

“A Trusted Symbol”

For More Than a Century, the American Red Cross Has Faithfully Served Marines in Crisis

By Sara W. Bock

Throughout three decades of service in the Marine Corps Reserve, combat veteran Mike Jordan noticed something that made a lasting impression on him: in times of crisis, the American Red Cross always showed up.

They were there when Jordan, then a second lieutenant, was assigned to replace a platoon commander from 1st Battalion, 8th Marines who was killed in the bombing of the Marine Barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, in October 1983. Restoring a communications platoon that had suffered heavy losses proved an overwhelming and emotionally draining task for a young officer on his first assignment.

“I didn’t really feel adequately equipped to deal with grieving parents who had just lost their sons in that blast, and I didn’t feel adequately prepared to tend with wounded survivors or Marines who came back to Camp Lejeune, N.C., and were hospitalized and would eventually return to the unit,” said Jordan.

But in the wake of devastation, the Red Cross mobilized volunteers from its Service to the Armed Forces (SAF) pro-



COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN RED CROSS

gram who assisted Jordan with freshening up his Marines’ barracks at Camp Lejeune, as well as the Quonset hut where they worked. For the Marines returning from Beirut who had survived a deeply traumatic event, something as simple as a new coat of paint and photographs on the walls made their living and working spaces feel warm, welcoming and a little more like home. And even more importantly, the Red Cross workers taught Jordan

through their example “how to really demonstrate the warmth and comfort for grieving parents, and how to show up and how to help support the Marines that were wounded and were recovering in the hospital,” he said.

Following his assignment at Camp Lejeune, Jordan left active duty and joined the active reserve component while launching a career in corporate America. But when the Gulf War began in 1990, he volunteered to again join the active-duty ranks and deploy as a communications officer and H&S Company Commander with 7th Engineer Support Battalion. By February 1991, Jordan, then a captain, found himself at the Kuwaiti border, prepared to participate in the ground attack on Iraqi forces in support of Operation Desert Storm.

“We were told that we were outnumbered and we would encounter nerve agents and anthrax attacks when we commenced the ground war, and that we were to expect high casualties,” said Jordan, who was newly married at the time and hadn’t spoken with his wife in two months. “Truth is, I think many of us weren’t sure if we’d return home.”



COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



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In September 1918, two Marines (above left) convalescing in a hospital in Auteuil, France, are cared for by a Red Cross nurse who, by pure coincidence, had traveled to Europe on the same boat that they did. By the end of the war, the American Red Cross was well-known for its humanitarian work and care for servicemembers, often going into harm’s way to provide assistance. A Marine (above right) receives first aid in a trench in France during WW I.

The realization that they might never hear their loved ones' voices again weighed heavily on Jordan and his Marines during those long days of waiting, but prior to the scheduled invasion they were given an opportunity to load into Humvees and drive 10 kilometers south of their forward operating position. The Red Cross, in a partnership with AT&T, had arranged for a satellite dish to be brought to their austere location in the middle of the desert so that the Marines could call home.

Jordan spent four hours in line for his turn to make a 15-minute phone call, but the chance to talk to his wife, Lynn, was more than worth the wait.

"It was an amazing call that I'll never forget because of the intensity and the mix of emotions," said Jordan. "It was probably one of the most important phone calls of my life."

After he came home from Desert Storm, Jordan remained in the Marine Corps Reserve and returned to his career in the private sector until 2004 when he volunteered to again activate and deploy, this time in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Then a major, he served as the director of the Civil Military Operations Center, government support team, 5th Civil Affairs Group. In 2005, Jordan and his team lived and worked "outside the wire" six days a week, operating out of the government center in downtown Ramadi, Iraq, with security provided by Weapons Platoon, "Alpha" Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines.

"My Marines and I were rocketed, mortared and fired upon routinely as we conducted our mission in Ramadi," said Jordan. "It is hard to express in words the intensity of being 'down range' or 'outside the wire' and how much the Red Cross SAF means when we perform our mission under those circumstances."

Support from the Red Cross came in the form of care packages filled with snacks, toiletries and other essentials, and given their position, Jordan and the other Marines relied heavily on the contents of those packages to meet their basic needs. One of the most meaningful items in the care packages, he recalls, were handwritten notes from patriotic Americans.

"When you're sitting there in that environment and you read a really kind note from somebody that doesn't even know you, it makes a heck of an impression," said Jordan.

Jordan's various interactions with the Red Cross in Iraq solidified his appreciation for their lifesaving mission. At one point during the deployment, one of Jordan's fellow Marines received an emergency communication through the Red Cross, which is congressionally chartered



COURTESY OF MAJ MIKE JORDAN, USMC(R) (RET)

As a Marine captain, Mike Jordan, pictured in the back row, second from the right, stands with Marines from 7th ESB during Operation Desert Storm in 1991. As a result of his various experiences with the Red Cross during his time in the Corps, Jordan now serves as the Vice President of Humanitarian Services for the Red Cross Pacific Division.

to deliver verified messages to deployed servicemembers to inform them of family emergencies on the homefront. This message was dire: his wife was terminally ill and he needed to return to the U.S. immediately. In these situations, the Red Cross works with a servicemember's command to help them make immediate travel arrangements when a confirmed emergency occurs.

