

"Hacksaw Ridge," New Film on Desmond Doss, Offers Adventists Unique Opportunity

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By John Bradshaw



*Desmond T. Doss in Okinawa, Japan
Photo courtesy of the Desmond Doss Council*

More than 70 years ago an unlikely hero saved the lives of dozens of American soldiers during one of the bloodiest battles of World War II. Now his story is about to explode onto movie screens all over the world (U.S. release scheduled for Nov. 4); and the international press are already hailing "Hacksaw Ridge" as a potential Oscar winner.

The film tells the story of Corporal Desmond Doss, a Seventh-day Adventist combat medic who single-handedly rescued 75 soldiers during the battle of Okinawa, in the midst of a hail of enemy gunfire. As a result of his bravery, Desmond Doss was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, the United States' highest military honor.

While Doss' story has been told many times, Hacksaw Ridge is the first feature film to recount his remarkable heroism. The movie is directed by Hollywood heavyweight Mel Gibson, who having fallen foul of Hollywood and the media on numerous occasions, may finally have found redemption, according to critics. David Rooney of the Hollywood Reporter has called the film a "forceful comeback." Hacksaw Ridge received a 10-minute standing ovation following its premiere at the Venice Film Festival.

It looks like "Hacksaw Ridge" is going to be huge. And that matters for Christians.

It's likely that millions of people are going to watch the powerfully-told story of a Seventh-day Adventist war hero. And they'll learn about — and talk about — not only his deeply-held beliefs and faith, but also about the remarkable God who enabled Doss to carry himself with such outstanding grace, commitment, and bravery.

"Hacksaw Ridge" neither downplays Desmond Doss' Christian faith nor minimizes his beliefs. Instead, the movie respectfully and accurately portrays Doss' steadfast faith in God. Corporal Doss, a Private First Class at the time of the Battle of Okinawa, is presented as a balanced, Sabbath-keeping, vegetarian, Bible-believing Christian who was moved by faith in God to adhere to his beliefs in the face of overwhelming opposition. Gibson's "Hacksaw Ridge" is an inspirational story of a Christian's unwavering faith in God.

In one of the later scenes of the movie, Doss — played by Hollywood leading actor Andrew Garfield — is doing all he can to save American servicemen. After lowering a soldier to safety, Doss prays, "Lord, give me one more!" Each time he lowers another soldier to safety the prayer is repeated: "Lord, give me one more!"

Doss' prayer is the prayer that should be prayed by Christians everywhere. "Lord, give me one more. Help me get one more!" While time is running out for Planet Earth, precious opportunities are being presented to reach this world for Christ. Disciples of Christ recognize that witnessing opportunities present themselves in countless ways. Even through Hollywood blockbusters.

"Hacksaw Ridge" was not made by Seventh-day Adventists. Nor was it made for Adventists. But it presents Adventists with an unprecedented opportunity to speak up for Christ. Doss' story thrusts the church into a global conversation. Hollywood is presenting Christians everywhere with a multimillion dollar opportunity to come along behind this headline-grabbing movie and speak in favor of the God — and the faith — of Desmond Doss.

Churches and members will need to be ready to engage in conversations with those who watch "Hacksaw Ridge," and be prepared to answer questions about what drove Doss to be steadfast in his faith in God.

It's hard to imagine God has not allowed the production of Hacksaw Ridge specifically for such a time as this. Not to glorify Hollywood or war or Doss, but to call attention to the theme of faith and grace.

Desmond Doss now rests beneath a simple grave marker in the Chattanooga National Cemetery in Tennessee. Ten years after his death Hollywood is telling the story of his battlefield heroism.

It's up to those of us still living to tell the story of his Savior, the power of grace and the promise of Jesus' return.

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The story of Desmond Doss, the first conscientious objector to receive the esteemed Medal of Honor, is one that has inspired generations of his fellow Seventh-day Adventist Church members. As powerfully shared in the upcoming film, "Hacksaw Ridge," Doss's strong convictions, his Adventist beliefs, and his unshakeable confidence in God come alive, and hold the promise of inspiring a new generation of believers.

While a graphic portrayal of the realities of war, "Hacksaw Ridge" paints a stirring portrait of the resolute manner in which Doss lived his faith, even while living through the horrors of the battlefield. The Seventh-day Adventist Church historically has strongly discouraged its members from bearing arms, and Doss embodied that philosophy. He became the first person to voluntarily enlist and then be granted conscientious objector status, the role in which he contributed to the often-heroic rescue of scores of his fellow soldiers.

The North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church appreciates the care and attention to detail brought to the telling of Desmond Doss's unique, unparalleled story of faith by the filmmakers in the production of "Hacksaw Ridge."

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