

THAT BOAR IN THE BUSHES

1 Kings 22:3-27

For several summers when he was in college our son, Toby, worked as an instructor at a surf camp. People came to the camp from all over the country, and even other countries to learn how to surf. One story Toby told us was about a married couple that came from Detroit. The husband was eager to learn how to surf, but the wife was more than a little dubious about the whole project. She had reluctantly agreed to attend with her husband but she had a big problem. She had a debilitating case of thalassophobia, which means fear of the ocean.

Not only did she not want to surf, she didn't even want to put a foot in the ocean. So the first couple of days of the camp, despite the reassurances and encouragement of both her husband and camp instructors, she sat on the beach and watched, and seemed determined to stay there. She could see that her husband and the other students were learning, having some success and enjoying it, and seemed safe. Toby and the other instructors kept coaxing her to just step into the water. That was the first thing. Just get her into the ocean, then maybe gradually as she got more comfortable maybe they could actually get her out on a board.

Finally several days in she actually ventured into the water. She was tentative at first, but seemed to enjoy it as she waded out into waist high water. And then a man not far from her stepped on a sting ray. It nailed him with its barb and he began howling in pain, and kept on howling for almost an hour. That woman practically walked on water as she shot back toward the beach. That was game over. She was done. She was more determined than ever to avoid the ocean at all cost. She spent the rest of the week on the beach, and the sum total of her surf camp experience was that it confirmed for her that she should never, ever go anywhere close to the ocean.

If that lady were to ever attempt surfing she would have had to screw up enough courage to overcome her thalassophobia. After the sting ray incident, there was no chance that was going to happen. Her fears had been confirmed. The ocean was a scary place where something terrible was sure to happen. To overcome that fear she would have needed some powerful motivation. She just did not have that motivation. Her life was just fine without surfing, why expose herself to the obviously real and terrifying dangers of the ocean just to learn to surf? Unfortunately, that failure of courage meant she spent a lot of money to sit on the beach, and she likely never will experience the joy of riding a wave. There are lots of things that most of us miss out on, things much more important than surfing, because we lack the courage to pursue them. Today we will look at one last game changer, and we will see that one of his obvious characteristics was courage. His story is found in 1 Kings 22:3-37.

JEHOSHAPHAT HAD HIS DOUBTS (3-9)

These events took place about 850 years before Christ. The Jewish nation was divided into two kingdoms, north and south. At that time the north was ruled by a notoriously bad king named Ahab and the south was ruled by a mostly good king named Jehoshaphat. Much like now Israel faced constant friction from nations on all sides. One of those nations was Aram, which was in the

territory we know as Syria today, to the north and east of Israel. At the time of these events there had been a lull in hostilities between Israel and Aram, but Aram occupied Ramoth-Gilead, which was a key border strong point that Israel considered part of its territory. Ahab decided that he wanted to get it back.

Ahab wasn't sure that his army alone could drive the Arameans out of the area so he invited Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to bring his army and launch a joint operation against Aram. Because "Ramoth" means "Heights" and it is a strategic location on high ground, they called the proposed operation, "Mountain Thunder." Actually, I made that up, but it sounds cool, doesn't it? Jehoshaphat liked the plan because he wanted to create an alliance between the north and south. So he said in verse 4, "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses."

He did have one caveat, however. He wanted to make sure that this was something God approved of. So he said, "First seek the counsel of the Lord." Let's consult a prophet and see what God says about this. Ahab agreed. He brought in 400 prophets. He wanted to convince Jehoshaphat, so he called an army of prophets in to provide divine guidance. You'd think one or two would be enough, but he brought in almost enough to fill the House of Representatives. This was definitely a case of quantity over quality. Maybe if he had a whole bunch of prophets Jehoshaphat wouldn't notice the miserably poor quality of the prophets. Their response to Ahab's question about whether they should proceed with Operation Mountain Thunder was unanimous. To a man they all agreed that the Lord wanted this and would bless the operation with success.

