

CBS RADIO NETWORK

DAN RATHER REPORTING

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DAN RATHER: Dan Rather reporting, with news and commentary.

The papers are full of pictures of soldiers. Our newscasts are full of them too. Soldiers on patrol, soldiers dazed in debris, soldiers carrying soldiers toward safety or the grave. Forget the politics of all this for the moment. Forget about whether being in Beirut means we're a hero or a sucker. Forget about whether the invasion of Grenada is good or bad. Remember this-when all is said and done, when all the politicians have had their say, have made their decisions and the generals their calculations, when all of that is done it all comes down to individuals. It all comes down to a person. A person has to pull that trigger, take that hill or jump from the door of the plane. That's what I'm thinking about. The kid in the door of the plane, in a moment.

(ANNOUNCEMENT)

RATHER: The Commander in Chief is up early. He meets with the advisors and they make a decision and the words go out. The Joint Chiefs nod and the calls are made and the troops move out and suddenly a kid stands in the door of a plane. He is a U.S. Ranger. It was the Rangers who got the order to take that big airport at the southwest tip of Grenada yesterday. Their job is to drop through the air with a rifle cocked and ready. Their job is to drop through the air and land on their feet and achieve instant orientation and run and seize and shoot and subdue. A mighty objective. Who achieves it? There he is, standing in the plane. The noise is great and the wind is a whistle and the plane bounces from the push of clouds and the pop of air pockets and there's a great unearkly hum. He shouts to be heard and they're getting nearer the target area and nearer and ready now and now. The Jumpmaster smacks his shoulder, shouts go. The Ranger looks and moves to jump. That moment. Doesn't matter how many times he's done it. There's no way he can stand in the doorway and look down and not be terrified because he doesn't know, doesn't know if he's jumping into death. What does he think in that split second between feet on the edge and over the edge? That big airline that went down in San Diego a few years ago; the pilot knew he was a goner and as the 747 tumbled toward earth he said-they're his last words, they were on the black box-he said, "we're going down. I love you Ma." What are the thoughts of a Ranger when he jumps from a plane? What are the thoughts of a Marine when the landing craft hits the surf and he barrels out, rifle high and his legs going like pistons and it's all, "Take that land, boy. Buy that real estate." Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote a poem that asked a good question. He wrote, "Why do we all, seeing a soldier, bless him?" I think part of it, for Americans, is that a civilian head of state, who is the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces makes a decision and the calls go out and suddenly a boy stands in the doorway, a lot of boys, and for a moment they are better than us as they make their spectacular leap of fate.

Now please, this message.

(ANNOUNCEMENT)

RATHER: Dan Rather reporting, CBS News.

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