During that same deployment to Iraq, two Marines with Jordan's civil affairs team were wounded by an improvised explosive device (IED) blast in Ramadi. Jordan relied on his Red Cross first aid training to assist the wounded Marines,

who were medevacked to the battalion aid station, but through the Red Cross in Baghdad, Jordan was able to get information and updates about their condition.

And when Jordan and his unit left Iraq to redeploy to the U.S., they spent a week at Camp Arifjan in Kuwait where they were able to decompress and visit the Red Cross Rest and Recovery Center there.

"It was nice because we had a chance to talk with really kind staff, we could communicate home and we could recover from our deployment," said Jordan. "I was struck again by the Red Cross staff, their kindness and their warmth, and it felt a little bit like home."



Marines learn Red Cross methods in the "gentle art of man handling" during a life-saving exhibition at the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard in Hawaii, in 1920. Since its inception, the Red Cross has provided training in various lifesaving skills to members of the military and civilians. (Photo courtesy of Library of Congress)



COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN RED CROSS

A group of Red Cross volunteer workers in Butte, Mont., make face masks for U.S. servicemembers during the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic. During WW I, volunteers across the nation joined the Red Cross Production Corps to make masks, warm garments, and medical supplies for the “boys” on the front.

These small, yet meaningful moments when Jordan’s life as a Marine intersected with the humanitarian work of the Red Cross are by no means unique, in the sense that virtually every Marine who has deployed to a combat zone—and likely even those who haven’t—have benefited in some way from the organization’s Service to the Armed Forces. In Jordan’s case, his personal experiences led him to join the staff of the American Red Cross, where he serves today as the Vice President of Humanitarian Services, Pacific Division.

“In times of hardship and difficult circumstances, you never forget how you were treated,” said Jordan. “I had a chance to give back, so I joined them in 2013 and I have not looked back.”

With little fanfare, the American Red Cross has provided relief and support to individuals in crisis and offered training

in life-saving skills to prepare people for emergency situations since its founding in 1881. An astounding 90 percent of the Red Cross workforce are volunteers who are committed to the mission of preventing and alleviating human suffering as part of the overall mission of the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, a global network of societies in 192 different countries.

From providing support to victims of natural disasters and offering first aid certification courses to organizing blood drives that supply roughly 40 percent of the nation’s blood, the Red Cross mission extends far beyond its Service to the Armed Forces. But supporting military servicemembers and their families has long been an integral part of its work to provide compassionate care, and the Red Cross continues to provide “home com-

forts” and critical services on bases and in military hospitals, support during deployments—particularly when emergencies arrive—and service to veterans even after their time on active duty comes to an end.

“The American Red Cross has always been a trusted symbol for the U.S. Marine Corps,” said Red Cross archivist Susan Watson, adding that the organization’s first direct support of Marines took place during the Spanish-American War in 1898 when the Red Cross provided food, medical personnel and nurses to aid the troops during the conflict. The founder of the American Red Cross, Clara Barton, was inspired by the International Red Cross movement and her work with wounded soldiers during the U.S. Civil War, as well as through her efforts to reconnect families through the Office of Missing Soldiers after the war. In 1881, the American Red Cross was first established, with service to the armed forces a central part of its mission, said Watson.

During World War I, the Red Cross mobilized volunteer workers across the nation to join the newly established Production Corps through its chapters on the homefront. The volunteers made gloves, sweaters and medical supplies for service-



JERRY WALLER

Wounded, ill and injured Marines on stretchers crowd the deck of a landing craft tank as American Red Cross workers serve them donuts and coffee, Sept. 26, 1944.



FELICE FUSCO, AMERICAN RED CROSS

Red Cross members with the D.C. Canteen Corps serve refreshments to a Marine and a Sailor in Washington, D.C., 1942.



COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN RED CROSS

A Marine talks with an American Red Cross Service to the Armed Forces staff member about the helpful services the Red Cross provides.

other services like loans and counseling—an effort that earned the praise of Major General Commandant John A. Lejeune. And a 1926 edition includes a letter of appreciation from Marine Colonel H.C. Snyder, commanding officer of the 2nd Marine Regiment in Port au Prince, Haiti. He expressed his gratitude of the Red Cross “not only in providing each man with a Christmas present each of the two years of my stay in Port au Prince, but for many other substantial services.”

When the U.S. entered World War II in December 1941, another formative period began for the Red Cross, which not only continued the services it previously established during WW I, such as the Motor Corps and the Hospital and Recreation Corps’ “gray ladies,” but began a number of new ones as well. These included its first-ever blood donor program, which would later serve as the model for its civilian blood program, established in 1948. Even before the U.S. entered the war, the Red Cross had anticipated that American troops would need blood—particularly plasma—in order to save lives. Prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Red Cross already had established 10 blood donor centers in the U.S.

members overseas including cloth masks to help combat the spread of the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic. The newly established Red Cross Motor Corps provided transportation support for the sick and wounded as well as for the movement of nurses and supplies. Through the organization’s local chapters, the Red Cross Home Service assisted the families of troops serving overseas, keeping them informed about benefits and services available to them and acting as a liaison for communications between the deployed servicemembers and their loved ones.