There was a fly in the ointment. You might recall that Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, had been making a concerted effort to rid Israel of every true prophet of God. They had been trying to stamp out the worship of the God of Israel. Jezebel had even scared off the great prophet Elijah by threatening to kill him. There were no prophets of God who would respond to Ahab's request, because there were almost none left in Israel, and the few who were left avoided Ahab like he carried Ebola. So who were these 400 prophets that Ahab summoned? They were false prophets. Every single one of them was nothing but a pretender.

Jehoshaphat wasn't fooled by Ahab's sleight of hand trick. He watched this prophetic performance with skepticism. He knew very well what Ahab had been up to, so as he watched these guys bowing and scraping before Ahab he knew they were all card-carrying members of the Yes Man Society. There wasn't a single true prophet among them. These clowns wouldn't know a real word from the Lord if God personally showed up and handed it to them in writing. They were as reliable as those people who call you on the telephone and tell you they are from the IRS and they're going to sue you.

In verse 7 Jehoshaphat wisely asks, "Is there no longer a prophet of the Lord here whom we can inquire of?" Ahab's response is both pathetic and kind of funny. In verse 8 he says, "There is still one prophet through whom we can inquire of the Lord, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah."

Oh, well cry me a river. He never says anything good about you? Well whose fault is that? Maybe you need to look in the mirror, King. Ahab seriously tips his hand in that statement. First, by saying that there was one prophet left through whom they could inquire of the Lord he revealed that he knew very well that they couldn't do so through his legion of lackey prophets. He knew very well they had nothing whatsoever to do with the true God. Second, he admitted in those words that he was unwilling to hear anything negative about himself or his plans. He refused to listen to Micaiah because he always said negative things about him. Yeah, because Ahab did a whole bunch of awful stuff!

Jehoshaphat refused to go to battle until they brought this one prophet in so that he could actually reveal God's thoughts on the whole thing. So Ahab reluctantly sent for Micaiah.

MICAHIAH DIDN'T BACK DOWN

While an aide is sent to track down Micaiah the phony prophets put on a show for the two kings. One of them, a guy named Zedekiah, made a couple of horns like those on a bull and mimicked the bull attacking. He said, "This is what the Lord says, 'With these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed.'" Ahab had no need of a court jester because he had this guy. What a joker. Can you imagine this clown running around pretending to be a bull, looking like an idiot, while his ersatz prophet buddies cheered him on?

While this vaudeville act was taking place the aide found Micaiah and tried to give him a script to prophesy from. All the other prophets are predicting great success. How about if you, just this once, go along, Micaiah? Don't be your usual sourpuss self. Just agree with the group. We've got a good thing going here and really don't need you to be Mr. Buzzkill like you usually are.

Micaiah says, "I can only tell him what the Lord tells me." I suspect the aide knew right then that this wasn't going to go well, but what could he do? When Micaiah arrived, Ahab asked him about whether to launch Operation Mountain Thunder. Verse 15 is one of those places in the Bible where it's too bad we can't hear tone of voice in what is said. Micaiah answers, "Oh, by all means, you should attack. God's on your side. It's going to be a roaring success." What we can't read is that this statement was dripping in sarcasm. It inundated the whole room and drenched everyone there in it. Micaiah was mocking the king and everyone knew it. We know that from what follows.

Ahab, knowing that Micaiah is mocking him, says, "How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?" Oh, that's rich. You have to keep telling the prophet to speak God's real message? Really? How often do you think that happened? Uh, let's see. Let me count, Ahab. I believe that would come to exactly *zero* times. You have already admitted that you didn't want to hear anything from any prophet but approval of you and your plans. Since you're doing everything you can to oppose God I believe that would mean no word from God allowed.

With that Micaiah let Ahab have it with both barrels from his prophetic shotgun. In verse 17 he says, "I see all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd." Why do they have no

shepherd? Because their shepherd, their king, is dead. In other words, you're going to die, dude. And when you die your army will collapse and the battle will be a rout.

Then Micaiah proceeded to tell Ahab where his pretend prophets got their message. He depicts a scene in heaven where the Lord asks his angels who can get Ahab to attack Ramoth Gilead so he can be killed. One of them says, "I'll work it out so his prophets are all deceived and tell him to go because it will be a great success." Zedekiah was offended and smacked Micaiah. Clearly godly behavior for a prophet, right? Ahab says, "I told you so. This guy is always so negative. He never, ever says anything good." Then he ordered him thrown in jail with nothing but bread and water until he got back. Micaiah got the last word in by saying, "You're not coming back dude. And if you do then I'm not a prophet."

