



Bethesda & Walter Reed Hospital Trip Report

Four members of the Slattery Detachment made this month's trip. Detachment members were Marc Purcelli, Eddie Neas, Chris Holleran and Bob Stalzer. We have not had a visit to Bethesda since early June and we were all glad to get back to visit the wounded and their families.

We left Newark Penn Station on the 0730 train and headed down to DC. We arrived at Union Station around 1100. I need to mention AMTRAK in this report as some of you may not know this, but here goes. Our Detachment has been making the monthly trips to Bethesda and Walter Reed for almost eight years. We used to drive down and it's a four hour ride down and back. It was a long day for all who did the visit. A local Congressman Rodney Frelinghuysen of Morris County, NJ found out what we were doing and contacted AMTRAK. For over seven years they have been donating the train tickets for us to make our visit. A big thank you and Ooh Rah to the Congressman and AMTRAK for making our visits a little easier on our bodies and that much more enjoyable.

We checked into the Marine Corps Liaison Section dropped off our gear and headed down to the Navy Galley (cafeteria) to grab some chow before we started our visit. As some of you may know, Walter Reed Army hospital is closing this month and for the past few years major construction has been going on at Bethesda as they consolidate both hospitals to one location. I expect some changes to be instituted at the hospital in the coming months, but hopefully they will not affect what we do during our monthly visits. Most of you know, even though we are a Marine Corps League organization, we take the opportunity to visit every service member who is in the hospital no matter what uniform they wear. We are all on the same side and we all need to support each and every wounded service member in the hospital and their families while they recover from their wounds.

Before we head up to the 5th floor we had the opportunity to speak with the mother of a local Army Soldier from Parsippany, NJ who had recently been wounded in Afghanistan and who is currently in the CCU. We introduced ourselves and told her who we are and what we do. We gave her an Army blanket, a few \$50 gift cards, Detachment coin and the application from the Family & Friends for Freedom Fund. She thanked us kindly but you could see in her eyes that she wanted to get back up to her son. Our meeting was brief and we did not want to keep her away from her son. Hopefully during next month's visit when he is moved to the 5th floor, we can visit with him. Keep him and his family in your future prayers.

The hospital is full. With the consolidation of both hospitals, the wounded are now on both sides of the floor from one end to the other. There are approximately 47 wounded men in the hospital which breaks down to 6 Soldiers and 41 Marines.

The Soldiers were from the following units 3rd Armor Division, Fort Benning, Ga, Troop A, 4th Squadron, 4th Cavalry, Fort Riley, KS, USASOC, Fort Bragg, NC, 75th N, BN, Echo Co, Ranger Support, Fort Stewart, Ga.

The Marines were mostly from Camp Lejeune, NC and Pendleton, CA. 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines, 1st Tank Battalion, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines, 2nd MEF, 2nd EOD, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marines, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines, 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines, 1st Combat Engineer Battalion, 2nd Combat Engineer Battalion.

There was also a Marine from the last unit I served with prior to retiring, 4th Civil Affairs Group of Washington, DC. Unfortunately, I did not get to see him.

The first Marine we saw was from 2nd CEB. He had been wounded in Afghanistan and lost both legs below the knee. His family was with him and their home is the state of Tennessee. He was in good spirits and he knows he has a tough road ahead of him. We told them why we were there and gave him and his family the Marine Corps blanket, detachment coin, teddy bear in dress blues, print from Tom Miller and the application from the Family & Friends for Freedom Fund. We also gave them a few of the \$50 gift cards and they were very appreciative that we were there. We shook hands and hugged each other and left to visit another room.

The next Marine was a young L/Cpl who was also a double amputee, but his were above the knee. His family was with him from Louisiana. This Marine was on his first tour and had been in county for about three months. We spent time with them and gave them all of the items we pass out during our visits. I told him to stay focused and do the Rehab he need to do and he would be fine. I told him it would almost be like going to Boot Camp again. But once he finished the rehab, he would much better to handle the loss of his legs. I have told many of the wounded and him about a Marine I met on one of my first visits back in 2006 who was also a double amputee. He left Bethesda and I did not see him again until I was at Walter Reed a few months later. He walked into the Rehab room I was in; Yes, I said "Walked In". If he did not have shorts on you would not have noticed his he had prosthetic legs. I asked him how long he had been walking and he said, "SgtMaj, Walking? I am also running". It was an amazing sight to see. Plus, he was not there to do Rehab. He was there to help motivate and assist all of the other wounded men and women who were there for Rehab. A very MOTIVATING moment for me. And to top it off a few months later, I looked at the front page of a local newspaper and saw that Marine was now leading a Marine Detachment who was in NYC for Fleet Week on a run by Ground Zero where the Twin Towers used to stand.

It amazing what the human body can do when the Heart and Mind work together. I am not saying it is easy, but anything can be done if you want it bad enough.

Bob and I then walked into a room where a Marine had a facial wounds and he was not able to speak. At first, I did not know what to say or even how to start the conversation. I did not know where to look. Should I talk to him or look at his family? I decided that he was the one wounded and I needed to talk to him. He just looked at the few of us in the room while we talked and introduced ourselves. After we gave him the blanket and few other items, I then pulled out the Detachment coin and gave it to him. He took the coin, grabbed my hand and squeezed it hard. I know he was looking to say something, I could see it in his eyes. He then took a small writing board and looked around for one of those erasable markers. He then wrote something on it and turned the board around. It said "Thanks You". For the next five minutes or so, we asked questions and waited for his answer in writing. We could have stayed in the room all day. I did not want to leave, but we had others to visit. We said Semper Fi and shook hands again as we left the room. After I left the room, I said to myself, sometimes I cannot put into words how I feel after a visit. The visit with this Marine was one of those times.

As I said before, there were so many in the hospital we did not get to visit all of them and we ran out of stuff to give out. I was not happy that we had to leave without visiting everyone. A young mother came up to me as we were leaving and asked me if I had any of the bears left, I had to say, No. I felt like I had just let someone down even after all that we had just done. We passed out blankets, about \$1,000 in gift cards, Detachment coins, watches, and the F&FFFF applications and because I did not have one bear left for this mother, I felt like we came empty handed. Not a good feeling. Yes, I will load up on the bears for the next visit.

As we stood in the lobby before we headed back to the train station, there were still more of the wounded men and their families returning to the hospital or coming from other parts of the hospital. We had nothing to pass out, so all we could say was Semper Fi and give them one of the Detachment coins. This was the first time in a long time that I can remember that we returned to NJ with nothing left. We could have taken 10 members of the Detachment and three to four suitcases of stuff to pass out during this visit. With both hospitals merging, we may have to do that in the future.

So to all of you who have donated money and/or purchased items from our Detachment, we thank you for what you do. As you can see, we did a lot during this month's visit. I know I am speaking for all of the wounded and their families we get to visit and help when I say, A Big Thank You to all of you who have supported the Slattery Detachment and the many other great organizations we partner with during the year to make this happen. I am proud of being able to represent you during our visits.

When you pass by your place or worship, stop in a say a little, I mean a BIG prayer for all of the families and the wounded we were able to visit. Every little bit helps and we can never do enough for the men and women who serve in the Armed Forces of the good old U.S. of A. Please don't forget the families of the 30 services members killed in Afghanistan this past weekend.

So if you are reading this report for the first time and want to know what we do with the money we collect, 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...

Please visit our Detachment's "MARINES CARE" web site for additional information.
WWW.Marinescare.org

"I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand"

Confucius

Semper Fidelis,

**Eddie Neas
SgtMaj/ USMCR/RET
Alpha 1/1, Viet Nam**