

# FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

An Oration

by  
Lt. James H. Case, Jr., USNR



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This oration from a speech made by Lt. Case on Memorial Day 1945 is just as timely today as when first spoken. Revised in 1968.

“No man is an island,” said John Donne, “entire to itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as if a promontory were, as if a manor of thy friend’s or of thine own were; any man’s death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”...

For nearly all of you within the sound of my voice, this day is one of personal grief or personal anxiety. You whose fathers or sons or brothers or husbands have been killed are charged with a high responsibility. The lives which they laid down were bright with promise, filled with hope, freighted with plans and ambitions. And now it rests with you to make your lives so significant that you may advance and perhaps even achieve those hopes and ambitions.

It rests with you--yes, but it rests with all of us. Is it hard now to understand those words of John Donne which I quoted a moment ago? “Any man’s death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind.” Oh do you see that there is work to be done? “Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”

Think ahead a few years. Where will our city’s leaders come from? There were many young men who would have planned boldly and well, who would have built daringly and soundly, but many of these men are dead. Will there be enough doctors to man your hospital--enough teachers to educate your children, farmers to work your land, mechanics and clerks and laborers and lawyers and druggists to do the work of this busy city? Where will the writers, the scientists, the soldiers and the ministers come from? Are there men and women enough to carry forward the work of the world, the conquest of nature, the quest of the human spirit? We can give a confident answer to these questions only if we accept in full the responsibility which the death of the young men has imposed upon us who survive...

There is a myth which has been so constantly reiterated that even some perfectly sensible people have believed it. That myth accuses the folk of this land of being gullible. It declares that in the World Wars we foolishly flung ourselves into a fight with which we had no concern. We were amiable but muddleheaded altruists--and the way purveyors of myth say the word “altruists” makes it sound like the deadliest of epithets. We stuck our noses into other people’s affairs, and all we got for our good intentions were war casualties, bad debts and harsh words.

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