

Live Healthy and Be Well!

Reminiscences of Service to the Nation

--Stephen Jarrard, MD, FACS, US Army (Retired)

This month's special topic, a bit of a diversion from the usual, comes from a journal I kept during deployment to Afghanistan with the U. S. Army (759th Forward Surgical Team) in 2006. Each day, I would take a few minutes before retiring to write down some of the experiences of the day. In trying to come up with a topic for the Laurel's Veteran issue, I decided to share (with some minor editing) a few entries from that journal, and thus share some of that time with our readers. We can all be very proud of our young men and women in the military today who are serving as so many of you have done. I would like to sincerely thank all our readers who are Veterans, and their families, for their service. Just a couple of notes – GSW refers to gunshot wound, FOB means forward operating base (our place of business), and BAS is the battalion aid station (medical clinic where our OR was located). My purpose in sharing this is to remind us all of the sacrifices of those who serve and have served, of the hardships of those who live in a war torn country, and how lucky we are to be here and raise our families in the United States of America!

10 June 2006

This afternoon, we got report of 3 US soldiers coming our way injured with GSW in an enemy contact at FOB Bermel. We all got ready and were at our places when the helos diverted them to Salerno for care. I went to the Operations Center to find out what was going on out there, and found out the bad guys had been seen going into a cave. This issue was quickly addressed with Apache rockets and a B1 bomber strike (penetrators) and I am sure all those guys are now with Allah. Then, after supper, we had to operate on a little boy who came in with a penetrating abdominal wound. It seems he had been playing with something he picked up that exploded (likely a blasting cap of some sort). So, he was taken to the OR and found to have no other intra-abdominal injuries save a slightly bruised right liver lobe – no bleeding.

After getting to bed for 10 mins – a call came of a GSW at the gate coming to the BAS. It was a local truck driver; incorrectly ID'd as an Afghan Army Soldier, who had been shot in the lower back with no exit wound. X-ray showed the bullet still in him – likely in the abdomen. Although he was compensating very well and did not appear in great distress, we took him to surgery and found serious injuries. It took us about 4-5 hrs to get it all done, and it seemed to go well. The guy went to the ICU on IV antibiotics and IV fluids.



11 June 2006

Today is the full moon of the month. One thing I have noticed – when there is no moon here, it is very dark and the sky is full of stars as there is no “light pollution” here. When there is a moon, esp full, it is very bright outside such that shadows are cast by the white moon! It is quite a contrast. My two ICU patients are doing well today. The little boy should probably go to the local clinic tomorrow – just waiting for some more bowel sounds and to let him eat/drink. The GSW guy looked good - no fevers so far. He is not taking any pain meds – but that is his choice.

We lost our first US soldier today – he came in already gone, I thought, when I first looked at him. He was an interrogator and sustained an IED injury. He had massive neck/chest trauma, and came in with no breathing or heart sounds. Still, we worked as hard as we could on him for over 30 mins. We always work like that and are thinking of his family as we do. We owe it to all of them, just like we would want someone to work hard to save one of ours. We finally called it, and he rested then in a private area covered with an American flag. There will be a “hero flight” ceremony tonight as the chopper comes to pick him up. Apparently, when there is a KIA, they get their own aircraft and there can be nothing or no one else on board but the flight crew. I think that is appropriate to show honor to this fallen Warrior who gave his all out there in a place far from home and family. God bless him. May he rest in honored glory and the peace of our Lord.

27 June 2006

No major trauma today – but almost. We had (supposedly) 2 Afghan soldiers wounded near Ghazni – one with extremity wounds and another with a GSW to the belly. The guy with the belly wound apparently died somewhere enroute, and the other guy turned out to be Taliban, so he went to Bagram Air Base (also, weather was a factor here – blowing dust). Speaking of blowing dust – tonight was the first time I could not see the mountains at all. Another memorable moment today was provided by two young girls. There was a 6 or 8 y/o local girl with her dad – she was lovely and had a sweet smile. She had on a traditional dress and scarf that the women wear – it is too bad she grows up in a place that does not value the role or contributions of women.



The other was a 6 day old local girl born with hydrocephalus (“water on the brain”). Her little head was swollen, her eyes (blind) were swollen and protruding, and she had a weak, pitiful cry that just tore your heart out. It is humbling that her parents thought “...if we can just get her to the American doctors, they can help her.” In truth, there was little to nothing we could do – and nothing could have been done at Emory or Scottish Rite either at this point. It is impossible to not be emotional with something like that, and it makes me so thankful that my own were born healthy, live in a wonderful country, and will never know some of these hardships.

1 JUL 2006

Rocket attack x 2 – first woke us up early at about 0015Z (5 AM) and another after supper (8 or 9 PM). No casualties and only minimal property damage...but what excitement! I have been in uniform since 1978 and today was the first time I have heard shots fired in anger. They say that you are never more alive than when you are scared to death – and I’d have to say there is some truth to that. But, our team was all in it together, checking on each other, getting accountability, and reassuring the FOB. Thank God no one was injured, just some property damage. But, we all learned today to be more careful, attentive, and it was a brisk reminder of why we are here and that there are people outside that wire that don’t want us here and wish us harm.

4 July 2006 – Independence Day!

We had a good, festive atmosphere today – not much going on at the aid station, some activities and good food, and no rockets (we see enough fireworks, we’ll pass on that this year)!! Activities included a donkey race, camel petting zoo, gator (4 wheeler) race, Humvee pull, etc. We topped it off with some volleyball and the FST bought a goat and some food and had a little BBQ behind the building. All in all a good day and we made our own celebration far from home. Happy birthday, America!

And so it went for six months. These were just a few excerpts to show some “typical” type days. When it was over and time to leave, although we had looked forward to that day for 6 months, we had mixed emotions as we were leaving friends and fellow warriors behind to continue the mission. They say you cannot know what it was like unless you have lived it – and that may be

true to some degree. But, I wanted to share some with those who have not lived it, and hopefully will never have to. All of our Veterans have been proud to serve when it was their time, as were all of us in this unit, but we wish for the day when there is no need. However, as Plato said, “Only the dead have seen the end of war.” Thus, we continue to give our thanks to all our Veterans of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Thank you for letting me share this with you our faithful readers. Next month, back to health and wellness!

We really do enjoy hearing from you with any questions, concerns, or ideas for future columns and/or health and wellness related issues for the *Georgia Mountain Laurel*. Please send an email to rabundoctor@gmail.com, or call Felichia at 706-782-3572, and we will be sure to consider your input. We will soon post the articles on the web at www.rabundoctor.com in an archived format. If you use Twitter, then follow us for health tips and wellness advice @rabundoctor. Until next month, live healthy and be well!