroism in action . . . in his first combat mission, voluntarily entering a hostile, fire-swept area to eliminate a tank threat." Faint remembrances of the man himself sometimes bobbed up in my brain: brief sketches of one whose predominant reaction to life was laughter and whose governing character trait was generosity. Especially tender were the memories of those occasions when I went with my father to Howard's service station and was permitted to walk behind the large glass counter to take my pick of the candy bars inside. He was not the kind of man you would expect to storm the nearest military recruiting office after the first shot was fired from an enemy gun. Such an impulsion, according to Tolstoy, was typical of unhappy men who marched off with the first wave of volunteers to become war heroes. War gained them a respite from their domestic turmoil.

The Western world was slow to anger. So too was Howard Callaway, who, although drafted late in the war, kindled sufficient wrath on a hot July day in 1944 to fight off single-handedly a field full of German panzers. Two worlds collided on that fateful occasion, as an awkward figure advanced alone from the American lines with a weapon resembling a stovepipe slung across his massive shoulder. His mission: intercept the *Blitzkrieg*, or as much of it as he could encompass within his gun sights. The war was thus reduced to its most fundamental issue: German steel versus the strength of human personality.

Sweeping across the same terrain in 1940, the awesome might of Germany's terrible swift sword tore through the fabric of a decadent, jaded society. But 1944 was a different kind of war fought by a different breed of man. Whether on the ancient plain at Marathon or on the Normandy beaches, battles have been won in the final analysis by individual acts of courage. In the summer of 1944, an exhausted *Blitzkrieg* directed by bleary-eyed warriors strained mightily to regain the initiative in the war, as their well-worn guns belched desperate fusillades of fire and

destruction in the direction of a man who yearned to be back home in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The haunting question will not die: What mysterious impulse prompted a happy man to stride into the jaws of a mechanized behemoth? The answer must be sought in the hidden recesses of the character. Human fortitude issues from diverse and sometimes unexpected sources, but its wellsprings always lie deeply hidden in the individual psyche. These energizing forces can be sensed but their founts can never be tapped in their full powerfulness unless the individual discovers by the use of some human divining rod a way to locate their source. The quest for a means to unleash these hidden powers is one of the themes of human life and one of man's deepest yearnings.

"To be a philosopher is to learn to die," according to an ancient Greek sage, and if one assumes the truth of that axiom, then the circumstances of a man's death reflect upon the quality of his entire life. Howard Callaway was neither a philosopher nor an intellectual, yet his life exemplified a system of belief as viable as the one Socrates proclaimed when he drank of the hemlock twenty-four centuries ago. When he volunteered to intercept those German panzers, Callaway may not have seen the denouement of the world war unravel before his eyes, but he rose to the moment and turned the tide of battle by an act of heroism that was both a summation of his life and a projection beyond the finite limits of his earthly experience.

II

THE BLOOD OF PIONEERS ran thick in the veins of Howard Callaway. Generations earlier Callaway kinsmen accompanied Daniel Boone to Kentucky, and the great pioneer's daughter, Jemimah, was even kidnapped by the Shawnee Indians along with two Callaway sisters. Thomas Callaway, a brother of the latter, assisted in the girls' rescue and subsequently became Boone's son-in-law when he married Jemimah. Howard Callaway's ancestors were also among the three-hundred

volunteers from Surry and Wilkes Counties who followed Colonel Benjamin Cleveland down the hollows of the Blue Ridge to battle the British at Kings Mountain in 1780.

The rugged sinews of that frontier spirit lingered in the hill country of the South well into the twentieth century, and the area became an enclave of one of the purest strains of pre-Enlightenment culture existing anywhere in the Western world. A unique situation existed in the Blue Ridge where, over a period of two centuries of relative isolation, settlers adapted the culture of northern Europe to the conditions of the American frontier. The admixture of old world culture and the frontier ethos produced that distinctive and widely touted Appalachian individualism. The prowess of fighting men from that region is supported by empirical evidence. For example, in the Korean War a highly disproportionate percentage of America's Medal of Honor winners came from small towns and villages in southern Appalachia.¹

The Appalachian region differed from that other frontier—the Old West—in one important respect: Its inaccessibility precluded the kind of *anomie*, or normlessness, which constant moving in and out produced on the western frontier. The inhabitants' orientation to life was instinctively Burkean, even before the great English political philosopher lived or wrote his anti-revolutionary classic. The culture of the British Isles provided a workable foundation upon which to build a way of life that bore remarkable similarities to the evolutionary conservatism espoused by the Burkean school. The southern mountain folk avoided rigid absolutism on the one extreme and the quicksand of cultural relativism on the other.²