We must not fail to observe what Micaiah did here. He knew who Ahab was. He knew that Ahab and Jezebel were trying to eliminate the prophets of the true God. They were terminating them with extreme prejudice. Ahab by his own admission hated Micaiah before this incident. Confronting Ahab in front of his own court and in front of another king and his people was just asking for trouble. Micaiah knew very well that by doing this he was putting his life seriously in danger. By insisting on keeping his integrity and obeying God Micaiah ended up in jail. And that is the last we ever hear of him. We don't know what happened to him. Perhaps he was later released, or perhaps he died in jail. In other words, he showed tremendous courage. When his life was in the balance he did not flinch.

AHAB SHOULD HAVE LISTENED

Ahab didn't believe that God was real. He had a pretend faith in some pretend gods represented by pretend prophets. That was convenient for him because it allowed him to do whatever he wanted. If God is real, then he presents a dilemma for humans, for he might insist that they live under his authority. There is a persistent pull on humans toward the spiritual. It is pervasive throughout the human race. But equally persistent is an effort to create a God and a religion that permits them to live unrestrained lives. That was exactly what Ahab did.

There are several enormous problems with that very human tendency. One of them has to do with the fact that the true God, the God of Israel, is a God of goodness and love. All that he does and all that he commands arises out of a desire to bring about good for people. So what happens when people seek to escape his authority and his commands? They are choosing what is not good for them. Inevitably they are going to end up with results that are unpleasant at best. Ahab demonstrates that in this story. He was determined to carry out his own plan, regardless of what some prophet of God said. The result was literally deadly for him.

The guy I absolutely do not understand in this story is Jehoshaphat. He wisely insisted they consult with a prophet of the true God before launching the operation. Yet when the true prophet said the invasion was going to be a disaster, he ignored him! What was he thinking? But it gets worse. Ahab refused to accept what Micaiah said, but it made him uneasy. It created some fear about how the battle was going to go. So Ahab cooked up a scheme that he figured would give him an extra

measure of security just in case Micaiah was right. Ahab said to Jehoshaphat in verse 30, "I will enter the battle in disguise, but you wear your royal robes."

Back then the king was commander of the army and was the number 1 high value target. Kill the king and most of the time the army would melt away. Years ago there was a classic Far Side cartoon that showed 2 deer standing in the woods talking. One has a bullseye on his chest. The other says to him, "Bummer of a birthmark, Hal." Wearing royal robes was like having a bullseye on you in neon lights. So Ahab, knowing both that he would be a target and that Micaiah claimed the king of Israel would be killed in the battle, figured he would disguise himself as a regular soldier, leaving Jehoshaphat as the only king for the enemy to aim at. If a king was going to be killed that day it would be Jehoshaphat and not him. And Jehoshaphat agreed to this plan! Was he as dumb as a box of rocks, or what? Maybe as a man of faith he trusted that God would protect him. It's either that or he was just one very dim bulb.

Ahab went into battle thinking he had thwarted Micaiah's dire prediction. He obviously thought he could outwit God, assuming God even existed. He learned the hard way that God is the one who determines the outcomes of events on this planet. One unnamed Aramean soldier fired an arrow at random. I once asked my dad if he had ever shot at anyone when he was in combat during World War 2. He told me that he had not. He said for the common soldier like him you knew the general location of the enemy and you just fired in their direction. That's what this anonymous Aramean did. He shot his arrow in the general direction of the Israeli army and it turned out to be one shot in a million. Not only did it go in the direction of the Israelis, but it hit someone. And the person it hit was none other than King Ahab. And it not only hit him, but it improbably just happened to hit at a chink in his armor. One thing you don't get from movies is that often back then one arrow was not enough to kill someone. It would do damage, to be sure, but not necessarily fatal damage. But this arrow not only found a chink in Ahab's armor, it hit a vital organ. Just as Micaiah had said, Ahab died from his wound and his army scattered. He should have known no human scheme can derail God's sovereign will, and fighting against it always brings death in one form or another.

