

THE BACKSIDE OF THE STORY

By John F. Hall

In Romans, Chapter 8, Verse 28, are these words: “And we know in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”



The backside of every story that I write is that we are not alone. Christ is with us and He will provide with the strength and the power to overcome and accomplish things. In the year 1964, I was an M-60 machine gunner in the 3rd platoon, B company, 327th, 1st Regiment, 101st Airborne Kentucky Division, Fort Campbell. I called my assistant gunner and tripod carrier “Lazy.” I called my ammo bearer “Mormon.” We were the top machine gun team in Division competition matches. Our Platoon Leader rotated up to Brigade Headquarters. The new Platoon Leader was fresh out of West Point. His main weakness was his failure to listen to advice from his seasoned Platoon Sergeant.

During one Field Training Exercise (FTX), the exercise Umpire ruled that our platoon was destroyed. And we were put in “Reserve Status.” That’s a polite word for being taken out of the FTX, I lost all confidence in that “green” 2nd Lieutenant that day. I felt that in combat, that LT would get us all killed. During one FTX, we dug a horseshoe foxhole. I let “Lazy” and “Mormon” sleep. I always stayed awake. After the FTX, we would go back to our three-story concrete block barracks. There was no privacy in the open bay accommodations. I had a metal wall locker and a wooden foot locker. “Mormon” was in the bunk to my right and “Lazy” was in the bunk to my left. “Lazy” was a good soldier, but he was really lazy.

I called my ammo bearer “Mormon” because he is of the Mormon faith. I could never convince him that God is a Spirit and He does not have a physical body. His church teaches that the Holy Ghost also has a human body. I liked “Mormon,” but the golden plates with Egyptian hieroglyphics, that Joseph Smith translated, not by looking directly at them, but by looking through a transparent seer stone in the bottom of his hat, was too far fetched for me. “Mormon” was an excellent soldier. I felt that the only reason he became a paratrooper is the extra \$50 a month that he was paid for hazardous duty/jump status. He told me that when his two-year military draft obligation is up, he planned to go on a two-year Missionary Mission for his church. “Mormon” has to fund his two-year mission. What he lacks, his family has to fund. The Mormon Church does not pay anything for his mission. This surprised me because, when my grand kids: John- John and Skyler were in Mrs. Little’s 4th grade class at HCA, I went with the class on a field trip to a farm in Christian County. I asked the farmer who was leasing the farm this question: “Who owns this very large farm?” He replied: “The Mormon Church.”

In 1965, I married Paula Oakley in Fort Campbell. My three-year enlistment was completed. All that I was taking with me was the memories of the 41 paratroopers that served with me in the 3rd Platoon. President John F. Kennedy was my first Commander-in-Chief. In his inauguration speech he said: that we would “pay any price, bear any

burden, meet any hardship.” But the U.S. military, especially my “Band of Brothers,” would be the ones to answer that call, at that time in history.

Most people don’t realize that in combat, it is not the flag or the country that a soldier fights for. He fights for the soldier on his left and the soldier on his right.

I was not aware that my “Band of Brothers” would be one of the first units to deploy to Vietnam. I was escorting a Merchant Marine cargo ship, and caught up in the middle of a typhoon in the East China Sea. I made it back home to Golden Pond and began salvaging barbwire. The TVA was forcing everyone to leave, so it could make the Land Between the Lakes (LBL). To me, it will always be the Land Between the Rivers. Paula’s Baptist Pastor was coming down a dusty road where I was working. He stopped and asked me where Paula and I would move when the TVA made us leave Golden Pond. I told him Cadiz. He told me that Congress passed a new GI Bill and a new Community College in Hopkinsville had just opened. I told him that I would look into it.

I enrolled in the spring of 1966. One day, I was walking past the office of Dr. Major at the UK Hopkinsville Community College (HCC). He was the college official over student personnel. He helped me find a part-time job. Dr. Major asked me to come into his office. On Sundays he would preach at a small church. He asked me to visit a soldier that might have been in my unit in the 101". He did not tell me why he wanted me to visit this Veteran. He gave me the Veteran’s address. I thought that perhaps this Veteran was in his congregation. I went to this Veteran’s house and rang the doorbell. His wife opened the door. I introduced myself and explained that Dr. Brooks Major asked me to visit her husband. She invited me inside.

I’m writing this story on a rainy 2021 Veteran’s day. Granddaughter Jade Hakes texted that she was about to leave school on a trip with her fellow JROTC students to meet with Veterans in the community and to do good deeds. It’s hard to believe that it had been ten years, or more, since my wife, Paula and I took Jade on a field trip to meet Military Police soldiers on Fort Campbell. Granddaughters, Heather and Lexie wished me a Happy Veterans Day. Trish Cunningham thanked me for my service.