Eighteenth-century notions, championed by French *philosophes* and other Enlightenment figures, barely penetrated the region. In fact the tendency to claim certain abstract rights as "gifts of nature" enjoyed little acceptance in a region where nature not only offered no free gifts

but stood as an obstacle to be surmounted. Nevertheless the struggle against nature offered an unexpected dividend: an exhilarating new freedom which enabled the inhabitants to fulfill the ancient admonition of Jehovah to "subdue the earth" and in the process to transcend the rationally-calculated parameters of their existence.

The essence of such a life was unavoidably metaphysical. Interpreting life exclusively in terms of intellect seemed artificial and contrived; indeed, life in the Blue Ridge appeared considerably more complex and mysterious than the celebrated "world-machine" of the rationalists. Struggle provided the mechanism to transcend nature, *i.e.*, the means to overcome the "stacked deck" of physical and historical determinism. One lived in deference to the rhythms of nature without being entirely of nature: to give and receive from nature while at the same time acknowledging the One who created man with the capacity to surmount his natural environment.

The most enduring conception of man in the Blue Ridge was that of an innately flawed being who nevertheless was free to pursue the upright life. The behaviorist claim that made the individual a helpless victim of external conditioning was as alien to this spirit as were the assumptions of the rationalists. Inhabitants of the region would have agreed with that "zek" from the Siberian gulag who concluded that it was "impossible to expel evil from the world in its entirety, but it is possible to constrict it within each person."³ They recognized instinctively that a moral law existed "prior to all devices and prior to all our contrivances . . . antecedent to our existence."⁴ As practical mountain folk they would have insisted, however, that the application of such a law be "left to prudence."⁵ In spite of their exaggerated individualism, they recognized that another spirit worked slowly and silently, shaping life into order and harmony.

Thrown back upon their own resources, the Appalachian mountain people, according to W. J. Cash, exhibited "the most intense individualism the world has seen

since the Italian Renaissance."⁶ They fashioned a society which placed its chief value upon personal courage and physical strength rather than upon wealth and rank, and any adversary who challenged their freedom to live their lives unencumbered by restriction could expect a fight. The mountain man would "knock hell out of whoever dared to cross him."⁷

The manner in which a man reacted to life situations established his individual worth, as well as his standing in the community. Those who forged ahead against obstacles, or who struggled against a stubborn fate for even minimal results, merited respect in the Appalachian community and presumably reward in the hereafter. However, their "root hog or die" attitude made them mortal enemies of social engineering and collectivist solutions to social problems. Mountain folk were little affected by the tendencies of contemporary man to live an exclusively exterior existence, stripped of the stabilizing influences which traditionally shielded them from harm. There emerged in the region a distinctive personality type, one which derived from religion a stable nucleus and from the prevalent mode of existence a rich inner life that rendered him immune to the crushing rigors of the outer world.

Culture is the lubricant of human existence, and in a frontier setting its maintenance is imperative. For human life to grate directly against nature is for it to be consumed. The struggle for a good, prosperous, upright life provided an appropriate setting for the Appalachian community. The socialization process in this region frequently broke down, as it does in every culture, but the peculiarly dogged manner in which the inhabitants fought off cultural extinction produced exceptionally strong sinews in those who successfully met the test. A fierce, unrelenting battle was required to thwart the twin threats to their way of life: alcoholism and general dissipation.

The most cherished value in the Appalachian region was the capacity to conserve: both in the material realm and in the immaterial world of the spirit. The Burkean

view of society is based upon the beneficial effects of a gradual assimilation of experience; indeed, the forming of the individual and collective minds into a depository to prevent the draining away of cherished ideas and venerated customs is the very essence of civilization. The civilized "stream of conscience" must be renewed continually to prevent cultural stagnation. There were times when the requirements of community prompted the individual to sacrifice his own interest for the well-being of his neighbors. The spirit of abstraction, so revered by the Enlightenment, seemed inimical to life in the Blue Ridge because it set the rationalized individual adrift in a passionless universe without direction or boundaries.