IMPLICATIONS

GOD WANTS US TO BE COURAGEOUS

Micaiah showed remarkable courage in this story. He knew that he would likely pay a severe price for being faithful to God, but he boldly did it anyway. That puts him in the same category as Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego, as Daniel when threatened with the lion's den or as the first Christian martyr, Stephen.

In so doing he is an example for us. Psalm 27:14 says, "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." As we trust in God we are to be strong and to take heart, to not give in to fear. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 16:13, "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong." In Ephesians 6:10 Paul said, "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."

Tertullian, an early church leader said around 180 A.D. "The Lord wants those who belong to him to be brave and fearless." My problem is that I am definitely not fearless. A few years ago I read a book titled *Fearless*. It was a biography of Navy Seal, Adam Brown, a member of famed Seal Team 6. He truly was afraid of nothing. He was a follower of Jesus, a man devoted to his family, and a fearsome warrior. I marveled that nothing, including deadly combat, scared him. He wrote a letter to his children in which he said, "I'm not afraid of anything that might happen to me on this earth, because I know no matter what, nothing can take my spirit from me." That was a letter only to be read in event of his death. He was killed in Afghanistan in 2010. I am just not like that guy. Does that mean there's no hope for me? No it doesn't. I can still be brave even if not fearless. But it is important for us all to recognize that God commands us to be brave.

COURAGE IS NECESSARY

In Numbers 13 the people of Israel were poised on the border of the land of Canaan, the land God had promised to them. After escaping slavery in Egypt, they were in position to enter the Promised Land. They sent in a special forces recon team. When they returned they affirmed that the land looked great, but they also said they had no chance to take over the land. They said they looked like grasshoppers compared to the powerful people groups that lived there. It was the Grasshoppers versus the Giants, and the Grasshoppers had about as much chance of winning as, say, the Padres do of winning the World Series this year. You know how bad those odds are? Offer me the chance to bet on the Padres at a million to 1 and I wouldn't waste a penny on it. There is exactly *zero* chance.

This was primarily a failure of faith, but it was also a failure of courage. Their courage absolutely crumbled in the face of the Giants. The result was that generation lived out their lives wandering around the wastelands of the Sinai Peninsula. It is a significant point for us to remember that the Promised Land is a symbol for experiencing the life of the Kingdom of God. The lesson we can take from that is that it will require both faith and courage for us to live that life in this world.

We saw that 1 Corinthians 16:13 called on us to stand firm in the faith and to be courageous. That's because it will take courage to stand firm in the faith. If Micaiah did not have courage what do you think would have happened when he was summoned to appear before Ahab? He would have taken the coward's way out and found some way not to confront the King. The only way he could be faithful to God is to have courage.

Michael Lopez is a professor of mathematics at Skidmore College in New York. Not long ago he did a statistical study of referee calls in the NFL. He analyzed all the calls from 5 years of NFL games. In one part of the study he focused on late hit calls by the sidelines. These plays are difficult to judge because the speed of play is so great that it can often be hard to judge whether a hit was legitimate or an illegal late hit. The study revealed a very interesting result. It showed that the referees' calls are much more likely to favor the team that is standing on the sideline where the referee makes the call. So unconsciously the refs are being affected by the pressure of wanting to please the people they are standing near and not make them mad.

If you are going to be faithful to God you are going to be out of step with the world around you. You are going to be different. You will be different in ways that they might despise or find absurd. If you are going to be faithful to God you are going to need courage to stand firm in the face of opposition or ridicule.

To live for God's glory is going to require some considerable courage. It takes courage to keep going when life is discouraging. It takes courage to get up and keep moving after we have failed and feel like our failure is final, that there is no use in continuing on. Unfortunately, through years of ministry at times I have seen Christians experience some very difficult circumstances, and be pretty much defeated by them. I have seen some exhibit zero peace and zero joy. I have seen them totally fail to give grace to others who have failed or hurt them. I have seen them live as though God was totally absent and had nothing at all to say to them in the circumstance.

