

## **Devlin's View: Program brings some comfort to Marines injured in war**

**By Gerard F. Devlin**

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We Marines have a saying that Marines never leave their wounded behind. Caring for our own is part and parcel of what it means to be a Marine. It is a concept drilled into us from the first time we take the oath of allegiance.

This thought was very much in my mind last Thursday as I made the trip from Bowie to the Naval Hospital at Bethesda to visit casualties of the conflict in the Middle East as part of a program called "Marines Helping Marines" which is run by the Department of Maryland, Marine Corps League and the national MCL organization to assist wounded and hospitalized veterans.

Actually very few of the wounded we assist are Marylanders. We got involved because of our geographic proximity to the two great military hospitals. For this reason we are being aided by Marine Corps League detachments across the nation.

While the deaths in Iraq have not, by World War II or even Vietnam standards, been large, every loss is a catastrophic one to the nation and to the families of the fallen. Seventeenth-century British poet John Donne wrote: "Every man's death diminishes me because I am involved with mankind ... " So, too, with Marines Helping Marines.

Largely because of modern medicine, men and women who would not have survived their wounds in earlier wars live to continue their suffering in military hospitals. Total casualties in the Middle East are over 28,000. Many of these are horribly wounded and maimed and face years of convalescence.

Local Marines Tony Beganwald, Jim McCauley and Bob Flick are regular visitors to the hospital. Beganwald who heads up the Marines Helping Marines program in the Bowie area has made the trek more than 25 times. Other Marines from Free State Detachment have joined with them from time to time.

Originally the MHM program was intended as a morale boost to hospitalized servicemen and women. Now it is a full blown program to aid the hospitalized and their families in a very direct way.

All too often, servicemen and women are flown to Bethesda and Walter Reed with little more than what they are wearing on their backs. We have attempted to fill a gap by providing toiletries and things like tear-away sweat pants for those with leg injuries as well as DVDs and CDs to help alleviate boredom in the wards.

We have donated money to assist parents of the wounded to pay for airfare and lodging in this area. In short, we are doing everything possible to brighten the lives of those who bear the burden of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We have been able to provide Orioles tickets and transportation for ambulatory patients to attend baseball games.

One of the more popular gifts have been gift certificates for McDonald's who have a restaurant adjacent to Bethesda. After months of GI food, servicemen and women seem to have built up a huge craving for Big Macs - go figure!

Last week we visited Marine Sgt. Joshua Horton, 28, whose wife recently delivered quintuplets at their home in suburban Chicago. Horton was badly injured in combat outside Baghdad.

Curiously enough Horton was more interested in learning about us than one would have imagined. He asked the half dozen of us who were present to line up in his room and to describe our Marine Corps experiences. Perhaps nothing serves to underscore the notion that we Marines really are family.

Lest there be any confusion about our program, despite our name we help all servicemen and women and not just Marines. Recently a severely wounded Navy Corpsman requested that his Purple Heart be awarded by a Marine officer because he said, "The only people who have helped me since I came to Bethesda have been Marines."

A USMC three-star general came over to the hospital to make the presentation. Last week we were joined in the wards by Shandi Finnessey, the reigning Miss USA, and Leeann Tweeden of Fox TV Sports. Without fanfare, these lovely women provided a morale boost that aging Marines could not compete with. There are limits after all.

If you wish to make a contribution, send a check to Marines Helping Marines, c/o Anthony J. Beganwald, 3404 Medina Lane, Bowie, MD 20715.

This program is run entirely by volunteers and there are basically no administrative costs so any funds received go directly to the beneficiaries.

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The writer is a retired judge, a former legislator, the senior vice commandant of the Department of Maryland Marine Corps League and Commander of Omaha Beach Detachment of the Disabled American Veterans.