Mountain folk never succumbed to that nostalgic sentimentalizing of the past which plagued many flatland southerners. The proper stance toward history was one of walking upright with one foot in the past (rooted in nature) and the other raised (transcended) thrusting into the future. One should never turn and face the past but have the winds of accumulated experience blowing at his back. Progress was always purchased with a price, and "great leaps forward" were rejected because leaping ahead severed the vital links with the source of life that had gone before. Yet to lose faith in the future, as Viktor Frankl has stated, is to "lose one's spiritual hold" and thus be "doomed."⁸

The Appalachian community became "one of the most remarkable societies which ever existed."⁹ Tempered by the savage harshness of the frontier, they were the "first men of American birth to establish an independent community on this continent."¹⁰ In the Watauga Association's Declaration of Protest in 1772, they declared themselves "a self-governing association under control of no power other than our God and the General Congress. . . ."¹¹ In reality they had a strong aversion for any exercise of civil authority beyond the bare essentials of civilized existence. The community customarily took care of its own problems without resort to law, even meting out punishment for

criminal transgressions in a manner that left little doubt about their determination to protect their rights.

The world witnessed their wrath for the first time in 1780, when Major Patrick Ferguson threatened to bring his Redcoat army into the region to hang their leaders, burn their crops, and lay waste to their country "with fire and sword." Ferguson's threats brought men swarming down the mountain slopes with grim fury flashing from their eyes and a fighting slogan on their lips: "the sword of the Lord and Gideon."¹² This band of men who had "such fear of God that no fear of mortal man plagued them,"¹³ cornered the British force atop Kings Mountain and administered such a thrashing that a flag of truce could not stop their musket balls from pouring into the Redcoats' ranks. Many apparently did not know the significance of a white flag. Rarely if ever has a modern professional army been so decimated by a band of irregulars, and tales of these "barbarians from the hills" circulated for generations.

The victory at Kings Mountain was no accident. The mountaineers cut their "warring teeth" in the Indian Wars, and their marksmanship was so renowned that they shot leaping squirrels in the head "to spare the meat." Their reputation for bellicosity continued as they followed Andrew Jackson all the way to New Orleans in the War of 1812, and Winfield Scott to the halls of Montezuma in the Mexican War. Lee and Jackson fashioned from their starving and tattered ranks one of America's most feared instruments of war. Wherever they have been called upon to fight, sons of Appalachia, such as Sergeant Alvin York, have never failed to win distinction for their physical courage. Indeed, men from the southern hills populate American military cemeteries around the world. Yet frequently they have been treated as curiosities, and scholarly analyses of their contributions have been practically nonexistent.

III

THE ENLIGHTENMENT inspired modern

man's peculiar version of the sin of hubris, namely, setting himself up as a separate, inviolable entity, answerable to himself alone, fully sovereign, and rival to God—even a God in his own right. The absence of belief attained the status of a recognized dogma and became perhaps the most popular viewpoint of Western intellectuals. Some remained nominal believers but nevertheless tolerated no interference by the Deity in their everyday pursuits. Equally debilitating was the new cult of spontaneity, spawned by Freudian psychology, which relinquished—at least in the popular mind—controls over human drives, urges, wishes, and whims. The privatization of religious belief also rendered the spiritual dimension a negligible factor in corporate life. By the turn of the present century, therefore, the nihilistic forces contending for control of modern man's disheveled soul produced a deafening, soul-searing, intellectual Pandemonium.

Modern man's weakened character stemmed from his refusal to draw limits around himself—even Nietzsche, who helped create the problem, admitted as much. All manner of perversions competed to fill the vacuum once occupied by religious belief. The First World War churned these and other cultural poisons into a satanic brew which presently convulsed the world in the guise of totalitarian movements on both the Left and the Right.

Modern man's grotesquely fragmented soul began to resemble the contorted features on the canvas of a Picasso abstract. With its citizenry in disarray, the democratic societies were paralyzed and unable to protect their way of life from the ferocious threats of the dictators. The redefinition of good and evil in social terms meant the relaxation of the historic source of moral and spiritual valuation. Western life was traditionally held in balance, as it were, by opposing magnetic fields—perceived good and evil—but the relaxation of the tension between these antagonistic forces disoriented man's moral compass, allowing the needle to

fluctuate erratically, pausing only long enough to point to transitory goals. The atmosphere of confusion was perhaps most exaggerated in Germany where the sense of personal autonomy was not strong enough to resist the resurgent powers of barbarism. Democracy succumbed and the weak foundations of Weimar society were swept away.

