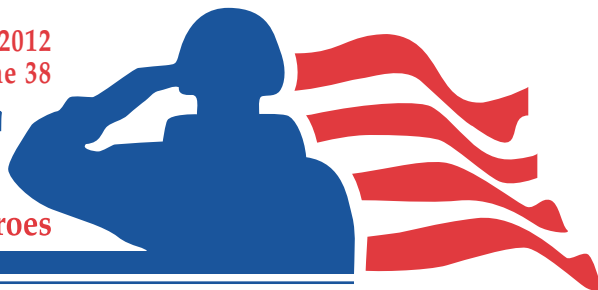


THE ROAD TO RECOVERY REPORT

March 2012
Volume 38



An Update for Supporters of the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes

Wounded hero thanks donors for Easter meal



“I didn’t know how to say thanks, so I called.”

Coalition staffers receive a lot of calls from severely injured servicemen and women asking for help with dire financial crises.

So in April 2011 when staffers received the voice mail described below from a serviceman, they expected to swing into action and send out some emergency aid.

Instead, it was a heartfelt thank you from a wounded hero who had just received his \$60 Easter meal gift check.

“I just received a letter with a \$60 check for the Easter holidays,” the recording begins.

“I didn’t know how to say thanks, so I called. For all those people who helped with donations . . . it reminds us veterans that we haven’t been forgotten, and that’s a big, big thing.

“I’m touched and very emotional. Thank you from me and thank you from my family,” the recording concluded.

Coalition Board Chairman David Walker said, “This unexpected phone message shows how we really can ‘reach out and touch someone’ by sending a few dollars through the mail.

“I only hope we will be able to provide similar gift checks to the severely wounded servicemen and women struggling to feed their families this Easter.”

Walker was referring to the Coalition’s Emergency Easter Meals Project, which has provided a total of 2,014 checks worth \$60 each

to wounded heroes over the past two years.

Retired Army Major General John K. Singlaub recently wrote to supporters asking for their help this year to fund the \$60 gift checks.



Gifts to the Coalition’s Emergency Easter Meals Project help wounded heroes like retired Army Sgt. Lisa Crutch, who returned from Iraq with a traumatic brain injury. Because of the injury, her husband Donald had to resign from his job and help take care of her and their three children.

In order to identify the families most in need and ensure emergency aid is rushed to them before Easter, donations in support of the Easter Meals project must be collected in the next few weeks.

Because of the long wait for government disability checks and the continuing weakness in the economy, the number of financially strapped military families who need help is steadily rising.

In fact as this newsletter was written, the number of requests for emergency financial aid was 26 percent higher this year than the same period in 2011.

With Easter quickly approaching, the Coalition is far short of its goal of sending \$60 to

every disabled serviceman or woman on our list.

In 2010, the Coalition provided 1,000 Easter gift checks to deserving severely wounded servicemen and women and their families.

Last year the Coalition’s faithful supporters made it possible to deliver 1,014 gift checks.

“I am hopeful we will be able to help as many families this year as we have in the past,” said Walker. “As we learned from the surprise phone call received from one wounded hero, a few hot meals can make a real difference to a desperate wounded hero during the Easter Season.” ■

Providing
Emergency Aid
to Troops Severely
Wounded in
Afghanistan or Iraq

KEY PROGRAMS:

Emergency
Financial Relief



Partner
Appreciation
Program



Road to Recovery
Conference and Tribute

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Providing Emergency Aid to Troops Severely Wounded in Afghanistan or Iraq

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By the numbers: Your generosity at work



Here's a brief sampling of severely wounded troops who have been helped by your generous donations to the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes.

