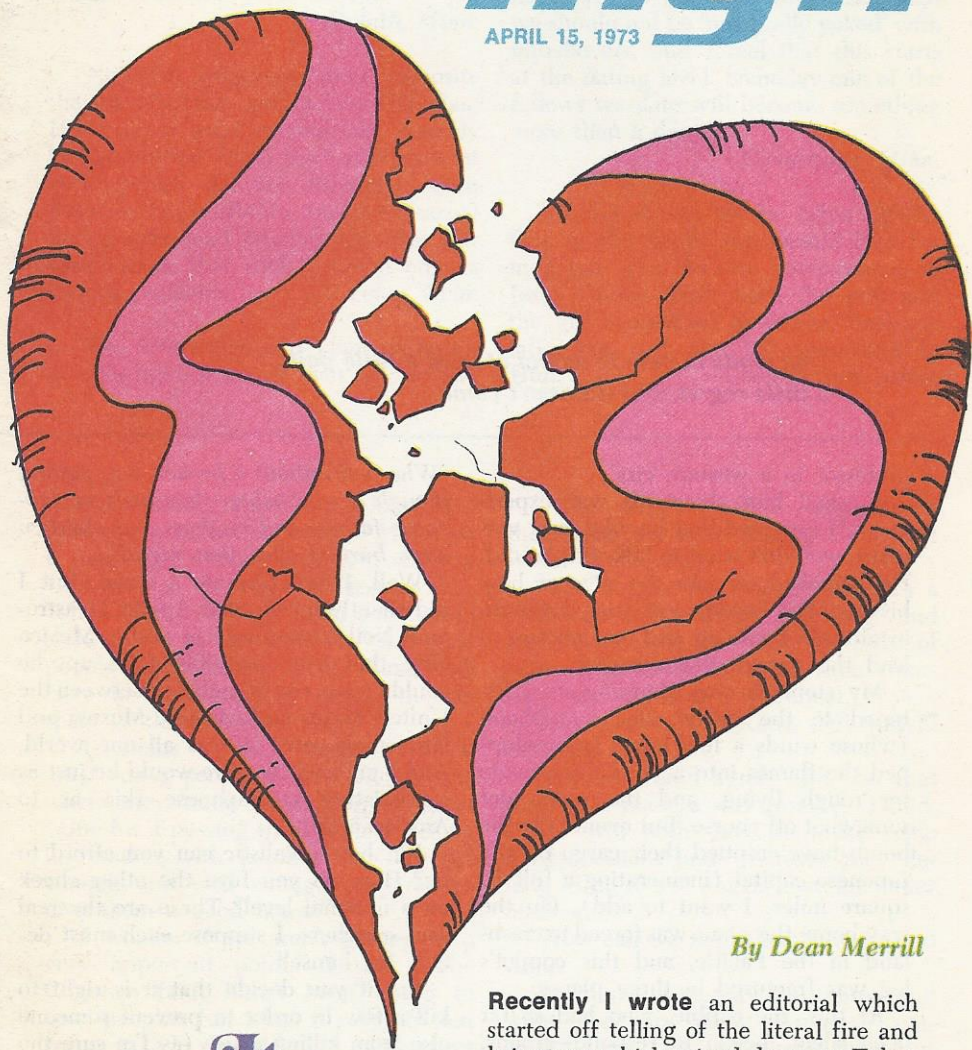


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It Ought to Hurt

By Dean Merrill

Recently I wrote an editorial which started off telling of the literal fire and brimstone which rained down on Tokyo from U.S. planes on March 9, 1945. I finished it off wishing that our country could export "more faith than flak" in the days ahead.

The other night I unexpectedly found myself in the same cab with one of the copilots who helped firebomb Tokyo that night. He is now a respectable

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professor in a western city.

I asked him about his war experiences. I expected that he, like most veterans, wouldn't want to talk. But he did. He launched off into the saga of how his crew had become extremely accurate in altitude bombing and was chosen to lead the parade that evening.