Like some collective Prodigal Son, modern man departed the Father's house and journeyed into a far country, where he lost touch with the source of his civilization's strength and vigor. On his own and with reason as his only guide, he was plagued by every form of madness. Unlike the seventeenth-century savant, Blaise Pascal, who detected the fatal flaw at the inception of the age, modern man continued along the path of reason, frantically attempting to make contact with something stable and permanent. He projected himself continually outward from the vortex of his being, and, since nothing held, he was driven to repeat the effort endlessly. Franz Kafka revealed the tragic dilemma of modern man when he acknowledged that his own failure stemmed not from "laziness, weak-will or clumsiness" but from "the lack of ground under my feet . . . the lack of law." No stable axis can be forged between the autonomous self and human achievement. Permanence only emanates from the primordial reaches of the inner self—that region where the voice of the divine is heard. The individual personally and society collectively must retain contact with the center if there is to be a possibility of permanent equilibrium.

The inhabitants of the mountains and valleys of the American South understood the secret of permanence; therefore, the nihilistic floodwaters never swept away the foundations of their life.

IV

HOWARD CALLAWAY CAME into the world in heroic dimensions, weighing well over ten pounds at birth. Uncle Sam's army would later be hard pressed to get his six-foot-two-inch frame below 215

pounds of muscle and bone. As he matured, Howard imbibed strength from the mountain culture: his parents in fact represented two distinct but crucial facets of Western tradition. Dan Callaway was an authentic mountain man who had that intense squint of the eye and fire in the belly of one who had carried on an unrelenting struggle for a livelihood against a rocky, hostile terrain—but who had never given in. When his farming efforts survived drought, economic depression and distant markets, an entire year's labor could still be wiped out in a matter of hours by an uncontrollable mountain firestorm. In his ceaseless toil, his upright life, and his unwavering honesty, Dan Callaway exemplified the Hebraic ideal of the "active life" and the stubborn refusal to accept barriers to human achievement. He despised drunkenness and his hatred of those who trafficked in the region's foremost social evil approached pathological intensity.

Laura Faulkner Callaway possessed an engaging love of life, an interest in humane letters, and a gentle, sensitive disposition. With her remarkable mental endowment, she could recite reams of poetry and sing entire church hymns after hearing them but once. She bore nine children and still "read every book that my children ever brought home from school." (What would one expect from a woman whose maiden name was Faulkner?) Representing the Greek ideal, the "contemplative life," she abhorred violence and later requested that no firearms be present at her son's military funeral. In a unique way Howard combined the best qualities of both parents: his father's utter fearlessness and his mother's sensitive intelligence.

Denied the "benefits" of the television age, the Callaway family habitually sat by the hearth in the evenings taking turns reading aloud from the classics of literature, which families in the area passed around or borrowed from schools. This ritual pleased even my unlettered grandfather who looked forward to the nightly delights with eager anticipation. The cadence of King James verse also pene-

trated to the marrow of the bone and composed a shield of mail, protecting family members from the traumas of life.

For a man typically as gentle as a lamb, Howard attracted an inordinate amount of excitement throughout his life. His fearlessness evoked much comment, even in childhood. One evening while still a preschooler, he continued playing outside after dark, when a relative placed a sheet over her head and decided to give the boy a good scare. Undaunted, Howard leveled his eyes at the ghost-like creature advancing toward him and sent her into a rapid retreat dodging flying bricks. On another occasion his mother gave him a sound thrashing for some misdemeanor only to have the determined lad stand up and sternly order her off the premises of his play lot.

As a beekeeper, Howard frequently worked shirtless among the teeming hives—generally without being stung. He claimed that his bees knew him. On Sundays, for the uproarious entertainment of nieces and nephews, Howard would sometimes pick up a bee gently by the wings, place the insect on his extended tongue, and blow the little critter off the end, as if it were a tiny runaway. Only years later did we learn that he selected harmless drones for his little theatrics.

Howard was the first member of the family to have access to a high school, and his acuteness of mind was recognized early. He planned to enroll at North Carolina State University—even packed his bags to go—but the Great Depression claimed yet another victim when at the last minute the family fell sixty dollars short in its effort to produce the necessary tuition. With the scholastic avenue closed, Howard had no alternative but to use his brawn to survive.

