SEEING WAR IN AN OLD SOLDIER'S EYES

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My late maternal grandfather was a soldier under the command of the United States Armed Forces of the Far East (USAFFE). Every time Grandpa Florendo came to visit, he would talk about how he'd survived the dreadful Second World War. I always enjoyed listening to his stories of bravery and fortitude as he fought with soldiers of the Imperial Army that had occupied our country during that time. Unfortunately, my dear grandfather never got to be recognized as a war veteran primarily because he, along with many others, escaped during the dreadful Bataan Death March. Although many out there would say that Grandpa's act was characteristic of cowardice and betrayal of all he had sworn to as a soldier of his country, I am still proud that Grandpa chose to run away when he did. Otherwise, he would not have been able to regale me with countless tales of heroism during the war.

Once, my mother's late aunt came to visit us. She was a cousin of my grandfather and her own late husband, also a soldier in the Second World War, had been killed in the war. She had a discussion with my Grandpa about World War II. Their discussion must have escalated into an argument because my Grandpa started to raise his voice while my mother's aunt started speaking in a shrill voice. You can imagine how their old-people-argument suddenly turned funny when mom's aunt said,"Ha, the reason why you never got to be given honors and benefits for fighting in the war was because you are not a VETERAN; you believed that time you had BETTER RUN! Ha-ha!" Grandpa was fuming and mad. He called my mom and told her to make her aunt stop or else!

Many of us most likely have an old relative or an ancestor who had been in the war, either as a soldier or a civilian. I think many out there have also heard their own grandparents talk about how war had affected their lives and changed their perspectives. In my late grandfather's case, he may have foreseen how finishing the Death March could take him away from his family forever. He might have feared that cruelty from the invading soldiers could snuff his life out instantly so he chose to escape to freedom and run back to his family.

My mom was just a little girl then. If she had lost her father during the war, she might not have been able to build the life she was able to go through. She might not have become what she had become and might not have had her father by her side during her wedding to my late father. A single alteration back then may have created a series of alterations today. The Second World War brought out soldiers in people, and those soldiers have continued to be a great part of what makes today what it is!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1.   What are the effects of war on a nation?
2.   Why is it important to learn the lessons of war?
3.   Does war always have destructive effects? How can war make us better citizens of the world?
4.   If World War II hadn't happened, what are the possible consequences? Be as imaginative as needed.
5.   Does one need to die in war in order to become a hero? Why or why not?