

A tribute to the American G.I.



Recently, Time Magazine published a list of the 10 most influential people of the 20th Century.

This list included, as one would expect, scientists, industrialists, statesmen and others. But topping the list as the most influential “person” of the 20th Century was the American G.I.

Retired Army General Colin Powell was asked to write a tribute to the most influential person of the 20th Century and here, in part, is what General Powell had to say:

“...G.I. is a World War II term that two generations later continues to conjure up the warmest and proudest memories of a noble war that pitted pure good against pure evil and good triumphed. The victors in that war were the American G.I.s, the Willies and Joes, the farmer from Iowa and the steelworker from Pittsburgh who stepped off a landing craft into the hell of Omaha Beach. The G.I. was the wisecracking kid Marine from Brooklyn who clawed his way up a deadly hill on a Pacific island. He was a black fighter pilot escorting white bomber pilots over Italy and Germany, proving that skin color had nothing to do with skill.”

“They were America. They reflected our diverse origins. They were the embodiment of the American spirit of courage and dedication. They were truly a ‘people’s army,’ going forth on a crusade to save democracy and freedom, to defeat tyrants, to save oppressed peoples and to make their families proud of them.

They were the Private Ryans, and they stood firm in the thin red line. For most of those G.I.s, World War II was the adventure of their lifetime. Nothing they would ever do in the future would match their experiences as the warriors of democracy, saving the world from its own insanity. You can still see them in every Fourth of July color guard, their gait faltering but ever proud.”

“The 20th century can be called many things, but it was most certainly a century of war.

The American G.I.s helped defeat fascism and communism. They came home in triumph from the ferocious battlefields of World Wars I and II...

The G.I.s were willing to travel far away and give their lives, if necessary, to secure the rights and freedoms of others. Only a nation such as ours, based on a firm moral foundation, could make such a request of its citizens. And the G.I.s wanted nothing more than to get the job done and then return home safely.”



“...And all they asked for in repayment from those they freed was the opportunity to help them become part of the world of democracy ...

...and just enough land to bury their fallen comrades, beneath simple white crosses and Stars of David.”

General Colin Powell