Securing employment in nearby Mount Airy, Howard immediately attracted attention as the powerful, raw-boned lad who worked the night shift at the Shell station on Main Street. He could not help attracting attention—some of it he did not want—when he hoisted heavy truck wheels over his head and slammed them

against the pavement with enough force to break the tire loose from the rim. A local “tough guy,” apparently intending to intimidate the newcomer, provoked a fight late one evening. When a few mauling lefts and rights added the local boy’s brain and left his legs rubbery, Howard deposited him unceremoniously on the sidewalk in front of the station.

Trouble now escalated. The dregs of the local night life, unable to pass up such a challenge, naturally tried to locate someone who could take Howard’s measure. They settled upon a ruffian from the local granite quarry who showed up one evening just as Howard had finished mopping the interior of the station. Accompanied by his friends, the bully piled out of his car and loudly announced that he was going to mess up the place in the worst sort of way. In his best drawl, Howard allowed that if he followed through with his boast, the local undertaker would need to be consulted. What then transpired, according to witnesses, was “one of the awfulest fights ever heard of in that county.” Flying bodies and slamming fists wrecked the interior of the station in several minutes of compressed violence. However, it must be said that this latest incident convinced the locals to “let the big mountain boy be.”

Living and working in town for a dozen years changed Howard’s orientation to life very little. He apparently understood that sophistication sometimes requires no radical changes. Growth often involves an enhancement of existing value structures rather than their replacement by new ones. He was not among those millions, uprooted from the soil, who renounced the very qualities which made them unique in order to appear worldly-wise and liberated from antiquated customs.

America’s entry into the Second World War found Howard Callaway at that point in life when most men begin to think of settling comfortably into middle age. By now he was past thirty, married, and the owner of his own home and service station. His expanding girth and disappearing hairline offered additional evidence that the rigors of military training and a distant

war were far from his mind. But the order came to present himself for induction into the armed forces of his country. As a happy man he went to war reluctantly, even approaching the experience with a profound uneasiness, but as a brave man he suppressed his inner disquiet. Howard had one thing in his favor: He was a total stranger to fear.

Having lived with my family for a considerable time near Mount Airy, Howard visited our home one last time before going overseas. His interesting personality and penchant for tall tales made him a natural for "favorite uncle" status at our house. However, on that particular occasion, he was strangely pensive, as if he had some premonition of disaster. Never one to flaunt his religious beliefs, he simply stated: "If anything happens to me, don't worry. My life is in order." Unsmiling, he pointed a brawny forefinger heavenward.

V

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY found the well of evil much deeper than the eighteenth century ever imagined it to be. By 1940 the birthright of liberty appeared irretrievably lost as Europe witnessed in the odious form of Nazism the full-throated counterattack of demons presumably banished two centuries earlier by the stewards of enlightenment. A mechanized version of the *furor Teutonicus* had Europe under heel, and there was doubt at this juncture of the war that the West could generate enough fury to smash the *Wehrmacht*.

The pestilence which the Howard Callaways came to Europe to combat could not have been more graphically visible. The apostle of the new religion whose god was the racial "superman" stood determined to refashion the world according to the dictates of the harsh new racial deity: to plunge the world into the fiery furnace of global conflict and to recast the molten human mass in his own idolatrous image. The Nazis claimed a mandate to launch a political plague across Europe, destroying Jews, Gypsies, and other "defectives" who

contaminated the Aryan race. Inferior groupings of humanity were nothing more than protoplasm to be recycled without regard for any possible intrinsic value they possessed as human beings. The entire nihilistic age was a world functionally godless.

The initial Western response to the Nazi threat was one of despair, a "dissolution at the heart of things... complete insolvency."¹⁴ Despair emerging from pride, according to Gabriel Marcel, was the result of "drawing one's strength solely from oneself."¹⁵ The abandonment of transcendent belief meant also the loss of civic courage. As Eric Hoffer conceded: "To our real, naked selves there is not a thing on earth or in heaven worth dying for."¹⁶ Man for himself was an entity without courage, trembling at the prospect of his own annihilation in some lonely, isolated struggle. Stripped of his sense of belonging and without a transcendent belief, man clung to his life with "shameless despair."¹⁷ Though a healthy sense of individuality is a proud inheritance of Western man, it can never by itself give a man sufficient reason to sacrifice his own existence. Such a self-denying act is an outgrowth of love and remains shrouded in mystery.

