

What Would Major General John A. Lejeune Think?

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What Would Major General John A. Lejeune Think?

Fulfilling the Commitment to Marines and their Families

Taking care of Marine and their families has been a part of the Marine Corps leaders ethos since the Marine Corps began. The recognition of this responsibility by officers is vital to the well-being and continued success of the Marine Corps, especially because most of the men and women enlisting are under 21 years of age. The young men and women are in the formative period of their lives. Officers owe it to them, to their parents, and to the Nation, that when discharged from the service they should be far better men and women physically, mentally, and morally than they were when they enlisted....and to make every effort by means of historical, educational, and patriotic addresses to cultivate in their hearts a deep abiding love of the Corps and Country.¹ This paraphrased excerpt by Major General John A. Lejeune in Marine Corps Order No. 29, *Relations Between Officers and Men*, was his vision about the responsibility officers had regarding taking care of Marines and setting them up for success. In June 2003 Colonel Gerald L. Yanello, deputy director of personal and family readiness director, Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC), made a statement before the personnel subcommittee of the senate armed services committee on issues affecting military families. He stated "...taking care of Marines and their families is a cultivated, point of pride of the Marine Corps; it is part of our ethos. Our continuum of care begins with the "yellow footprints" and continues throughout the life of the Marine. Marines are Marines for life. Legendary hallmarks of 'Once a Marine...always a Marine' and 'Semper Fi' prove our long-term commitment

¹ Lejeune, John A., Marine Corps Order No. 29: *Relations Between Officers and Men*. 14 August 1920.

and provide convincing testimony from Marines that they are forever changed and a part of a 'society' that is sustained through self-perpetuation and a shared culture."² The question is are these young men and women and their families who continue to make sacrifices everyday, who provide a great service to this Nation and who deserve a quality of life that recognizes their commitment, being taken care of by their government? The answer is a resounding no. The United States government and the Department of Defense have improved the military benefits since the onset of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF). Benefits remain inadequate even with the changes that have been made. The Department of Defense needs to revamp the current programs supporting casualties and their families during their recovery and follow-on care. This paper will detail travel benefits for wounded Marines families, how they need to be changed, and how these changes will benefit Marines and the government.

Current Programs

Casualty benefits and the programs surrounding them are extensive. The specific program that will be outlined here is encompassed in a document called Joint Federal Travel Regulations, Article U5246. The article is titled, *Transportation and Per Diem of Family Members of a Seriously Ill or Injured Member*. That article has undergone changes as recently as October 2004. In the general portion of the article it states, that no more than three family members are authorized a one time travel and per diem for

² Yanello, Gerald L. Colonel, USMC, Deputy Director, Personal and Family Readiness Director, Manpower & Reserve Affairs Department, HQMC. *Statement Before the Personnel Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee on Issues Affecting Military Families*, 02 June 2003.

twenty-one days.³ The categories of casualties that are authorized to receive these benefits are outlined in the Marine Corps casualty procedures manual. They are classified by an appropriate authority (medical personnel) as “very seriously injured” (VSI), “seriously injured” (SI), and “imminent death.”⁴ The family members who are authorized to travel and receive these benefits to assist in the cost of their travel are outlined in Title 10, as well the Marine Corps outlines the requirements in the Marine Corps casualty procedures manual. The family members are authorized per diem for up to twenty-one days to remain bedside with the injured/ wounded Marine. This is a recent change to the policy it use to be limited to seven days but was extended to twenty-one during OIF. The family member and/or military member can request an extension beyond the twenty-one days if needed according to Captain Kenny Jones, who works as the operations officer for the casualty branch for the Marine Corps. The travel to bedside benefits as stated include round-trip airfare and per diem but these benefits are limited to one time only. An example of where problems exist related to this is for example if a Marine is married and has a small child, and becomes a VSI casualty, the spouse travels to bedside and say the parents of the Marine travel as well. If the Marines spouse has to return home during that time to tend to their child, she no longer can receive per diem or travel if and when she returns to on bedside of the casualty. The current programs are limiting. Considering the gravity of recovering from injuries received while fighting for the United States, the US government should be more generous with travel benefits. Over

³ US Government. Joint Federal Travel Regulations: Article U5246, *Transportation and Per Diem of Family Members of a Seriously Ill or Injured Member*. Washington D.C.: US Government, 2004.

