

I. THE MARINE

The War on Terror, Where we were, to Where you are now...

The last thing most remember is a deafening explosion. You were a Marine in the area of operation, on a dismounted patrol. Sometime after being ordered to the alert—and that enemy was close and contact was likely—you were hit by a piece of shrapnel propelled by an explosive, made from lethal ammunition and detonated by sophisticated mechanisms. Now, you are a Marine waging an entirely new fight: one that depends upon not your Marine Corp training, but your Marine Corp will to survive. During the first hour of your injury, the “golden hour”, your fight was intense and the actions of others critical. Your injuries have a formidable enemy—the Marine inside. From “yellow foot-prints” to decorated combat veteran. So what’s next...?

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Fellow Marines, Welcome to Bethesda...

As a Marine, from the time you were injured to this moment, countless hours of surgery and travel have impacted you. You have traveled thousands of miles, most likely in a drug induced comma, from Iraq to Landstuhl, and had orders you never signed. After treatment in Landstuhl Germany, you crossed the ocean and became a patient at the National Naval Medical Center. While inpatient (a patient residing in the hospital) at the National Naval Medical Center you are bound to have questions. Let’s address some of these questions:

What are contact precautions?

Certain areas of the world have bacteria that exist in the soil, water, and natural. Called Acinetobacter, this bacteria is harmless to most, but requires “gowning-up” to protect patients fighting infection from transferring it to their families, then to the hallways, and other families, and so on.

What should pay say?

Pay: Credit deployed, per-diem, hazardous duty, and family separation (after 30 days in-patient) all stop. Should make sense—you are no longer in a combat zone, your lodging and food are provided, family is on the way! However, everything else remains the same, as long as you remember that while in-patient you are tax exempt.

How long will I be here?

Bethesda is an acute care facility: when you are better and need rehabilitation you are going to want to leave to find the places that provide those services.

What is next?

For some prosthetics and for others rehab. Your injuries force the whole family to strengthen and learn new things. You might not know it yet, but just as you thought your life was over—it may just be beginning. Opportunities will arise, so be prepared to act when they do.

Should I fight to keep it...?

The Hardest thing to hear WE know... You most certainly have already heard the term “wash-out”! Much like the word suggests, wash-outs incorporate saline solution and surgical procedure to separate the dead from the living. Often, wounds have questionable areas surrounding the area of certainty. Obliterated tissue must be cleaned and eventually replaced by with a “flap”. Seeing as *you* match well with *you*, a flap is a portion of tissue compiled of muscle, skin, and blood vessels to fill this gap and save the limb. But, what if the flap is inserted into a questionable area? Both the flap and wound continue to fail and you have just sacrificed a healthy flap. But, say the flap takes, bone and muscle is surgically aligned what then? Well, the hardest part is realizing that even with *perfect alignment* you may still have a crippling deficiency in either use, movement of, or weight bearing. Suddenly, saving the foot also means that navigating from your bedroom down stairs to the kitchen becomes exhausting and painful. Amputees will run before you walk, and time will only worsen the situation.

Have more questions...? talk to someone... anyone...we are here for you!!!

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)...

“How are you feeling Devil Dog?”... “Can I get you anything”... “I heard you were with 1/8...out there with one of my Marines”... “Sempri Fi”

As a hurt Marine, you, like many others; feel as though you have or are missing out on the fight. Missing out on the times your buddies are having in Iraq, missing out on being there to fight along side of them in the War for your team, and just missing out as you lay in bed. It is hard not to be with your Marine buddies, the Marine family you left for combat with—and it will not get better as you or they rotate out, start-up after-care, and enter care under ‘Marine 4 Life’. The rooms inside the National Naval Medical Center are tight and the visitors are many. And, as you work to overcome your physical injuries, you and your family battle the most painful injuries: **the injuries we can not see**: Traumatic Brain Injuries. All these and more will be address in time, with the support of your family and friends, and the loyalty of United States Marines. The Marine Liaisons are dedicated and will listen with compassion and provide comfort from fellow Marines as they work through the hard past that led them here.

Arriving in Bethesda, you realize that your priorities have changed, but you are still a Marine. Your mission is to get better and connect with your support networks. Your family has already arrived two hours prior, at the hospital, via invitational travel orders. Marines transported your family to the hospital from Reagan, BWI, or Dulles International Airports and processed them in by a trained Reception section. The uniformed Marines inside the hospital provide patient advocacy and Marine advocacy mainly looking to care for the families. Pay, travel, lodging, chow, and gear are always on a Marine’s mind; and on your mother’s mind as well. It is the Marine Corps Liaison’s mission to make sure these issues do not detract from your support and your family is given full attention. The one thing on your mind should be rest and heeling under the care of the best professional medical facility in the most powerful country on the planet.

For as you will learn 20 steps down a medical corridor becomes an exhausting feat.