An age of relativism could banish all absolutes save one: death. Though autonomous, modern man was frail and finite, lacking the power to overcome evil. The horrendous casualties which would accompany the invasion of the European continent were awesome to contemplate, yet the Western world would have to locate men who would not shrink from the prospect of pouring out their lives. Many would come from unlikely places.

It was a long way from the Blue Ridge to the hedgerows of France: the scene of Hitler's desperate gamble in the summer of 1944 to stave off total defeat by hurling the Allied invaders back into the Norman Sea. American fighting men collectively met the test in the face of almost unprecedented martial intensity. Yet every man fought his own private war as well. Howard Callaway's whole life had been

one of individual actions, as had been the case for generations among his ancestors who protected their homes with flintlocks and shotguns. The modern bazooka gave Howard more firepower than his ancestors ever imagined, and his heart was as strong as the hardiest frontiersman. However, no generation of Americans had ever faced such a ruthless adversary.

On July 16, 1944, Callaway reached the front in time to witness a German armored assault against the American lines at St. Gilles. Men determined to preserve their lives at any cost live by the admonition, "never volunteer for anything . . . especially anything dangerous." The kind of assignment Howard Callaway accepted on his very first day in combat would appear foolhardy to those who prefer to live cautiously rather than risk dying as heroes. Panzers were already moving toward the American lines, and there was no time for a raw recruit to acclimate himself gradually to the horrors of war. With no Allied tanks available, a machine age was compelled to rely upon an individual act of heroism to prevent the Nazi steel monsters from wrecking havoc among its troops. And yet a single act can justify a life. There was no time to engage in philosophical reflection, so Howard Callaway did the only decent thing that he knew how to do. He left the safety of his own lines, thrusting himself into action in a manner consistent with his deeply ingrained sense of values.

This was not the "happy" man of the past. Even his photographs from that period betray a changed demeanor, a scowl replacing the easy smile, and brooding eyes staring out from behind raw cheekbones. The anguish of war exposed a value higher than personal happiness. His fierce countenance was the enemy of happiness—as Michelangelo's "David" he went out to engage the wicked in mortal combat. To refuse to permit fate to have its way, to go beyond personal limitations, to thumb one's nose at security and comfort, to defy death—this was man at his most heroic. One who is fully rational perhaps fights in a different man-

ner, but there are times when it pays not to be in one's "right mind," rather to be "beside oneself," *i.e.*, to have the power to work miracles. The true dimensions of the man emerged as if a mighty oak suddenly burst fullblown from an acorn.

Howard Callaway had declared war on the Third Reich. The terrible burning wrath of Jehovah descended like a shadow across the brow of the mountain man whose rage now erupted against those who had turned the good earth into a killing ground. Bring on the *Wehrmacht!* Where is it? Show yourselves! The contest appeared uneven only because the American elected to fight in an entirely personal manner—going after his adversary with a weapon in his hands, as his ancestors had done for generations.

All kinds of men were caught up in the war, and they fought under every conceivable circumstance, but the arrangement that July day was almost providentially symbolic. Despite this close proximity, a yawning abyss separated the worlds represented by the two sides in a fight which pitted steel robots against a solitary figure armed within himself with all of the inner buttresses of a great civilization and armed outwardly with a simple but deathly-awesome weapon in skilled hands. The Germans might possibly have been pleasant enough lads, but they were instruments of the satanic will-to-power festering in the soul of the Fuehrer of the Greater-Germanic Reich.

The finest steel that a technocratic mechanized society could provide shielded the bodies of the attackers, who nevertheless found their war machine reduced to hollow, smoking shells by the American. Those encased in steel were less secure than the one in possession of that irreducible something in the human personality which cannot be torn from the one who can call to his side the transcendent power of the universe. The machines and their occupants represented fate in life—the inevitability of victory for the materially over-endowed; the lone soldier symbolized the refusal to bow to fate—the capacity of the human spirit to triumph

over matter, even against overwhelming odds.

Since David battled Goliath in the Judean Hills, the fire power of armies has increased many times over, but this modern spectacle represented a show-down as meaningful as the ancient contest. The "superior" force in each instance was encased in metal (pride), the "inferior" force shielded by the intangible armor of the spirit. A well-placed shell from the muzzle of a bazooka could obliterate a tank just as surely as the stone from David's sling felled the Philistine giant.