- Army Sgt. Brian F. from Longmont, Colorado contacted the Coalition and needed \$1,471.78 to make an overdue mortgage payment, catch up on utility bills and buy some groceries.
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$1,471.78**
- Army Staff Sgt. Christopher B. from Jasper, Texas, with a traumatic brain injury suffered while serving in Iraq, needed \$3,063.58 for first month's deposit and rent and overdue utility bills.
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$3,063.58**
- Army Cpl. Dean T. from Woodhaven, New York found himself behind on rent and car insurance payments. He needed \$1,403.21 to get caught up.
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$1,403.21**
- Army Cpl. Heath H. from Attleboro, Massachusetts is coping with a right leg injury suffered after serving in Iraq. He had \$948.08 in past due utility bills.
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$984.08**
- Air Force Staff Sgt. James S. from Summerville, South Carolina had \$2,922.09 in overdue rent payments, utility bills and phone charges.
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$2,922.09**
- Army Sgt. Scottie B. from Attalla, Alabama let us know that in addition to needing his car fixed, he also had overdue rent and utility bills. In total, he needed \$1,565.93 to meet his financial emergency.
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$1,565.93**
- Army Staff Sgt. Victor B. from El Paso, Texas needed \$1,450.00 to make overdue rent payments and avoid an eviction.
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$1,450.00**
- Army Sgt. Andres R. from St. Johns, Florida had a \$2,000.00 car repair bill he could not pay.
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$2,000.00**
- Army Staff Sgt. Adam C. from Clarksville, Tennessee contacted the Coalition and needed \$947.31 to get current with his mortgage payments.
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$947.31**
- Army Spc. Blair B. from Jonesboro, Arkansas, disabled while serving in Iraq, needed \$1,540.52 to fix his vehicle and buy groceries.
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$1,540.52**
- A traumatic brain injury suffered while serving overseas caused Army Staff Sgt. Darrell T. from Eastover, South Carolina to need \$2,946.11 for overdue mortgage, car and utility payments.
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$2,946.11**
- Army Sgt. Derrick F. from Chula Vista, California found himself needing \$2,019.00 to prevent an eviction.
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$2,019.00**
- Marine Staff Sgt. Vincent G. from Jacksonville, North Carolina suffered a severe leg injury while serving in Iraq. With bill collectors hounding him, he needed \$4,429.19 to pay off overdue bills.
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$4,429.19**
- Army Sgt. Michael B. from Katey, Texas was severely injured while serving in Afghanistan. He contacted the Coalition needing \$1,651.58 for rent, vehicle payments and utilities.
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$1,651.58**
- Army PFC Michael R. from Tarpon Springs, Florida had a \$1,380.50 back rent payment he could not make.
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$1,380.50**
- Army Spc. Tricia A. from Warren, Ohio needed \$1,586.00 to avoid an eviction.
▶ **Coalition Paid: \$1,586.00**





IN THEIR OWN WORDS



Thank you letters from our severely wounded troops



**“When you had everything before and it’s all taken away ...
the Coalition is there for you if you really need it.”**

I couldn't pay my rent; I couldn't afford to pay my bills. My electricity may have been cut off, my water may have been cut off. There could have been the possibility I could have gotten evicted. I contacted the Coalition and filled out the application for availability and they contacted me right away. They paid my rent and they paid my electricity, my water, all that stuff for 2 months. I was only hoping and expecting one month to get done but they did it for 2 months to give me time to get back on my feet – to make me comfortable. I'm very grateful for the Coalition for doing that for me. But not just for me but for my wife and my kids. As a veteran, the way I see it is I'll be OK if I got evicted, but when you have a family it's not OK. When you had everything before and it's all taken away and you don't have any means the Coalition is there for you if you really need it. God Bless them. I wish that their life would prosper forever.

— **Sgt. Felix Garcia, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.),
Palm Coast, Florida**

While I was in the hospital I started thinking about what was going to happen to me. I had some dark times when I felt I wasn't going to be able to do certain things, my wife there with me and my kids back home trying to pay for two things. We hit some financial stuff then. Financially it was a strain when you're used to two incomes coming in, or one income, and now you have to pay for two households. I want to give thanks to everyone who has donated. It's amazing that people are out there doing that and it's great to know people care like that.