My stomach was churning as I listened to the grisly tale: a typhoon (whose winds a few hours later whipped the flames into a holocaust) made for rough flying, and the plane got somewhat off course. But eventually the bomb bays emptied their cargo on the Japanese capital (incinerating a full 16 square miles, I want to add). On the way home the plane was forced to crash-land in the Pacific, and this copilot's leg was fractured in three places.

At this, the cabbie, who had so far been silent, began to respond—groans, oohs and other signs of sympathy. The story went on about how the crew was rescued and hurried to a hospital, where the man's leg was placed in a cast to heal. Today, he walks normally.

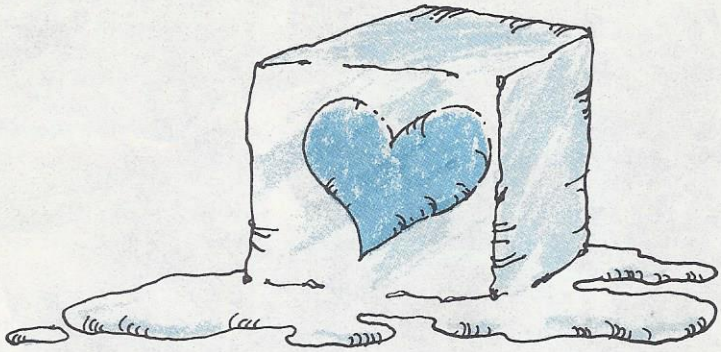
Except for the injury part, both men seemed relaxed and enjoying the war thriller. Myself, I felt like screaming,

"Who cares about a broken leg, painful though it was, when thousands of Japanese fathers and mothers and children were burned alive that night!"

Well, I didn't create a scene. But I did silently recall what Apollo 11 astronaut Neil Armstrong had said in Mexico City—that from 124,000 miles up, he couldn't see any boundaries between the United States and Mexico, Mexico and Guatemala, etc.; it was all one world. And I guessed that fire would be just as excruciating to Japanese skin as to American skin.

But how idealistic can you afford to be? How do you turn the other cheek on a national level? These are the real soul searchers. I suppose each must decide for himself.

But if you decide that it is right to kill a few in order to prevent someone else from killing many (as I'm sure the World War 2 copilot believes), you've got to do something else. You've got to feel fantastically sorry about your deed. Especially if you're a Christian. Christians believe that life is a direct gift from God and to destroy God's gift had better have a pretty good reason behind it. It had also better leave you



profoundly disturbed.

When a father has to spank his 5-year-old, he usually senses some of this anguish; he often reflects, "It hurt me more than it did the kid." His action is needful—unpleasant, but needful.

But there are fathers in this world who simply swat their kids in anger or frustration or disgust, saying only, "He had it coming." And there are far too many people in this world, Christians included, who are far too enchanted with how hard they (through their military hardware) can swat. One waits in vain to detect at least a little pain, a little regret. But it doesn't come.

It seems to me that if someone is going to take it upon himself to extinguish the God-given life of another human, whether with a knife or with his tax money, it ought to hurt. He ought to go about his business with something of the air of a prison executioner, for he, too, is involved in administering death.

I don't mean by this that he should become a neurotic on the battlefield, dripping tears into his gunights every time he's in a fire fight. But it's savage for anyone to be flippant about it all,

looking at it as if it's some sandlot game in which the only important thing is that he wins. How can one be flippant as he kills boys with mothers, wives and little kids at home?

Take a minute to watch Jesus Christ a few days before His own murder, after He had verbally blasted the phonies of His religious establishment: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites: . . . You blind fools! . . . you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones. . . . You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?" (Matthew 23:13,17,27,33).

Suddenly His tirade stopped. Deep inside, it had completely torn Him up. Soon afterward, He viewed that city from a hill and began to weep. "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes" (Luke 19:42).

That's Jesus-love. And if He felt that bad about verbal firebombing, our insides should be constantly wrenching about what our soldiers do in war, whether we believe it to be politically necessary or not. ▲