⁴ US Marine Corps. Marine Corps Casualty Procedures Manual. Washington D.C.: US Government, 2003.

10,369 American troops were wounded in Afghanistan and Iraq so far.⁵ In the most current US casualty status report released by the Department of Defense (DOD) on January 7, 2005 over 5,678 military casualties have been wounded in action and unable to return to duty.⁶ DOD allocates spending for programs, and Congress, determines allocations of government funds to the DOD for these programs and whether or not the current programs are sufficient.

When the US government falls short in terms of taking care of the military casualty and their family private organizations make up the difference. The Fisher House is the most famous organization supporting wounded military members and their families during rehabilitation and drawn out hospital stays. The Fisher House annually serves more than 8,500 families and has provided 1,750,000 days of lodging to family members since the program originated.⁷ There are several other charitable organizations that exist and offset where the US government has left off in upholding its responsibility to these young men and women.

The Changes that Need to be Made to the Current Casualty Travel Benefits Program

The three areas of the travel benefits programs that should be changed are to expand the availability of the per diem/ travel to bedside to more than just a one time opportunity. Family members should be allowed a maximum of six total roundtrip tickets to bedside and per diem as long as is necessary. Secondly, the per diem should be

⁵ Matthews, Chris. *A wounded soldier's journey home*. Hardball, MSNBC. 16 December 2004. <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/6686538/>.

⁶ US Government. *OIF/OEF U.S. Casualty Status as of: January 07, 2005*. Department of Defense. Washington D.C.: US Government, 2005. <http://www.defenselink.mil>

⁷ Matthews. 1/1.

based on the stay of the Marine in the hospital not on a pre-stated twenty-one days. Lastly, beyond the current benefits of travel and per diem, an allowance should be allotted for one family member who travels to bedside to stay with the Marine. The allowance benefit would offset the financial burden that so many of these military members families are incurring due to their loved one being injured in the war. The allowance allows for a family member, to come and stay with the Marine full-time and assist in the care and recovery of the Marine. As a result the family member is not taking on the additional burden of no longer receiving an income. Most Marines injured in OIF and OEF are lance corporals and corporals according to Capt Kenny Jones of USMC casualty branch. Frequently the family member who comes to stay “bedside” is a mother or father. The parents have to deal with the emotional struggle of a hurt child and the additional financial burden for their family. This financial burden could be offset if the allowance program was established. The amount this family member would be paid would not be based on their former salary, it would be determined by the median for the country. The United States median salary for 2002 according to a press briefing in Sept 2003 was \$42,400, by making it a median salary this resolves any issues of varying salaries throughout the country and based on what job this family member normally does.⁸ An excerpt from an article called, *Marine’s Parents Grateful for Medical Care, Help Received.*

“Visiting their son was expensive for the couple, but they say they’re pleased with the help they received. John, a logistics coordinator for Proctor and Gamble, said the government paid for the first week for him and his wife to visit their wounded son. “But after that, it was on us,” he said. “We were incredibly lucky, because our employers were both very generous on paying us and not making us take vacation time for a few weeks,” said Janice, a payroll manager for a facilities-maintenance company. “I honestly don’t

⁸ US Census Bureau. *Sept 2003, Press Briefing Including Charts.* Washington D.C.: US Government, 2003. www.census.gov/hhes/www/income02.html.

know how people do it who can't leave their jobs.” She said the parents of a young man injured with her son have been driving back and forth from Philadelphia to be with their son. ‘his dad’s a fireman,’ Janice said of the others Marine’s family. ‘So he can’t take off (work).’ John said he and his wife are pleased with the medical care his son received, but the military needs to take a look at the assistance provided to parents of wounded service members. ‘Even though they want the families there for the patient’s well-being and to help in the rehabilitation and recovery, they only pay for the first week’s expenses for families,’ John Hamberg said. ‘For families like ours, that stayed there three months, that gets pretty expensive.’”⁹

In the most pragmatic sense they would be being paid to assist in the recovery of their child, but in an emotional one this allowance would allow them to be exactly where they would want and need to be for the benefit of the Marine.

