

"Writing the truth
as I see it;
trying not to
offend
those who will
disagree."

The truth as I see it™

Idaho Common Sense™



Craig L. Bosley, MD

Remembering Pfc. Joseph Dwyer

July 21, 2008

Our country has a large group of people who hope we never go to war. No, they are not the people disparaging our military; rather, they are our military personnel. Our military is full of reluctant warriors who understand better than anyone the travesty of war. They know the price to be paid; but, unlike the rest of us, they are willing to pay it. They know the parents who will lose sons and daughters. They know the husbands and wives who will lose spouses. They know the children who will lose fathers and mothers. They know the reality of war the rest of us watch from a safe distance.

The reason they are different; they have a sense of duty, a sense of honor, a love of country the rest of us also have; but, they have a little bit more. They take that final step, putting their lives on the line for the rest of us. When ordered to war, they reluctantly become heroes while having no interest in being a hero, trying to avoid the term altogether. Their goal is not medals and ribbons; their goal is to do their job, to take care of their "buddies," and to come home alive to their families.

Last week I read the story of an Army medic serving in Iraq during the first weeks of the war in 2003. His regiment was fighting its way toward Baghdad, under fire for 17 of the previous 21 days. The medic was in his 20s, joining just two days after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack. He joined because, "I knew I had to do something." Like other military personnel, he was not confused about his love of country, his duty to country. His was the

ethic of the WWII generation; the generation that defined AWOL as escaping from the military hospital to return to the front lines.

During those first few weeks of the war in Iraq, this young man saw more death and destruction than he could imagine, more than he could tolerate. Death was everywhere. The smell of death was everywhere. Just yesterday his Humvee was hit by a rocket. There was no rest from the battle, no rest from the terror, no rest from the fear. This day, as they approached an Iraqi village, he saw a man running, while carrying a boy covered with a bloody sheet. They were caught in the crossfire of the battle. With no hesitation, medic Pfc. Joseph Dwyer ran into the crossfire, grabbed the young boy, and carried him to safety. A journalist captured the moment on film and shared it with the world. Joseph was hailed a hero, something he never understood; "I was just one of a group of guys." He is an American Soldier. He has a sense of worth only those privileged to serve in the military have, a worth the rest of us cannot understand; but, deep in the recesses of our heart, we wish we had it too.

Four months later Pfc. Dwyer returned to the United States, a forever-changed man. He had seen too much death. He had seen too much anguish. He had just seen too much. Moreover, his mind could not leave Iraq; it was unable to allow him to heal. He saw the enemy at night. He sat with his back to the wall in restaurants. He was different. He could not find Joseph. His wife could not find Joseph. She had to

leave. Pfc. Dwyer used alcohol to blur the images, to ease the anguish, but to no avail. The medications and hospitalizations were not helping. His post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) refused to let go. He was losing this battle, his courage not able to conquer the evils haunting him. He was seeing bombs in the streets and enemy Iraqis outside his home.

Almost mercifully, nearly 5 years after returning from Iraq, Pfc. Joseph Dwyer accidentally overdosed on his medications. He died while asking the police to break down his front door and help him. His demons were finally gone. He could finally rest in peace.

Pfc. Joseph Dwyer is today's version of the Marines raising the American flag on Iwo Jima. He is the same symbol; he is of the same mold. What do you say to his wife, to his family? He was killed in action, taking 5 years to die. He loved his country. He heard the call. He did his duty. He was a hero the day he signed his enlistment papers.

Joseph Dwyer showed us the best of humanity, the best of our country's values. He also showed us the horrors of war, the human price of war, reminding us, even though we must be warriors, we must always be reluctant warriors.