

Son reflects on dad's story depicted in 'Hacksaw Ridge'

By HAYAT NORIMINE
The Daily News

TACOMA, Wash. — Mel Gibson's new film "Hacksaw Ridge" tells the story of a World War II soldier, Desmond Doss, who won the Congressional Medal of Honor for single-handedly rescuing 75 wounded soldiers.

On an escarpment known as "Hacksaw Ridge" on Okinawa, Doss refused to find cover, plunged into the line of fire to find his injured comrades, and one by one lowered them down a cliff with rope to friendly hands. He may have even helped a few wounded Japanese soldiers, reported The Daily News.

"One more," Andrew Garfield — who plays Desmond Doss — repeats to himself as he lowers another wounded soldier to safety, his hands soaked with blood. "Lord, please help me get one more."

But this is no ordinary war hero. A devout Seventh Day Adventist, Doss refused to touch a gun. He was the first conscientious objector to receive the Congressional award. And his son Desmond Doss Jr., of Ilwaco, says the movie is ultimately not about war or patriotism. It is about love. About a man who gave it unconditionally.

'Love story'

"This movie is really a love story," Doss Jr. said. "That's what we need in this world is more caring for each other. And here's an example of

somebody that was a vehicle for some incredible love."

Desmond Doss Jr. said it was a "perfect" portrayal of his father. It's like he came alive on the screen, he said. Garfield, an Australian, perfected Doss Sr.'s mannerisms, from his Southern dialect to his "quiet determination." So it was emotional for both of them when Desmond Jr. met Garfield.

"He asked me what I thought of what he did. I said, 'You nailed it. It's perfect.' And he was moved by that," Doss said. "He wanted to do that. He wanted to become my father."

Desmond Doss Sr. grew up in Virginia and was drafted in 1942. He became a private first class for the 1st Battalion, 307th Infantry in the 77th Division, but spent his first two years persecuted by the U.S. Military. His nuanced, quiet strength throughout those challenges were perfectly captured on the big screen, Doss Jr. said.

"I just couldn't believe it," Doss said. "I was just completely taken by it. I thought I was watching my mother and my father."

Heroic act

Doss said his father's heroic act on Hacksaw Ridge was not a one-time incident. He had received the Bronze Star for his work as a combat medic on Guam and the Philippines. But even before that, his son said, Doss was a man of unconditional love, day in and day out.



Bill Wagner/The Daily News

Ever since the portrayal of his father in the current movie *Hacksaw Ridge*, Ilwaco, Wash., resident Desmond Doss, jr. has been flooded with emails and letters regarding his father. The one he is holding is from a woman in North Dakota with excerpts of her father's diary from the time he and Doss' father fought together on Okinawa during World War II.

He found his faith as a boy, inspired by a poster of the 10 Commandments on the wall of his home. The Sixth stuck out: "Thou shalt not kill." Even before he entered the military, young Desmond's faith was tested by his father, William Doss, who was abusive toward his mother. That struggle is depicted in the film, too.

Desmond Doss Sr. did not always receive considerate treatment in return. Because the soldier refused to bear arms, an officer tried to have him discharged on grounds of

mental illness. He also tried to court-martial Doss for refusing a direct order.

"Sometimes I hear people saying he was patriotic. Well he was, but that's not the point," Doss said. "The point is he just had this love for people."

Doss Jr., who cleans the post office and volunteers as a firefighter, said he's not religious himself but has a spiritual life.

"I can't imagine life without it," he said. "There's a statement in the Bible that says God is love. ... I try to think in those

terms — what's loving, what's caring, what's compassionate."

For Desmond Doss Jr.'s first five years of childhood, he wasn't allowed to see his dad. Desmond Doss returned home in 1946 with serious injuries in his arm and legs. He had contracted tuberculosis. Desmond Jr. was 5 years old by the time his father was no longer contagious and able to check out of the hospital.

'Never over'

"The war is never over. It's just never over," he said. "It

affects the people that were there ... but it goes way beyond that. It affects the families. It's very disruptive to life."

Desmond Doss Sr. died in 2006 at his home in Alabama. Film directors had been after him for years to make a movie, but he only authorized Gibson to do a feature film. A book about his life is called "The Unlikeliest Hero."

Doss Jr. said he didn't have a "normal" life with his parents; much of it was surreal, like moments when he would find himself in a room with hundreds of Medal of Honor recipients.

