A presidential historian and friend, Jon Meachum, delivered George H.W. Bush’s eulogy. Interesting enough, George H.W. Bush had heard it before he died. This is part of that eulogy.

The story was almost over even before it had fully begun. Shortly after dawn on Saturday, Sept. 2, 1944, Lieutenant Junior Grade George Herbert Walker Bush, joined by two crew mates, took off from the USS San Jacinto to attack a radio tower on Chichijima. As they approached the target, the air was heavy with flak. The plane was hit. Smoke filled the cockpit; flames raced across the wings. “My god,” Lieutenant Bush thought, “this thing’s gonna go down.” Yet he kept the plane in its 35-degree dive, dropped his bombs, and then roared off out to sea, telling his crew mates to hit the silk. Following protocol, Lieutenant Bush turned the plane so they could bail out.

Only then did Bush parachute from the cockpit. The wind propelled him backward, and he gashed his head on the tail of the plane as he flew through the sky. He plunged deep into the ocean, bobbed to the surface, and flopped onto a tiny raft. His head bleeding, his eyes burning, his mouth and throat raw from salt water, the future 41st president of the United States was alone. Sensing that his men had not made it, he was overcome. He felt the weight of responsibility as a nearly physical burden. And he wept. Then, at four minutes shy of noon, a submarine emerged to rescue the downed pilot. George Herbert Walker Bush was safe. The story, his story and ours, would go on by God’s grace.

Through the ensuing decades, President Bush would frequently ask, nearly daily, he’d ask himself, “Why me? Why was I spared?” And in a sense, the rest of his life was a perennial effort to prove himself worthy of his salvation on that distant morning. To him, his life was no longer his own. There were always more missions to undertake, more lives to touch, and more love to give. And what a headlong race he made of it all. He never slowed down...
