



Subject: Evening Parade

Gentlemen,

Last Friday my family and I had the pleasure of attending the Evening Parade at the Marine Barracks, 8th & I as guests of the Commanding Officer, Colonel Terry Lockard. You may remember Col Lockard as our Operations Officer in 1/5 during Desert Storm.

As you would imagine, the evening was perfect from the minute we arrived at the Barracks. There were numerous Marines assisting with every aspect of the Parade, from parking, giving directions, checking names, and helping people cross the street. These Marines, whether LCpl or MGySgt, displayed obvious pride in being there and represented the best of our Corps. The Marines were striking in their ceremonial uniforms complete with medals. I saw numerous Silver Stars, Bronze Stars, and Purple Hearts on some young men barely old enough to buy a beer.

As guests of the Commanding Officer, we were afforded the opportunity to mingle with other VIPs in the Center House on the grounds of the Barracks.

The bar was tended by a Major, a Captain, and a Warrant Officer who happily served drinks to the guests. At the appropriate time we were escorted to our seats. We sat field level second row back at the 40 yard line. (The Commandant's guests get the 50.)

You have all seen the Silent Drill Team perform, but this was the first time my family was at our Oldest Post. I knew what to expect. It was going to be an amazing evening. Just as everyone was settling in, I saw a small commotion out of the corner of my eye to the left. Several wounded Marines were being escorted in by their fellow Marines. Each was in a wheelchair some attended by their wives. Blankets covered most of their wounds, but I could see some seriously damaged bodies. They received a standing ovation from the spectators as they passed by. The wheelchairs made their way toward us and stopped about 2 arms interval from me.

The Marine next to me sat upright in his wheelchair with his scarred legs immobile straight out in front. He was carrying his daughter on his lap. She was maybe a year old. His wife sat behind him in the bleachers. I was amazed at his mood as he played with his daughter and moved her arms in rhythm to the music played by the President's Own.

I could see he was uncomfortable at times as he tried to reposition his blanket or cushion. To move his legs, he had to grasp his shoe laces which were tied with extra long loops. He then had to lift and attempt to maneuver his legs. I watched him do this several times and had to fight the urge to assist him. After all, his wife was just a few feet away and certainly she knew when to help and when not to.

The Parade progressed as all parades do. At the command, "Pass in review," the Marines faced to the right and began the march off the Parade Grounds. After some quick drum beats to get everyone going, the combined President's Own and Commandant's Own began playing the Marine Hymn. To my amazement, the Marine next to me started lifting his legs off the rests on his wheelchair and planted his feet on the grass. He held on to the arms of the chair, and strained to push himself up. His body was far from straight and actually resembled a question mark, but in his eyes and those around him, he was standing tall. He was shaking, struggling not to fall over, but he was at attention when our Colors passed. I can't remember ever seeing such determination and pride. I didn't have to look far to find a hero that night. He was sitting (and standing) just 2 arm lengths away.

Semper Fi,

Ray

Raymond Sturm
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U.S. Secret Service

