



Published: 11.11.2007

A study of WWII heroes paints a different picture

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ALBANY, N.Y. — An infantryman charges a pillbox in the face of enemy fire. A firefighter rushes up the stairwell of a skyscraper as workers flee. A teacher shields her student from a gunman with her body.

A salute to veterans / A12

Heroes all. But what personal qualities made them heroic?

In the movies, heroes are charismatic rebels. But researchers who surveyed decorated World War II veterans found not all heroes are cut from the same cloth.

"We often think of the gung-ho, John Wayne 'Sands of Iwo Jima' kind of hero driven to combat," said Brian Wansink of Cornell University. "But there's a whole lot of these heroes that are much more along the lines of that Capt. Miller character Tom Hanks played in 'Saving Private Ryan' — the reluctant ... English teacher."

A study of 83 World War II medal winners found that they tended to rate themselves higher for qualities like leadership, adventurousness and adaptability. When divided into groups, those who enlisted ("eager heroes") and draftees ("reluctant heroes"), the latter scored higher in selflessness and working well with others.

The study suggests that quiet heroes rely on a sense of duty as opposed to derring-do. To a man, they downplayed any notion of heroism.

"You show me a man who says he was brave over there and I'll show you a liar," said draftee and Bronze Star recipient William O. Carpenter, 84, of Champaign Ill. "Every one of us was afraid. Even the Germans were afraid."

A salute to veterans / A12

All content copyright © 1999-2007 AzStarNet, Arizona Daily Star and its wire services and suppliers and may not be republished without permission. All rights reserved. Any copying, redistribution, or retransmission of any of the contents of this service without the expressed written consent of Arizona Daily Star or AzStarNet is prohibited.