Meanwhile, across the ocean, the American Red Cross helped set up the first 50 military hospitals and supplied Red Cross nurses to care for the combat wounded, said Watson. Red Cross workers also staffed canteens that provided food and drinks for the troops and established “Camp Service” to provide needed items as well as recreational opportunities.

As injured servicemembers began to return home to convalesce, the Red Cross began a Hospital and Recreation Corps at Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, D.C. Staffed entirely by women who wore gray dresses as uniforms, members of the corps quickly earned themselves the nickname “the gray ladies.” The gray ladies provided the wounded with non-medical services like shopping, reading and writing letters on their behalf. In 1917, the Red Cross Institute for the Blind, also known as Evergreen, opened its doors in Baltimore, Md., to care for the visually impaired returning home from the war.

By the end of the war in November 1918, the American Red Cross had grown exponentially and was a household name in the U.S., having earned great visibility for its humanitarian efforts.

“World War I really was the defining time for the Red Cross and really helped

shape the organization that we know today,” said Watson.

Articles from the *Red Cross Courier* in the 1920s provide insight into the organization’s interactions with Marines following the war. Some are humorous: a July 1922 article entitled “Devil Dogs Eat Up All Chapter’s Jam,” details the staggering volume of jam sandwiches the Red Cross fed to 5,000 Quantico-based Marines who were traveling through Washington, D.C., on their way to Gettysburg. Another article published in 1922 covered the Red Cross support of Marines in Santo Domingo by providing them a place to read and study, as well as



In the wake of Hurricane Harvey, Marine reservists load buckets of Red Cross cleaning supplies onto a disaster relief van at the Red Cross warehouse in Beaumont, Texas, in September 2017. In addition to being on the receiving end of American Red Cross services, Marines also have worked alongside the Red Cross in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief scenarios. (Photo by LCpl Niles Lee, USMC)

than 2 million emergency communications between the troops and their family members.

Supplemental recreational activities overseas (SRAO) workers supplied by the Red Cross were college-educated women who brought entertainment, refreshments and “a touch of home” to the Marines and other servicemembers in secured areas near the front lines in Vietnam, much like the clubmobiles in WW II and Korea. This time, however, they traveled to remote locations via helicopters and jeeps.

Much has changed since the Red Cross began its wartime support of the U.S. military, and the organization has had to adapt its services to reflect the evolution of the nature of warfighting, the landscape of the battlefield and the role of technology in the way people communicate with each other. But they’ve managed to do just that, while remaining true to their original mission.

“When I think about today, the things that we’re doing—the mission continues,” said Mike Jordan.

The Red Cross maintains a large presence on military installations worldwide, providing support to nearly half a million active-duty and veteran servicemembers and their families each year. It offers programs and services at 147 military medical facilities and 171 veterans care facilities around the globe and is proud to serve 24 hours a day, 365 days a year through the American Red Cross Hero Care Network, which provides emergency communication and assistance and is available by phone, online, or through the free Hero Care mobile app.

Whether it’s through resiliency and reconnection workshops, job training for



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American Red Cross SRAO workers say goodbye to the Marines of a reconnaissance platoon departing on a weeklong patrol in Da Nang, Vietnam, December 1967.

military spouses or workshops and training for caregivers of wounded, ill and injured servicemembers on the home front or emergency support during deployments, Marines and their families continue to count on the Red Cross to be there in their time of need.

For Jordan, his personal journey with the Red Cross came full circle when he became a Gold Star Father after his son, Air Force 2nd Lieutenant Travis M. Jordan, died while serving on active duty in 2016. In 2017, following a fundraiser in his son’s name to help refurbish the Camp Arifjan Red Cross Rest and Recovery Center in Kuwait, where Mike Jordan had transitioned through on his

way home from Iraq in 2005, the building was renamed the “2nd Lieutenant Travis M. Jordan Resiliency Center.”

For servicemembers passing through Kuwait on their way in or out of the Middle East theater, the Travis M. Jordan Center offers them resiliency counseling and training as well as an opportunity to participate in the “healing arts” like music and painting. A collection of guitars—his son was an avid guitarist—are available for servicemembers to pick up and play.

For Jordan, who as a Marine relied on the Red Cross during times of need, there couldn’t be a more fitting way to honor his son’s life. 🇺🇸



COURTESY OF MAJ MIKE JORDAN, USMCR (RET.)



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Above left: Maj Mike Jordan and his son, Air Force 2ndLt Travis Jordan, before Travis’ tragic 2016 death.

Above right: Mike Jordan traveled to Kuwait in 2017 for the dedication of the newly refurbished Camp Arifjan Red Cross Center, which was renamed the “2nd Lieutenant Travis Jordan Resiliency Center.”

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