In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of the Bible, 2 Corinthians 2:14 says, "In the Messiah, in Christ, God leads us from place to place in one perpetual victory parade. Through us he brings the knowledge of Christ." That defeated, discouraged, uptight, angry, hopeless reaction to hardships doesn't look much like a victory parade to me, and it sure doesn't spread the knowledge of Christ. In order for us to live out that victory and spread the knowledge of Christ is going to take same courage.

Fortunately, I have also seen Christians display remarkable courage as they have faced daunting obstacles, painful losses and endured great hurts and disappointments while still courageously staying faithful to their Lord and trusting in him.

Pastor and author Bryan Chappell tells the story of a man in his church named Earl. When Earl was young he would have been considered quite a catch by young ladies, but he delayed marriage because he needed to take care of his ailing, elderly parents. He worked their farm and kept them going. He was eventually able to marry and start a family. This was years ago, and at one point it was learned there was coal under the family farm he now owned. Coal companies offered him a premium price to sell, so he did. He bought a new home and homes for his now grown kids, then used the rest of his money to start a construction business. He built homes, and made good quality homes. But then the coal industry began to collapse. The economy in their area was devastated. People moved out of the area in droves so there was no more need for the houses he built. His construction company went belly up and he lost everything, his business and his home and even his children lost their homes. He felt like he had failed at pretty much everything. But in the middle of all that darkness he never compromised. He kept his integrity, he never wavered in faith, he trusted God and continued serving him. He was never bitter, never pessimistic, he just lived out solid faith. He was courageous. Chappell says that many in their area suffered terrible losses and their church went through an awful time of struggle. But many saw Earl's example, were inspired and followed. He says, "because of Earl's faithfulness our church survived." Subsequently 8 different men went into full time ministry from that church.

COURAGE IS A DECISION

My problem is I don't feel very brave and strong much of the time. As I said, I am not fearless. I wish I were, but I have more fears than I even think I need to. That's all right because courage has nothing to do with what we feel. In fact, courage is acting in spite of fear. It doesn't require courage to act when you're not afraid. Nelson Mandela said, "I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers the fear."

Mark Twain said much the same thing. "Courage is the resistance to fear...not the absence of fear." This makes sense when we recall that the Bible commands us to have courage. It is pointless to command a person to not feel something. We feel what we feel. But the point is we can be commanded to be courageous because we can feel terrified and choose to act anyway. We can decide not to let fear rule us.

Years ago, we went with our then adult single children to Disney World. There is a ride at Epcot they were enthusiastic about that they wanted us to go on with them. It was called Mission Space. This ride is a centrifuge that simulates the acceleration of a rocket launch. The problem is it is a centrifuge, meaning it spins you around at high speed. How do you spell motion sickness? Centrifuge! They should have named the ride Mission Puke Your Intestines Out. I suspected that my children were under the impression that I have a lot of money that they are going to inherit so they wanted to get me on this ride to kill me. As we stood in line for the ride I tried to think of excuses for backing out. I was afraid of this ride because I hate being sick. I knew I was going to spend the rest of the day feeling miserable, maybe the next couple of days. I felt the fear of that. But I chose to go anyway. I showed courage because I did something I feared doing. I did it because I wanted to experience it with my children. I wanted to enter into their lives and their joy and to share it with them, even if it ruined me. To put your mind at ease, the first 10 seconds of that ride I thought it was one of the worst decisions I've ever made in my life. It felt awful. But amazingly it settled down, I survived the ride and felt only the slightest wooziness when we were done. I did maybe embarrass my family a tad when outside the ride I fell to my knees, kissed the ground and said, "Thank you, Jesus, it's over."

There is a crucial point in that story. I had motivation to overrule my own fear and choose courage. I did it because I wanted my kids to know I loved them so much that I wanted to enter into what they enjoyed, even if by doing so I barfed like a big dog. The key point is there must be something you are pursuing so much it overcomes the fear.

