

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Christmas: Time for family, time for faith

Injuries changed life for corporal

Monday, December 25, 2006

By DEBBIE HALL - Bulletin Staff Writer

Paralyzed from the waist down and hospitalized thousands of miles from home last Christmas, U.S. Marine Cpl. Raymond Carnwright could not have known how different this year's holiday would be.

He came home to his native Bassett on Wednesday, fully recovered from the injuries he suffered on Dec. 22, 2005. He is spending Christmas with his mother and siblings, Kelli Jackson and Kristen, Karri and Kevin Carnwright.



Posing for a family portrait are (from left) Kristen Carnwright, Kevin Carnwright, Raymond Carnwright and Terri and George Sawyer. They are standing in front of the family Christmas tree that is decorated with U.S. flags as well as photographs and ornaments.

"It will be the first year in a while that all five of us are able to get together" for the holiday season, he said.

Carnwright was hurt during his second deployment in Iraq. He was assigned to the 2nd Marine Unit, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines, and working as a turret gunner on a Humvee when it flipped and he was ejected. Carnwright, now 21, suffered a heavy concussion and other injuries. He recalls last Christmas vaguely.

"I spent it with a lot of other injured Marines and soldiers. We tried to make the best of it, because we're family, too," he said.

Following his accident, Carnwright was moved to several hospitals before his January transfer to the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., for extensive therapy and chiropractic treatments.

At the time, physicians would say little about the likelihood of a full recovery. The situation "was an eye-opener," Carnwright said.

"While I was in the hospital, I started reading the Bible and a miracle happened," he said. "I woke up one morning and felt the worst pain I had ever felt. It was the worst pain and the best pain all at the same time" because Carnwright discovered "I could feel and move my toes." Throughout the months as he fully recovered, Carnwright eventually came to the realization that "God has a plan for my life. Something always told me this is what I had to do. I have no regrets."

Carnwright first was deployed to Afghanistan from May through December 2004. He then

served in Iraq until he was hurt and could be deployed as early as next month on a third mission — a second tour of duty in Iraq.

But he is not complaining.

“I never took life for granted,” he said, and now he appreciates each moment even more. “I overcame a lot of odds to get back to full duty status and do what I signed up to do,” Carnwright said. Working in Iraq, it “is a beautiful thing to see your brothers go over there and do their jobs and come home. I like to believe it’s the little things we do that make a difference.”

Carnwright is a 2003 graduate of Bassett High School, where he was enrolled in ROTC before he joined the military when he was 18.

“At this point, I think I’ll probably be in for 20 or 30 years,” he said. “I like it.”

His experience and the sense of independence of his military career also have taught Carnwright a new respect for his mother, Terri Sawyer. His stepfather is George Sawyer. “I thank her a lot. She raised five kids on her own. That’s a good accomplishment to have five kids graduate from the same high school,” Carnwright said.

Today, the family will spend Christmas together at home. That means “listening to my mother’s Elvis Presley Christmas music, singing Karaoke and exchanging gifts,” Carnwright said with a smile.

Although gifts “are nice, overall, the best gift is to be around family at Christmas,” he said. “I wouldn’t trade that for the world.”