



AN AMERICAN HERO

The zing! ping! of bullets ricochet off the Humvee's metal; dirt plumes mushroom and skew the view of a man in white running in the opposite direction; one wrong step sends a Marine flying through the air. Welcome to Afghanistan.

This is the life Navy Corpsman Anthony Ameen faced when he was embedded with the 2nd Battalion 7th Marine Regiment from April to July, 2008. In that short three-month period he lived a lifetime of experiences.

The Ahwatukee man's inspiring story of bravery and camaraderie begins with a serendipitous step into the Navy recruitment office as a Desert Vista High School graduate looking for direction. What he found was an extended family and a love of medicine.

Ameen was originally a Deck Seaman, aboard the *USS Dubuque* (LPD 8) and his first deployment was taking Marines with the 3rd Battalion 11th Marine Regiment from San Diego to Iraq. During the journey to the Middle East on *USS Dubuque* he met several Marine Corpsmen. He was impressed

by their work helping save the lives of others and decided he wanted to do the same.

On March 20, 2003, Ameen remembers newscaster Paula Zahn telling the world "We're at war."

When the Marines returned to the ship, the craft was lighter as Anthony and his crew picked up fewer men than they dropped off.

Upon returning to the United States, Ameen was sent to Hospital Corps School in Great Lakes, Ill., and then the Navy Medical Center in Portsmouth, Va. where he trained as a Corpsman. After a year and a half in the Emergency Department and one year in Women's Health, he was given a choice: re-enlist or be embedded with the Marines.

He ended up with the 2nd Battalion 7th Marine Regiment, where he found not only trust and respect, but brotherhood. He was told, "You've got some big shoes to fill."

After training at Mohave Viper, a mock Iraq and Afghanistan town, he deployed with the 2/7 in April, 2008. For three weeks, the Marines waited at Kandahar Airbase where they exercised, slept and read the Bible.

Their mission when they pushed out to Nawzad, Afghanistan, was to train Afghani police and soldiers. When they stepped on the dirt, however, there were no police and no soldiers. The Marines were on their own until the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and International Securities Assistance Force allies came to help.

Less than three miles away the third largest Taliban headquarters was watching from the mountains. Nawzad was abandoned. The 2/7 faced daily firefights. The worst was the 16-hour Battle of Nawzad facing "Kinetic Combat," or non-stop fighting. Ammunition trucks had been destroyed and air support was fighting in another area, far from these troops.

"At one point, we all thought it would never end," Ameen recalls. His radio was constantly squawking, "Doc, Corpsman up," meaning a Marine was hurt. During the time they were stationed in Afghanistan, faith became a strong source of support. Anthony led prayer groups before each mission.

On July 21, 2008, the sight and smell of fear was thick in the unit. Marines were looking at pictures of their children and making sure the Corpsmen were prepared to save their lives. They said a prayer and pushed off.

The Marines crept along the ravine where they could hear the Taliban talking, and smell the coffee coming from their area.



Suddenly, they were ambushed and bullets were flying, explosions abounded and one Humvee exploded, sending a tire flying right to Ameen and another man. Ameen pulled the Marine out of the way as the tire dove into the dirt.

The ground was shaking as people were calling for the Doc. He heard large explosions, and then the call to help a severely wounded Marine who was 100 yards away. The men were reminded to "Watch your feet!" as they checked for improvised explosive devices (IED) and made their way to the injured Marine. Ameen ran, oblivious to anything but saving the wounded man's life.

Ten feet away from his wounded comrade, he was suddenly up in the air. Ameen had stepped on an IED. He knew he had lost his left foot, and that his gear had been ruined. Another Corpsman was hit so hard he had a grade three concussion and was bleeding from the ears. A fellow Marine administered life-saving care to Ameen.

"There was so much pain," Ameen says. "I don't wish that pain on anyone, even the enemy." He and the Marine were lifted into the back of a truck, and were taken to an ambulance, where Ameen held the Marine's hand, knowing this would be his last fight.

His injuries were severe, necessitating the amputation of the lower half of his left leg. He sustained multiple fractures of his right leg, and shattered his left hand. He was initially treated in Afghanistan and in Germany, followed by medical care at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas and the Naval Medical Center in San Diego, Calif. He has had more than 30 major surgeries.

The 2/7 received 180 Purple Hearts for their efforts in Afghanistan. They lost 20 men in Afghanistan and six more when they returned as a result of combat stress or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Many of these men, including Ameen, have PTSD, a serious medical disorder affecting many service members.

Anthony volunteers as a public speaker for the **Wounded Warrior Community**, talking with various groups and sharing his story to bring greater insight into what those serving in the military struggle with on a daily basis.

"I wouldn't change anything. I would do it all over knowing I would get injured. I am proud of everything I have done, including my battle scars." Ameen hopes to resume running and to further his education

in the medical field, either in emergency medicine or rehabilitation.

The Arizona Corporation Commission awarded Ameen a grant to start a non-profit organization, Wings for Warriors, which supports Arizona veterans injured in combat during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Through the organization he speaks to community groups to "personally share with people my forever life-changing experience." He said the presentations "also allow the community to ask questions directly regarding fighting in a combat environment, related injuries, and the overall recovery process that a wounded veteran must go through in order to live a somewhat normal life in the after-process."

Ameen is not just a Local Legend, but an American Legend. His honors and awards include the Purple Heart; the Navy/Marine Corps Achievement Medal with Combat Valor Distinction and two Good Conduct Medals. His is just one story of the countless contributions from servicemen and women who have contributed and sacrificed on behalf of our country.

This article was written in honor of Lance Corporal Ivan Wilson, the Marine Anthony was running to save. For more information visit www.wingsforwarriors.org



www.wingsforwarriors.org

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