Jack Groppe is a pioneer in the science of human performance, an author, a fellow in the American College of Sports Medicine, a speaker and a professor. He is co-founder of the Human Performance Institute. His institute has a facility in Florida where they train people to be leaders. One time they had 4 NFL players come to their program. These guys averaged 6 feet 5 inches, 300 pounds. One of them was a first round draft pick offensive lineman. Jack asked him, "What are you thinking when you see a 240-pound linebacker coming at you full speed?" He said, "I'm going to fold him in half." These are not men who scare easily. They gave these guys a mission. They had

to run a mile across their facility, touch a white fence then run back and do it at a 9 minute per mile pace. That was no problem for athletes like these men. However, they warned them they would be running through Florida swampland. They would need to keep their eyes open for alligators and snakes, but they could just avoid them and the animals would not bother them. One more thing. Some wild boar had been spotted on the property. They needed to watch out for these animals. They weigh 400 pounds, have razor sharp tusks and are aggressive. They will attack without provocation. The men started out on their run. Part of the way through the run two of the company's employees were hiding in the bushes. One had a video camera. When the football players neared their position, the other man shook the bushes and made snorting sounds like a boar. Those enormous football players screamed, turn and ran faster than they'd ever run before. A week later they had 4 more clients at the facility. They put them through the same exercise. But these 4 were average size men who were all members of the elite FBI Hostage Rescue Team. When they got to the place where they heard the supposed boar sounds instead of running all 4 of them immediately took up combat stances, prepared to stand their ground.

What was the difference? All were afraid, but that second group had a mission. They were training to face combat and save lives. That's where their courage came from. In Matthew 16:21 we read, "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." Jesus faced a fearsome future and knew it, but he did not shy from it. He had a mission. In Mark 10:45 he said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." That was his mission. So in Luke 9:51, Luke tells us, "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." He courageously headed for Jerusalem with determination, because he had to do that to accomplish his mission.

In Acts 21, Paul was on his way to Jerusalem to bring a gift from the Gentile churches that would help the impoverished believers there. He was repeatedly warned against going to Jerusalem as he traveled. Then he got to Caesarea in the north of Israel. According to verses 10-14 here's what happened there. "A prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, 'The Holy Spirit says, "In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'" When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, 'Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, 'The Lord's will be done.'"

Paul was on a mission, and that mission motivated him to not be controlled by his fear but to be courageous. We need a mission. That's a crucial factor in having the courage to overcome our fears. The woman at the surf camp did not have a mission to learn to surf, so her fears won out. In Orlando, I had a mission to enter into my kids' enthusiasm, so I overcame my fear of the ride. If we are on a mission to make our God known and to bring him glory in everything we do and say, that will enable us to overcome our fears and obey him no matter what may come.

GOD'S PRESENCE GIVES COURAGE

One of the great verses in the Bible is Joshua 1:9. Poor Joshua was given the unenviable task of following in the footsteps of Moses and taking over leadership of Israel after the great prophet had died. That would be a daunting challenge for anyone. The Lord said to Joshua, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

Do not be afraid? Too late. Do not be discouraged? Way too late. But God said, "I will be with you no matter where you go." The thing that gives us courage is that God never abandons us. He always goes with us. The Almighty God, the Sovereign Ruler who determines even the steps of every human, is with us, so we need not fear.

Psalm 27:1 says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" Deuteronomy 31:6 says, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

In December, 1944, just when the Allies were sure that Germany was defeated and that the Nazis were about to totally collapse, the Germans shocked them with a massive surprise attack along a 75 mile long front through the Ardennes forest. Led by feared Panzer tanks 200,000 German troops surged forward against weak Allied forces consisting of untested green troops who had just arrived in theater and a few battle-weary units badly in need of rest. The Germans overran many of the American positions but began encountering fierce pockets of resistance. On December 19, an American antiaircraft unit was confronted by some powerful Panzers. They needed someone who would be willing to go after the tanks with a bazooka. A 19-year-old draftee named Albert Darago from Baltimore volunteered. Years later he admitted he didn't know the first thing about bazookas and had never fired one. Nevertheless, armed with a bazooka, he went forward on open ground under heavy fire, thinking that he was certain to die, and located the tanks. He took aim, fired, and amazingly got a direct hit. He immediately scrambled away and made it back to his troops. Then his officer asked him to go again. He reloaded the weapon and went out again, fired once more and again got another hit. His actions blunted the enemy advance. At a reunion 3 years ago he said, "I never considered myself brave. Somebody had to do it, and I was there." But there was another statement that was crucial to his courage. He said, "I knew God was with me." That made all the difference.