Even now, his father continues to influence his life in unbelievable ways. Doss Jr. was quietly working at the post office in Ilwaco when calls began streaming in about his father. He's met movie stars and Mel Gibson. And he just returned home a week ago after a trip to California to see the premiere and across the country.

What his father did in World War II was a "natural outgrowth" of who he was, his son said. And now, more than ever in a world of division, Desmond Doss Jr. said he hopes people get the right message out of the movie.

"That's who he was. ... Some people know who they are. I sincerely hope that people walk away with that insight and connection with their own self. Who am I? What's intrinsic to me?" he said. "Am I fearless or am I fearful?"

Rescues in Washington's Bainbridge woods just got easier

By TRISTAN BAURICK
Kitsap Sun

BAINBRIDGE ISLAND, Wash. — The Bainbridge park district is trying a high-tech solution to the age-old problem of finding injured hikers.

The district is installing rescue locators in its forested parks and across its growing network of interconnected trails.

If a hiker twists an ankle or a mountain biker crashes, a 911 caller can tell the dispatcher the number on the nearest locator. Each locator is coded with GPS coordinates that emergency responders can use to zero in on the injured person, reported the Kitsap Sun (<http://bit.ly/2fxwhxP>).

"Now emergency personnel know exactly how to get to them, cutting down their response time to a minimum," said Dan Hamlin, park services director.

The first 30 locators were installed in Grand Forest Park, a 240-acre swath of woods with 6 miles of trails and several trailheads. People regularly get lost in the park, spurring the district in 2014 to try another tech fix: trail markers that activate smartphone maps.

Borne of tragedy

The district's rescue locator program is the first of its kind in the county. It was borne out of a recent tragedy and a near-tragedy.



Tristan Baurick/Kitsap Sun

A rescue trail locator in the Grand Forest on Bainbridge Island, Wash. The Bainbridge park district has installed about 30 rescue locators in the 240-acre Grand Forest Park to help emergency responders find injured trail users.

Two years ago, a group of friends were hiking Grand Forest when a man in their party suddenly keeled over.

A frantic 911 caller was clear about the emergency: heart attack. But the other critical detail — location — was unknown.

"It was very confusing because they didn't know where they started and they didn't know where they were," said Luke Carpenter, the Bainbridge Island Fire Department's assistant chief. "We had all these units running around trying to find this individual."

It was fortunate for the hiker that a CPR-trained park employee happened to be

working nearby. He kept the hiker breathing until an ambulance crew eventually located them.

Four months later, Bainbridge middle school mountain bike coach Jay Abbott suffered crippling injuries during

a training ride in the park. He died four days later.

"It was a tragic outcome," Carpenter said. "I put the onus on the park district, and said: 'Folks, you got any ideas to help us find people? Because I don't.'"

Park staff did have some ideas, thanks to a training hosted by American Trails, a California-based trails advocacy group.

"It was a webinar about trail signage, but there was some mention about these rescue locators," Hamlin said. "It seemed like just the thing we needed."

Sometimes a big fix comes easy and cheap.

Recording coordinates for the 30 locator sites simply required staff to take a few hikes with a GPS unit.

Dozens of trail markers already were installed, so there was little added cost.

"It was pretty inexpensive — just buying some decals," Hamlin said.

Total cost: \$60.

Bringing CENCOM, the county's 911 service, onboard was surprisingly uncomplicated. CENCOM simply plugged the 30 sets of coordinates into its own locator system.

"They were great," Hamlin said. "They just loaded them right in. That was it."

Not widely used

Beyond Bainbridge, the rescue locator system is not yet widely used. One early adopter was the TRACKS trail group in northeast Arizona. The group's volunteers installed hundreds of the GPS-coded markers across the 200-mile White Mountains Trail System in 2013.

Volunteer Nick Lund said rescues used to take hours. Now they're typically completed in under 45 minutes.

The Grand Forest system has been used at least once since it was activated during the spring.

"It was a sprained ankle, I think," Carpenter said. "It wasn't a significant event for us because we found them so easily."

The district plans to expand the system to the 445-acre Gazzam Lake Preserve, which links Fort Ward and Blakely Harbor parks.

"We have so many trails that are interconnected and go long distances," Hamlin said. "People might know where they left from, but they have no idea where they are when they call."

Carpenter said his department is grateful for the help.

"When seconds count, we have to know where a patient is," he said. "This has proven to help us do our job."

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