

COURAGE

One man with courage makes a majority. Andrew Jackson

For without belittling the courage with which men have died, we should not forget those acts of courage with which men have lived. John F. Kennedy

*Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene.
Ernest Hemingway*

The only thing we have to fear is fear itself. Franklin Delano Roosevelt

*Everyone should have the courage of my convictions, with one exception, me.
Jack Basuk*

Most individuals require someone that they can have a high regard for and to some extent venerate. We need our idols. What seems to be true for most folks is equally so for societal entities such as ethnicities, religious collectivities, the world of the arts and humanities, the criminal element, sport fans, scientific associations, the military and especially nations. The most important traits that our heroes must exhibit is their bravery or courage as well as their durability and resolve under extreme trying circumstances. These icons are sometimes legendary or long gone. Those that are still with us often maintain an aura of invincibility. We place them on such an exalted pedestal that they acquire a degree of renown making them legendary in their lifetime. (Einstein, case in point.)

Are there any still around? As an investigative journalist I will make the argument that in our nation one such exists. Whether he merits such accolades I will leave to you.

Our most frequent source of heroes is the military, especially when we are at war. It is therefore not surprising that our current celebrated hero was a non-commissioned officer in the army. He was awarded every armed services' medal for bravery under fire. The highest honor was bestowed on him seven times. He always seemed to be in the thick of the hostilities, performing deeds deemed impossible, yet he never suffered a scratch. On the basis of his military record he certainly merited all the tributes that came his way.

At first glance, he seemed to be the most unlikely of heroes. His name is Samuel Shane. He was brought up in the slums of one of our most dilapidated cities. His parents were dirt poor, always struggling to make ends meet, using whatever dubious means available to them. A great proportion of any income they managed to scrape up was spent on alcoholic liquid refreshments. Notwithstanding their obvious handicaps they tried to be good parents. Samuel was reasonably amply fed although not well nourished, provided with money to spend on reading material, and encouraged to go to school and study diligently. Unfortunately he was a poor student despite being blessed with street smarts. Perhaps that was due to the rough neighborhood in which he resided, where not much value was placed on education.

Samuel had no athletic skills. He could not run very fast. He had no physical strength to speak of. He was very thin and had a waxen pallor. Thus he had no ability to defend

himself. He was also extremely shy and timid. How he survived in his rough milieu is a mystery. Perhaps it was because he quickly learned how to make himself invisible. His non descriptive appearance certainly aided him in this regard. Also he was smart enough to keep to himself and to remain as quiet as possible. He walked in shadows, never in light.

I found him intriguing. How could such a character have become a legendary hero in his lifetime? I was determined to find out. I started by trying to interview him. He must have turned me down at least a dozen times. I finally cornered him in a quiet café where he was having breakfast. His physical appearance and demeanor were a far cry from the pre-military wimp that he had been before enlisting. The subsequent conversation revealed very little about him. The only thing I learned was that at the age of nineteen he decided to enlist in the military. He had never finished high school and decided that he had no prospects for the good life unless he tried something radically different. He was smart enough to realize that he had to escape from his sordid surroundings. He revealed absolutely nothing about his life in the military. The only other thing he disclosed was that with the aid of a G.I Bill, he had gone back to school, had graduated from High School, had earned an undergraduate degree and was working on a Masters program. He refused to make known the subject of his Masters thesis.

His reticence about his life in the army and his current studies made me suspect that he was hiding something that the government was not allowing him to disclose. This possibility piqued my curiosity to a much greater extent. Luckily, I had many close contacts within the Defense Department and I had no misgivings about using my friendship with some of them to get information. They owed me. I quickly discovered that indeed, Samuel had been involved in something that was considered such a grave matter of national security that only a few at the highest echelon really knew the nuts and bolts about it. Since a major aspect of my profession was to try and unearth information that the government or the private sector was concealing, I devoted all my time and energy in attempting to unmask whatever they were trying to suppress.

Without disclosing my sources, I eventually discovered what all the fuss was about. That it should have been kept secret is certainly debatable. In my opinion, national security had nothing to do with it. However it made some sense to treat the matter with a high degree of sensitivity.

It seems the Defense Department had contracted with about eight pharmaceutical manufacturing companies to produce a drug that would enhance the physical prowess of anyone taking it. Each agreed to formulate a testosterone-related compound coupled with other bio-chemicals to reduce any undesirable side effects. Of course, none of the companies knew who the other companies were although one can be reasonably sure that they could accurately guess who their competitors were. Very cautiously each started with only one human guinea pig. Much to everyone's surprise the results were very positive for all those tested. Medical tests indicated that no one's health had been deleteriously affected.

However before more volunteers could be tested an anomaly did show up. Samuel exhibited characteristics that, frankly, were unbelievable. After a battery of exhaustive tests, not only did his muscular physical abilities improve dramatically, as it did with all the others, but his visual and auditory acuity, his reflexes and reaction times to new and unexpected stimuli far surpassed anything ever seen before with humans. This was

coupled with a spectacular psychological change. No longer was he timid and meek. He became totally fearless, exhibiting unimaginable courage and bravery. He has become a superman, something most of us fantasize about. These results were passed on to the other drug companies with the hope that they could achieve the same results. Of course the competition between them is fierce since the potential profits would be enormous. Up to the present time they had not succeeded. Samuel's drug company also does not understand what has transpired with Samuel. A careful examination of his DNA has provided nothing. Everyone is in the dark. I can only hazard a guess as to what Samuel's research towards his Masters. He knows how he has changed.

The significance of all this is apparent. To have an army of Samuels is the dream of any top military officer. It would render their soldiers invincible. That nation could conquer the world. However it goes beyond military victories. Imagine if such a drug were available to one and all. Think of it! We could all purchase 'courage'. Since that commodity is rare, the price would be proportionally high, much to the delight of its manufacturers and distributors. We would all become an induced race of fearless drones. Can our society survive if fear of the police, fear of the judiciary, fear of the penal system, fear of the military, fear of government authority, fear of weaponry, fear of our school masters, fear of our bosses at work, fear of God as promoted by religious prelates, fear of retribution, and fear of each other, disappeared? Is it an accident that most laws prohibit anti-social behavior? If we were able to always do as we wish without suffering any dire consequences, would that not result in utter chaos? Is it not a truism that 'fear' is the glue that holds civilization together? Doing away with fear, I find quite fearful. A cheerful thought!

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