

Injured Marine recovering, honored by Elks club

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By Joel Danoy

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WINCHESTER- Mark Sackett is literally taking each day one step at a time.

The 20-year-old 2008 James Wood High graduate and Clear Brook resident has no choice. He's still on crutches as a result of being injured by an IED (improvised explosive device) Oct. 10 while serving in Afghanistan.

Sackett was on patrol in the Helmand province as a squad automatic weapon gunner with Golf Company, 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division based at Camp Lejeune, N.C., when the explosion occurred.

"It's been a little hard to adjust," he said about his return to his Frederick County home Nov. 26. "Now that I have a little more strength, I can get around good on my crutches."

A lance corporal, Sackett endured about a dozen surgeries to repair his shattered right heel, fibula, tibia, multiple broken bones in his right hand, and numerous shrapnel wounds.

It's difficult to conceal the visible reminders of his injuries. He still wears a medical boot on his right foot, and his gait is altered as a result of the crutches he uses for walking.

All told, Sackett once had 19 pins in his hand. He currently has two pins inserted in his right heel for stability with his ankle and heel, and a metal bar will permanently remain inside his right fibula.

His right thumb and forefinger have movement, but his remaining fingers appear stiff and have little flexion.

What hasn't changed are his smile, his quick and witty personality, and his ability to make those around him laugh.

"His attitude has been the biggest thing," said his father Donald Sackett. "We help him out with the little things, but he is



Injured Frederick County Marine Mark Sackett (center) smiles after being honored Friday night at the Winchester Elks Lodge. He is flanked by lodge exalted ruler Wayne Graham (from left), his mother Kelly Miller, his father Donald Sackett, and Jim Payne, the lodge's veterans appreciation officer.

basically on his own. I'm so proud to see him making his way through this."

Sackett said he passes his time at home playing video games and spending time with his girlfriend. He occasionally makes it out for a movie or a trip to the mall or grocery store.

The small things, such as cooking food, getting dressed, bathing himself, and simply functioning on his own, are all getting easier.

"The main thing is I just want to walk, that's killing me," he said. "Just sitting around or being in the wheelchair, my anxiety builds up real bad and I want to walk somewhere. I know that will go away once I can walk around at my own pace."

Sackett said the injuries he sustained were "just business" and insists they haven't changed him, saying, "I just feel happier as a person.

"I was sent over there to fight them and they were there to fight me, and that was the business I signed up for," he said.

There is still some uncertainty to whether the Marine Corps will retain Sackett in a different capacity or discharge him with a medical separation designation. For now, he will undergo one more surgery Jan. 26 to remove the pins in his heel, at which time he'll be assigned to Bethesda Naval Medical Center until his fate is decided.

Sackett isn't waiting for that decision - he already has his sights set on life after the Marine Corps.

He wants to attend college and hopes to work in the pharmaceutical field or as an occupational therapist.

"I want to start going to college, get my education and a decent job for the future," he said. "I just think [those occupations] would be cool because I've been through it. My therapists have been great, and I think medicine is really cool, it's helped me a lot."

Sackett's sacrifices haven't gone unnoticed in the community. He and his family were guests of honor at the Winchester Elks Lodge's Friday dinner.

Jim Payne, chairman of the civic club's veterans' committee, said the organization takes every opportunity to honor the area veterans, past and present.

"This is certainly a great pleasure for us to have Mark and his family," said Payne, a Vietnam veteran. "We just thought he would be a great person. You know, he really deserves this."

Sackett called the invitation "a little overwhelming at first."

"It was a little awkward to me to be invited at first because I didn't know anything about them," he said. "But now that I'm

here, it's very comforting and nice to be around other veterans."

The best part of dinner, Sackett said, was sharing stories with other veterans, typically 40 to 50 years his elder.

He was especially touched by Payne's efforts to thank him for his service and sacrifices.

"What we saw compared to Vietnam was nothing," Sackett said, "so to have him come up and thank me it's like, 'Damn, man, you don't have to be thanking me, I should be thanking you.'

"That's why I have so much respect for the Vietnam guys. It must have been horrible to see what they saw and to come back and have people treat you so terribly."

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