

John Hoyte's description of Eric Liddell, for whom John served as a pall bearer

He was as close to being a saint as one could imagine. Overflowing with good humor and love of life, Eric devoted his time to us young people. He organized games, particularly field hockey, planned square dances, chess tournaments, and debates, and was tireless in living out the life of Christ for others.

He was forty-two, with a spring in his step and a friendly smile. I was eleven and feeling quite insignificant. Eric spoke to me with such ease and informality that I suddenly felt joy. That was his nature, for he loved kids and would do anything he could to give us orphans, separated from our parents, a sense of self-worth in spite of the misery of the camp. If we were without Mom and Dad, he was without his wife and daughters, who were now in Canada, so he understood our longings. It became apparent that for him, the three and a half years of confinement were the very opposite of being wasted. There was no difference between the secular and the sacred. We called him Uncle Eric.

Quite suddenly, he developed extreme headaches, and died of a brain tumor within four days. Everyone loved him, particularly us kids, and the shock to the whole camp was extreme. I remember the gray, winter day of his burial. I was a member of the boys honor guard at the gravesite just outside the camp walls. The bleak treeless landscape fit the sadness of the occasion. The award-winning movie Chariots of Fire was made about his life. When I saw it, I compared that primitive burial with the grand memorial service in St. Paul's Cathedral for the other runner in the film. Of course, older folk were dying all the time as the war continued, conditions deteriorated, food became scarcer, and medicines less available, but those four deaths were close to the bone for me.