

**Courage Rushed In**  
by Corporal Josh Wicker, United States Marine Corps

*Editor's Note: The following letter was sent by Cpl Josh Wicker, USMC, to his wife, Allison, to reassure her about his "getting hurt a little." The letter was passed on to LtCol George Whitbeck, USMC, an OCF member, and he thought members would be interested. He asked Josh for permission to publish it in COMMAND.*

"Wife of mine, I am great and God is good!

I know we talked earlier, but things were choppy and I was shaky so I thought I would write and try to clear up the picture a little. I figure you can send it out to family so you don't have to explain it over and over...

We had two contacts today about twenty-five minutes apart. First one: we were rolling down a terrible road behind a dilapidated town, poor and falling apart. I started hearing gun shots and thought someone had either just taken a potshot at us or someone in the patrol was shooting a car that had passed our kill line (that happens a lot).

But a few seconds later shots rang out again, coming from the town. At best this was a haphazard attack. Maybe a few people jumping on the opportunity to get lit up by some Marines. I don't know. I just know I saw muzzle flashes coming from three buildings and opened up on them. Immediately the patrol stopped and everyone got in on the action.

We handled the situation pretty well and followed all the expected response exercises (becoming the aggressors instead of the ambushed). Two bad guys down -zero good guys! The whole episode was about twenty-five minutes. We rolled on.

We dropped off about half of our men ('the BEAST,' my team, was playing taxi today) and proceeded home. We got about two minutes down a highway that is in our AO (Area of Operations), got hit by an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) and took rocket fire.

I am always the gunner in the fourth vehicle and for the third time since we have been here the fourth vehicle was picked as the primary target of the insurgents' IED.

God was protecting us though, and the bad guys didn't know it. Just as the IED went off we were passing a Mac truck and that truck took the brunt of the explosion.

I felt the blast just as I heard it so I knew it was close. The shrapnel came through the armored windshield (causing glass and bits of shrapnel to enter the vehicle. The driver was struck in the face (he got hit the hardest) by shrapnel on his right cheek. His jaw was broken from the force.

My right calf (I stand facing the rear of the vehicle on the gun) took some of the leftover force and little pieces of glass from the windshield.

At the time it felt worse than it was. I also got a piece of shrapnel to the shoulder. It went through my flack jacket (like a bullet-proof vest) and stopped at my shoulder. I have a hole in my blouse and skivvy shirt the size of a quarter, but the wound has no shrapnel in it and looks more like I fell and skinned my knee on some asphalt! (I told you God was protecting us). Our Staff Sergeant didn't get hurt at all.

After the explosion my right side was in so much pain I couldn't man the gun. I looked down and saw that our driver was hurt much worse and I prayed that God would help me stay in the fight physically and mentally because we were immobile and a perfect target for small arms fire.

It seemed like I heard a voice saying, 'Step up to the plate Josh, you have to.' And the pain went away. I could stand on my leg with no pain and I forgot about my shoulder wound.

Not surprisingly, the time element is a little sketchy in my mind, but about two minutes later a rocket was fired at our stationary lead vehicle landing about 100 meters short. I saw the dust clouds from the firing point and engaged it with the M-19 (machine gun that fires grenades).

When the dust settled I saw nothing. I don't know if he drove away in his truck or if I destroyed the truck. I hope I blew it away. Some time later I shot at a FO (forward observer) and missed low and right...he disappeared.

Doc came to our vehicle and treated our driver and the passenger in the Mac truck. Mostly bandages. No one knew I was hurt until we got back to the base.

It was crazy, the emotions going through my body as we rode back. I wanted to kill everyone I saw, out of fear. And then I was also thinking I should wave at everyone like normal so they would think everything was fine and we were invincible!

I started singing to God as we rode and I looked into the peoples' eyes (so many filled with hate) knowing that they couldn't touch me, not a hair on my body, unless the God of the Angel Armies allowed them to. And to tell you the truth, anything an Almighty God wants is going to be just fine with me, because He is good, He loves me, and I trust Him. It is good to be on His side.

All that to say I am fine, just some bandages on the calf and one on the shoulder. Oh, I almost forgot. On the way back Staff Sergeant was driving and he yelled up to me to say a prayer for us. I did. I started yelling out a prayer and the power of God filled our truck.

All fear vanished and courage rushed in. Gotta go... out of time."

Love you, Josh