Howard Callaway was not a modern-man—neither eloquent nor graceful—but on that day in some hidden redoubt of his mind there was the striking of flint against steel. Suddenly he was God's avenging angel, smiting the ungodly to set the world aright. In a single display of courage, he could, as a common soldier, act in the stead of countless millions who suffered mute, but whose broken bodies and tortured spirits bore witness to an awesome tyranny.

A curtain was raised and on the stage resounded the vulgar notes of an orchestra of war whose terrible but familiar chords were provided by the *Blitzkrieg*: the hoarse revving of war engines, the clanking of caterpillar treads, the screams of exploding artillery, the echoes of mortar fire, cannons belching smoke and bright flashes of fragmented steel, the burping noises of small arms fire, men's curses and groans, the unholy eruptions of exploding steel and flesh. The shrieks of sobbing multitudes over Europe provided the chorus. It was as if the vials of some devilish concoction were emptied and through the haze of escaping vapor appeared every horror that the feverish brain of man could contrive.

A lone man placed himself in the path of the engine of death ready to defy any power on earth to drive its machines past him. "They shall not pass!" A few score yards separated the mechanized hellions of the Third Reich and the mountain man, as bolts of flame and steel thundered back

and forth. What must have appeared an eternity was in fact no more than a few minutes of strife. Steady nerves and deadly marksmanship, finely honed and sifted through the generations, turned back the German armor thrust. A tank exploded and burst into flames, then another, and still another. The remaining German vehicles reversed their motion and withdrew, leaving behind a lone soldier in no-man's-land. Acting in total disregard for his own safety, Howard Callaway had earned America's second highest military decoration on his very first contact with the enemy.

His full-throated defiance of a brutal foe continued unabated for more than four months. After dispatching his first SS-officer, Callaway mailed the slain enemy's death-head insignia home, noting: "Where he's going he won't need this." The Nazis' slurs against the "softer emotions" of Christianity withered in the face of such determination. Heinrich Himmler, the *Reichsfuehrer-SS*, once lamented that the "pale figure on the Cross" with his "emphasized mien of suffering" exemplified qualities which Germans, "conscious of our heroic blood," must utterly deny.¹⁸ The *Reichsfuehrer-SS* had never met Howard Callaway.

Staff Sergeant Howard E. Callaway of the 30th Infantry Division lost his life on the morning of November 24, 1944, at "Bloody Aachen," where the Germans made a fanatical stand. He died doing what he had done since his very first day in battle: advancing directly into the face of the enemy's strength. Across exposed terrain and through murderous enemy fire Callaway advanced nine-hundred yards before a partially concealed German panzer, poised in hiding as some devilish monster, flicked its fiery tongue and in a sudden flash of light mortally wounded a man of enormous courage.

VI

LIFE MUST BE poured out to be meaningful. To hoard life's substance is to find it drying up, exhausting itself, poisoned. The

voluntary act of surrendering one's very life-essence for others is the greatest affirmation of meaning in life, and such a gesture can only spring from depths of character hidden from rational analysis. Howard Callaway lived a life meaningful in the highest sense of the word.

He was deeply mourned by the people who knew him best and beneath the good earth of his native state he is remembered still.

Will we see the likes of him again?

¹Tom Wolf, "The Last American Hero," from *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* (New York, 1965), p. 32. ²Vigen Guroian, "Natural

Law and Historicity: Burke and Niebuhr," *Modern Age*, XXV (Spring 1981), 169. ³*Ibid.* ⁴*Ibid.*, 170. ⁵*Ibid.*
⁶W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York, 1941), p. 32. ⁷*Ibid.*, p. 44. ⁸Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York, 1972), p. 117. ⁹Cash, p. 44.
¹⁰Hank Messick, *Kings Mountain* (Boston, 1976).
¹¹Alverson Pierson Hannum, *Look Back With Love* (New York, 1969), p. 21. ¹²Wilma Dykeman, *With Fire and Sword* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1978), p. 44. ¹³Hannum, p. 19.
¹⁴Modris Eksteins, *The Limits of Reason: The German Democratic Principle and the Collapse of Weimar Democracy* (London, 1975), p. 305. ¹⁵Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism* (Secaucus, N.J., 1973), p. 27. ¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 32. ¹⁷Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer* (New York, 1951), pp. 61-65. ¹⁸*Ibid.* ¹⁹Quoted in C. S. Macfarland, "Hitler or Christ," *American Mercury*, XLVIII (September 1939), 1-2.