



Assyrian Soldier Struggles With Injury

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WASHINGTON -- Abraham Odisho has hobbled several steps closer to home.

But the grievously wounded Iraq War veteran still is several hundred miles away from the Modesto neighborhood where he grew up. He still hasn't received his new prosthetic leg, for which he was recently fitted. Over the Memorial Day weekend, he still was confronting the indignities that war imposed upon him.

"He's sad," said Odisho's mother, Catherine. "You can see it in his face."

A 20-year-old Army infantryman, Abraham Odisho recently relocated to the Naval Medical Center San Diego. He thought the San Diego facility might help him reconnect with his West Coast friends and family members. Geographically, it's fine. Some relatives have, in fact, stopped by to say hello.

Physically, though some phantom pains have subsided, the Johansen High School graduate is coping with lingering aftershocks in his left leg. It now ends eight inches below the knee. An anti-tank grenade tore the rest off on March 27 while Odisho was driving what is called, optimistically, a mine resistant ambush protected vehicle.

Emotionally, Odisho's transcontinental relocation proved surprisingly rough. During his seven weeks or so at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, Odisho felt like he was in the right place despite being in intense pain. He had made new friends there, Army guys who knew the score. He had interesting visitors, including celebrities and members of the D.C. area's Assyrian-American community.

San Diego proved a shock.

"It doesn't compare to Walter Reed," Odisho said. "I had a whole lot of care there. Here, they just give you the meds."

A San Diego nurse practitioner, at first, would ask questions for which Odisho could not furnish answers. He had been fogged up on morphine for several weeks at Walter Reed, Odisho would explain; how could he know exactly what was going on? The nurse practitioner seemed to want him to move.

"I told him not to bother me anymore," Odisho said.

A spokesperson for the Naval Medical Center could not be reached to comment. Hospital documents describe the facility as "high tech and ultra modern" with a mission "to provide the finest medical care in a family-centered care environment to the operational forces, their families, and to those who served their country in the past."

Catherine Odisho was with her son the entire time he was at Walter Reed. She lived in a nearby hotel and spent every minute she could with him. Now, she is living at Fisher House, a facility for family members of patients at the Navy hospital. Her two daughters, Merail, a Modesto Junior College student, and Edail, a Daniel Savage Middle School student, remain in Modesto.

She is a widow -- her late husband, Zaki, died five years ago at age 45 -- and she defends her son fiercely. At one point, she was threatening to call Army Secretary Pete Geren on her son's behalf if conditions in San Diego didn't improve.

"The nurse came and apologized," Catherine Odisho said. "I told him, when you treat Abraham like this, you make him sick."

Now, the nurse and the infantryman seem to be keeping their distance from one another. Odisho does two hours of physical therapy daily, with therapists he respects. Next week, this will increase to three hours a day.

On Thursday, the hospital staff fitted him for the temporary prosthetic leg he will receive today. He expects within two weeks to move into an apartment complex on the Navy base, where he will continue his rehabilitation. Odisho also hopes to be back in Modesto for a visit in late June, just in time for his 21st birthday.

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