— **Spc. Robert D., U.S. Army,
San Antonio, Texas**



Retired Marine Sgt. Joseph R. Bitz was injured in an IED blast. The explosion destroyed part of the bone of his right leg and sent shrapnel through his arm, face and legs. “Words can't describe what this Coalition has done for me and my family,” he says.

I've had financial problems with not being able to put food on the table. Now we seem to be doing all right. We had financial problems because of the difference between living on base and having an apartment. And paying those bills, I wasn't expecting that. At the time I was focusing on getting better. We had to scale back on a lot of things. I'm very appreciative for the men and women who donate to this program.

— **Sgt. Cory Lewis, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.),
Lady Lake, Florida**

I was in a coma for 2 months. I had 17 surgeries. I was close to being evicted but the Coalition was able to help me. For me the one thing I would say to someone with the Coalition is thank you. It's a thousand words in two words. Thank you goes a long way.

— **Sgt. Rafael Lopez, U.S. Army Reserve (Ret.),
Jacksonville, Florida**

Policy on using troops' names and photos

Readers of “The Road to Recovery Report” may wonder why some service members are identified by their full names and in other cases only first names and last initials are used. The reason is that the U.S. Department of Defense has asked the Coalition to refrain from using the full names of active military personnel, and we are complying with that request by using only their last name initial, when applicable. In the case of retired service members, in order to protect their privacy, the Coalition uses their full names and/or photos only with their permission.





SALUTE TO A SPECIAL HERO



Soldier who lost leg says Coalition donors “saved my life”



Financial aid helped pay for cross-country move for medical treatment

Matthew Pennington, who joined the Army in March of 2001, was on his third deployment overseas when the vehicle he was driving on patrol in Iraq, struck an improvised explosive device (IED).

“I swerved to allow the engine block to take as much of the blast as I could,” Matthew remembers. “After the explosion, I tried to hit the brakes, and when I looked down my feet were gone.”

Matthew ended up losing his left leg below the knee and sustained severe damage to his right leg, although doctors managed to save it. He also suffered a traumatic brain injury from hypoxia when the fire of the blast deprived his brain of oxygen for several minutes.

After leaving the hospital he returned home to Maine and began his rehabilitation, aided by his wife Marjorie.

However, it quickly became obvious that Matthew’s rehabilitation wasn’t going very well.

“Matthew was not happy,” Marjorie recounts. “He was not the man I had met.”

The couple wanted to relocate to Texas to be near a state-of-the-art VA trauma center that specializes in severe injuries like the ones Matthew had suffered.

That’s when Marjorie called the Coalition to Salute America’s Heroes.

“They were so quick to help,” she recounts. “In one week, they sent checks for a U-haul and even helped with our first month’s rent and deposit.”

After six months at the Fort Worth facility, Matthew had completely turned around.

“What the Coalition did for me I don’t think I could ever repay,” he says. “They saved my life.”

Marjorie adds, “The Coalition helped us in so many ways – not just moving us. We need the Coalition because there aren’t a lot out there like them. There are a lot of organizations that help with different

aspects, but when it comes to emergency financial assistance: The Coalition is who you need to go to.”

Soon after returning to Maine, Matthew answered a casting call from an independent filmmaker in New York. The filmmaker was looking for someone to play a wounded service member trying to live a normal life after returning from battle.

Matthew got the role and was featured in the film, “A Marine’s Guide to Fishing.” And his story was featured on the front page of the January 2, 2012 edition of *The New York Times*. Matthew hopes the film and his story will inspire other wounded troops facing physical and emotional challenges during recovery.

“I’d like to thank the Coalition,” he says. “I feel that if they wouldn’t have helped me when they did, I wouldn’t be where I am today – able to help others and help raise money for charity.”

“Donations to the Coalition help a lot, and not just for immediate needs. It sets us up to be better for the future and do better for our community.”

Marjorie agrees. “Coalition donors changed my life, they changed my husband’s life and they saved our marriage,” she says. “I couldn’t be more grateful. When we called you up, you were there.”



According to Matthew Pennington, Coalition donors “saved my life” when they helped him move from Maine to Texas to get rehabilitation.