I followed the Veteran’s wife into the house; her husband was in a wheel chair. He had a black eye patch over his left eye. He had a short beard and he reminded me of a pirate. He invited me to sit down. He told me that he was in my platoon. I asked him to tell me what happened. He said that the soldier that took my place on the M-60 machine gun was walking across a field. A sniper took him out. Then the platoon fell into an ambush. He said a mortar round hit nearby him and the blast knocked him several feet into the air. Then another mortar round hit near him and knocked him into the air again. He was knocked unconscious. He was not sure how long he laid there. Two medics came to treat him. One of the medics talked to the other medic and said: “This poor old s.o.b. is not going to make it.” He told me that it made him so mad that he willed himself to live. I asked about the rest of the Platoon. He said that two others made it out alive. I asked if “Mormon” and “Lazy” survived the ambush? He shook his head and said, “No!”

“Mormon” and “Lazy” joined the names of the 58,000 other military personnel who have their names on the Vietnam Memorial Wall.

A fellow soldier and friend from Golden Pond named Ricky Fay Cossey was killed in Vietnam on December 18, 1968. He died through hostile action, of an artillery rocket mortar in Bien Hoa, South Vietnam. He was assigned to the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, 1st Squadron, Howitzer Battery. While I was still on active duty, I would drive home from Fort Campbell to Golden Pond and Ricky would come over and talk to me. He was interested in becoming a soldier. I felt bad when he was killed in Vietnam. He was drafted into the Army via Selective Service. Ricky is honored on the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial in Washington DC. His name is inscribed at VVM Wall, Panel 36w, Line 39. On this Veterans Day, I honor a friend and a fallen soldier. The backside of this story is not complete without showing Ricky’s face. He will remain forever young in the arms of Jesus Christ. (SPEC Ricky Fay Cossey, b. 2 August 1947, Cadiz, Trigg Co., KY – d. 18 December 1968, Bien Hoa, Dong Nai, Vietnam, US Army Vietnam, s/o Andrew E. Cossey & Ernestine S. Jones)



John F. Hall

EPILOGUE

I mentioned Dr. Brooks Major in my story, “The Backside of the Story.” I would be remiss if I failed to mention how significant a role that he played in my life. His generosity and kindness, to me, is one reason that I achieved so much success in life.

It began when Congress passed the GI Bill of March 3, 1966. I was in Golden Pond salvaging barbwire on my father-in-law’s farm. The TVA was making everyone leave to make the LBL. My wife’s Pastor came down the dusty road and said HCC opened and I should go to college.

The GI bill only paid for tuition and books. I needed a part-time job and I asked Dr. Brooks for help. He told me about a Postal Assistant job on Fort Campbell. I was hired and that was one reason that I could stay at HCC.

In 1977, I needed to do my student teaching requirement for my Master in College Teaching degree from Murray State. I asked Dr. Major if he would let me teach Management 1 in the spring semester. He said that HCC did not offer that course in the spring. But if I had 10 students take the course, he would allow me to teach it. I had 42 students sign up for the course. On the last day, he came to the classroom and told me to take a break. He had the students evaluate my teaching. The following week, he called me at home and offered me a full time teaching position. I had to decline because I had to stay in law enforcement for five more years.

My son and I ran out of gas on I-24 near his farm. He gave us gas and would not allow us to pay for it.

*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at:
<http://www.ajlambert.com>

Rev. Dr. J. Brooks Major

Rev. Dr. J. Brooks Major, 93, of Beverly, died at 11 p.m. Friday, November 12, 2021, at his residence.

Memorial services will be 2 p.m. Saturday, November 20, 2021, at Liberty Christian Church with the Rev. Paul Ganther and the Rev. Rachel Ganther officiating. Visitation will be Saturday from noon until the service hour at Liberty Christian Church. Hughart, Beard & Giles Funeral Home is in charge of the arrangements.

A native of Beverly, he was born September 1, 1928, the son of the late Robert Howard Major, Sr. and Harriett Steger Major. He earned his Bachelor's and Master's Degrees from Austin Peay State University and his Master of Divinity and Doctor of Philosophy Degrees from Vanderbilt University.

Rev. Dr. J. Brooks Major was a minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) since 1948 until his retirement in 1993. He served various churches including Liberty, Rich, Millbrooke, Crofton, Roaring Springs, and Elkton. He retired from the ministry from his home church of Liberty Christian where he was still a member.

He was a member of the first faculty of the University of Kentucky — Hopkinsville Community College in 1965. He served as a Professor of History and Associate Director for Academic



Affairs. He served a number of terms as Chairman of the Hopkinsville-Christian County Library Board and was a member of the board when the present facility was built. He was a longtime member and past president of the Athenaeum Society and the Christian County Historical Society.

He was preceded in death by his wife of 66 years, Martha Hutchison Major; his son, Robert Boyd Major; his daughter in law, Ruby Major; and his granddaughter, Denise Major Sowell.

Survivors include his brother, Howard Major of Oxford, Kan.; his grandson, Bobby (Andrea) Major of Hopkinsville; his granddaughter, Michele (Kinney) Adkins of Beverly; his seven great grandchildren; and seven great great grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers memorial contributions may be made to Pennyroyal Hospice 220 Burley Avenue, Hopkinsville, KY 42240.