



Bethesda Hospital Trip Report

Our last trip to visit the wounded was Thursday, 1 April 2010. Four members from the Slattery Detachment made this month's trip along with a member of the Employee Support of the Guard & Reserve, Tom Branch. Tom is a Korean War Veteran of the U.S. Army, "Welcome Aboard". Slattery Detachment members were Marc Purcelli, Eddie Neas, Chris Holleran and Keith Butler.

As we do on most visits we left from Newark Penn Station at 0730 and arrived in Washington DC and then took the Red Line train to Bethesda.

We all arrived at Bethesda Naval Hospital around 1200 and then had lunch with J.R. who lives in Maryland. He is transferring his life membership to the Slattery Detachment in New Jersey. J.R. is recovering from surgery and has been AWOL the past few months, but looks like he is almost ready to run a Marine Corps PFT. OOH RAH and welcome back, J.R., you were missed. A few of us, OK all of us, were disappointed that we did not have lunch with a few of the Occupational & Physical Therapists who take care of the wounded men and women we visit. They all had to attend a meeting at Walter Reed at 1230, but we at least did get to say hello to some of them.

With the recent events taking place in Afghanistan, Bethesda is starting to get busy. There were a total of 15 wounded or injured Marines, one Navy Corpsman and one US Army Soldier on the floor this month. All were not in their rooms as some were in Rehab and a few were having additional surgery. We were able to visit seven Marines on the floor.

We split into two groups. Tom, Keith and I took one side and Marc, Chris and J.R took the other side. The Marines we saw on this visit were from the following units, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines, 1st Battalion, 6th Marines, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines and 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines.

Most of the Marines we saw had been wounded by IED explosions and a few had received wounds by rifle or machine gun fire. One of the first Marines we saw or shall I say the first two we saw, both had their families outside of the room. One of the Marines was coming back from surgery and the family was outside while the staff got him back in bed. So I asked them if we could take a few minutes to talk to them. They were all together and I assumed they were all part of one family. It was actually two families hanging out together. So I started to talk about why we were here and who we are and why we do this. There must have been 8-10 of them listening to us.

We passed out all the items we had. The last two items we gave them were the Family & Friends for Freedom Fund application and four \$25 gift cards to each family and told them to go and have a good lunch or dinner on us. Both Mom's started to cry at the same time. And of course we all got tears in our eyes too. I told them it was OK to cry and even Big Bad Marines do it also. One mother said thank you and she wanted to hug each and every one of us. We would come back later to visit their sons as they were still trying to get the room squared away to move the one Marine back in.

The next room we visited we saw a Marine along with his Mom and Dad. They were from Arizona. He had been wounded in an IED explosion in Afghanistan a few weeks ago. He was doing well and would be starting Rehab in a few weeks or so. They all thanked us for what we do and we told them that there are a lot of people back in New Jersey who support them and their son for what he is doing for our country. We shook hands and headed to the next room.

The next Marine we saw had been wounded when his 81mm mortar had a hang fire. This happens when a mortar round is dropped down the tube and does not go all the way down. He started what we call "Immediate Action" to clear the stuck round and his hand was on the tube when the round slipped down and went off. He has a very nasty burn and has a few tough months ahead of him to rehab his hand. We gave him all of the items we passed out and he thanked us for stopping by. As a matter of fact, he liked us so much that when his buddy returned from Rehab he went looking for us. So we headed back to his room and talked to his buddy too. It was almost like getting "Two birds with one stone"

One Marine we saw had also been wounded by an IED explosion. Wait till you hear how he was wounded. When the Bad Guys bury the IED's, they consist of ammo, artillery rounds, mortar rounds or anything other type of explosive. They also add their own stuff such as nails, glass, metal or anything that can be added to make shrapnel. Well this one Marine had a bad leg wound and his lower leg was broken by an old .50 caliber round, not fired from a rifle, but added as a piece of shrapnel. We said wow, but he was not finished. He then told us that another .50 caliber round stuck in his helmet and get this; A SPARK PLUG was stuck in his flack vest and was embedded in one of his M16 magazines. You know what they mean when some say "That They Would Rather Be Lucky than Good" We wished him well, shook hands and gave him a Loud Ooh Rah and Semper Fi as we left.

We all headed back to the room where we met the two families when we started our visit. We visited and talked to both Marines. One was from 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines. I told him that I was a member of his Battalion back in 1966. So I said OOH RAH and shook his hand. He looked like his was doing well. We headed over the next bed to talk to the Marine who had returned from surgery. He had a bad eye injury and was just lying in bed as we approached his bed side. As we were telling him who we were, he moved around so he could sit up tall in the bed and then put on his eye glasses. He was in good spirits and we asked him how he had been wounded.

He told us in was in a vehicle in the turret with his weapon and an IED exploded causing his weapon to smash into his face and left eye. He needs a few more surgeries and a possible corneal transplant down the road. This young L/Cpl was a sight to behold and to me it was an honor to be at his side as he told us what happened to him. They may not make Marines like they did when I first enlisted in the Corps back 1966 anymore, but I will tell you with all honesty, these young Men and Women who serve in our Corps today are every bit as good and tough as we were back in my day. I am Proud to be a Marine. Semper Fi,

All of the wounded we saw at both hospitals were given their Service blanket, Detachment coins and brochure and gift cards along with an application from the Family & Friends for Freedom Fund. It was a great visit, as usual, and I look forward to the next one.

So if you are reading this report for the first time and want to know what we do with the money we collect and where it goes, well now you know. If you want to make a donation, please do so. It will be greatly appreciated by the men and women we get to visit. All it takes for us to make these visits is the time of day. We don't have to drive; we enjoy good company on the ride to and from and meet a lot of GREAT people.....

It's a great way to spend a day with the men and women who serve in our Armed Forces who have given so much of themselves to protect our freedom and to ensure the freedom of others. OOH RAH...

“A nation reveals itself not only by the men it produces but also by the men it honors, the men it remembers”.

President John F. Kennedy

Semper Fidelis,

**Eddie Neas
SgtMaj/ USMCR/RET
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