

A 9/11 reflection: the heroes and the cowards

As I write this, the United States media is gearing up for the one-year anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. One year ago, a group of hijackers killed thousands of people in a fit of blind zealotry.

The powers that be have debated this event for months on end -- and I don't know that we are any further along the path of understanding this horrific event than we were a year ago. We can, however, label the parties involved in this event with their proper labels: Heroes and Cowards.

Heroes: The multitude of police and fire personnel who responded to the attacks. In the World Trade Center, teams involved in the Fire Service or the Police Department rushed to the aid of people in the higher floors. "As we were going down, they were going up," said one survivor of the attacks. Of the fire service personnel who responded to the attack, few survived. Of course, nobody thought at the inception of the attacks that the towers would crumble -- but even if they had known it, many of the firefighters who responded would have still chosen to stay inside as long as they had a chance to help.

This is the epitome of true service -- to lend your life to someone else -- even though through that act, your life may be taken.

Cowards: The hijackers. It's the tradition in some circles to cast these cockroaches in the role of "martyrs." Certainly through the ages, martyrdom is something that has appealed to many religious followers. Information gleaned from police reports, however, shows that these hijackers did not follow the tenets of their religion -- and in fact, reports suggest that many of the "muscle" recruited as hijackers didn't even know they were going to their deaths -- only the pilots knew. Many of them apparently did it in hopes of hitting some sort of sexual lottery -- believing that if they died in pursuit of a such a goal, they would be promised vast numbers of virgin female attendants in an afterlife.

Such action is not courage -- courage would have been doing something with the college and flight training they received, and actively working to make their countries a better place, actively serving their countrymen. Courage is more than just a one-time "leap of faith." It's actively working, every hour of every day, to make your life better, despite the odds.

These cockroaches could have made a great difference in the lives of their countrymen -- instead, they chose to make a one-time splash into the annals of infamy.

Heroes: The families of those people killed in the attacks. Few of them will ever receive any personal effects from their dead loved ones. Most of them will never see a body. Many of them will never gain any official acknowledgement that their loved one was lost. Many people were vaporized in the intense heat or the tremendous force of the WTC buildings' collapse, or in the Pentagon's fires. When most of us lose a loved one, we have the person's physical remains, to bury or cremate. Each day they live, many survivors will have to deal with the pain of not having such a closure. Eventually, the pain will fade, but the memory will never leave them.

Dealing with such loss takes vast reservoirs of courage -- and where such reservoirs do not exist, they will be formed. Heroes? Certainly the survivors are heroes. Just dealing with each day takes courage for many of them.

Cowards: The "leaders" who enticed the hijackers to do their deadly deeds. Take a young, impressionable, gullible person, and teach them how to hate others -- that was their recipe -- and still is their recipe today. First off, you have to control the information they get. Next, you control the way they interpret that information. Last, you fill them up with tales of supposed rewards, and push them out the door.

Martyrs? These idiots will never be martyrs of any sort -- they are too good at using other people to achieve their ends. The average age of a martyr is in their late teens -- the young, gullible stage before they start to think for themselves. These "leaders" know that, and they use it to their advantage.

Think of the good that someone could do with such leadership abilities -- think of the changes that could be brought to society. Think of the people who could be turned toward a positive path in life. Think of the way these "leaders" could motivate others to learn and grow -- not to choose to die.

These cockroaches are masters of the "big lie" theory. Tell a lie enough, with adequate buildup, and people start to believe it. Odd thing isn't it? You never see these cockroaches standing up for their cause -- they're hiding away somewhere, tail between their legs, waiting for all the noise to stop. When everything calms down, they'll come out from their holes, bleating about their accomplishments, and telling stories about their exile.

Leaders? Well, if cockroaches have leaders, then these creatures fit the bill. Otherwise, they're just like any other cockroach, scurrying around from one hole to another, spreading their filth as they go.

Heroes: The "Let's Roll" group on board United Flight 93, who, confronted by the news of what had happened to the other planes, chose to storm the cockpit, rather than submit to the hijackers' demands. It's certain that if the other planes' passengers had known where the planes were going, they too would have chosen this path. This is ultimate courage -- confronted with two modes of apparent certain death, these people chose the path that prevented the deaths of other innocents.

Cowards: The backers of terrorism in the world today. "What part of 'Thou shalt not kill' do you not understand," a satirical piece in the online publication, "The Onion" quoted God as asking. Those who finance terrorism are as bad as the terrorists themselves -- worse, perhaps, since they choose to enable terrorism without getting their hands dirty in the process. They are the person who buys the gun for the murderer -- and then turns away, saying "I don't know what he's going to do with that thing."

Heroes: The dead. Confronted with their certain death, many of the people imprisoned in the WTC floors above the plane entry points used their remaining time to call their loved ones and say goodbye. Some others died, as they worked to help others evacuate the building -- more than one leader made certain everyone else had evacuated, and stayed behind to help evacuate the slow and handicapped -- gaining death for their efforts.

Heroes: The surviving world, who tries to become better. There are few of us who don't remember that fateful day -- and almost none of us have been spared from seeing those horrific crash pictures, time after time, after time. Those pictures take their toll on our lives -- but we continue to live.

In the end, that is the very strength of humankind -- to live, and keep on living, despite the turmoil, defeat, and trouble that greets us -- and to make our world a better place than it was when we came on the scene.

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