Changes can benefit Marines, Families, Marines Corps and US Government

The proposed changes will benefit Marines, their families, the Marine Corps, and the US government. The Marines ability to recuperate will be enhanced if they do not have to worry about the financial hardships their families are incurring. The Marines overall recovery will be quicker if they have their families with them during their time of recuperation to give them moral, spiritual, and physical support.

“Where are the politicians? Where are the Generals? Where are the people that are supposed to take care of me?...The Military could do a better job of taking care of their own, though the system in place was often unwieldy, outdated and inadequate...As to Kelly’s discovery that he and his wounded comrades had to beg and borrow to pay for their loved ones to visit while they recuperate, Hagenbeck said a new policy went into

⁹ Williams, Rudi. *Marine's Parents Grateful for Medical Care, Help Received*, Armed Forces Network, Armed Forces Press Service: 01 Oct 2004. <http://www.armedforces.net/Detailed/2571.html>

effect this weekend to alleviate part of the problem.”¹⁰ These quotes are taken from the article, *Injured Iraq Vets Come home to Poverty*. These recommended changes would benefit the Marine Corps, the Marines and their families providing an additional sense of relief to many families who have so much to worry about as it is with their Marine going to war.

The final benefactor of these changes would be the US government. If a wounded Marine who is recovering in the hospital has his family with him, and someone there who can really help his recovery, and assist in keeping his morale, and spirits up this will decrease the time they have to stay in the hospital by speeding up their recovery. Medical staff working at Bethesda Naval Hospital with wounded Marines confirmed based on their observations that a patient's recovery time is reduced as a result of a family member's presence. These changes; multiple airfare travel to bedside, per diem benefits for the family members for the duration of the Marine's recovery in the hospital and an allowance program for a family member who remains bedside all have an upfront cost, but on the back end it saves money. Marines do not have to stay in the hospital as long and do not require as much medical care long term.

Ensuring the Promise is Kept, and the Order is Followed

Congressman John Dingell (D-MI), a former infantryman, wrote a letter to the Pentagon demanding further assurance. He requested all wounded and disabled vets be financially assisted and otherwise helped in transitioning to civilian life. He wrote, “I am

¹⁰ Ross, Brian, Scott, David & Sauer, Mandy. *Injured Iraq Vets Come Home to Poverty*, ABC News: ABC News Internet Ventures, 2004. <http://abcnews.go.com/Primetime/IraqCoverage/story?id=163109&page=1>.

astonished by this story and disappointed that we are failing to fulfill our nation's duty to care for our injured veterans."¹¹ Over 1.5 million military members have deployed to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM since September 11, 2001. The current casualty benefit programs need to continue to be improved, three methods of improvement in one specific program have been outlined here. Allowing family members to travel bedside multiple times, per diem benefits extend for the duration of the Marines stay in the hospital, and an allowance program for one family member to offset the income loss. All of these changes would be beneficial to not only the Marine and their families but to the Marine Corps and the US government as a whole. "We continue to write our history, whether conducting critical operations in the international spotlight or diligently attending to the equally important, but unheralded work of taking care of Marines and their families. We are in fact, stewards of the past, present, and future. We, therefore, must remain mindful that our actions today-guided by the lessons of yesterday-will determine the fate of the Corps tomorrow."¹² General James L. Jones, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR).

¹¹ Ross, Scott, & Sauer. 5/5.

¹² Jones, James L. General USMC, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), Marine Corps Birthday Ball Message 2000.

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