

A CLOSE CALL

Lawrence Bone, MD '73, and son Christian experience the wounds of war

BY LOIS BAKER

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— LAWRENCE BONE, MD '73

People get involved in wars through a variety of avenues: as soldiers, as military contractors, or by being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Lawrence Bone, MD '73, got involved to repay a debt.

The debt came due at 4 p.m. on July 20, 2006, when he received a call at home from Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, the primary U.S. military hospital in Germany.

HIS SON CHRISTIAN, an Army sergeant assigned to Iraq, was patrolling an insurgent-controlled area south of Baghdad, when an improvised explosive device (IED) blew out the front of his Humvee. (Earlier in the war, soldiers had been kidnapped and killed on this road, which Christian drove down every day.)

Bone, who is chair of orthopaedic surgery at UB and a trauma surgeon at Erie County Medical Center's Level 1 trauma center, knew all the important questions to ask: Were bones crushed? Blood vessels decimated? Nerves destroyed?

Sergeant Bone was inordinately lucky. He sustained only flesh wounds to his right shoulder and forearm. "One millimeter here or there and it would have been very bad," says Bone.

His son's close call hit Bone hard. He had considered volunteering to go to Iraq for some time through a program sponsored by his specialty society, the Orthopaedic Trauma Association. "I would have done it even if Christian hadn't been injured," he says, "but then I had to."

Bone applied immediately to be a volunteer surgeon and then waited, and waited.

He was ready to bypass volunteering and enlist in the National Guard that fall when his volunteer commission finally was approved. That was only the first hurdle, however. He then was immersed in the military bureaucracy.

Volunteer physicians are required to be certified by the Red Cross, so despite his medical credentials, Bone had to complete basic cardiac-resuscitation training, and there were mounds of forms to be completed, including those that entailed his applying for privileges at the military hospital. In all, it took four months to get through the red tape.

"The U.S. military is a whole different world," Bone says dryly.

By April 2007 he was on his way to Iraq. He flew to Frankfurt on the 28th and then caught a shuttle to Landstuhl. After being issued his Red Cross badge and his military identification, he was ready to go to work.

Bone's contributions were part educational and part surgical. He presented a one-hour continuing medical education lecture on orthopaedic trauma and fracture care for the military physicians and orthopedic surgeons. As a civilian, he was not permitted to operate independently, but he could assist.

"They were happy to have a specialist around to help out," says Bone. "It was like assisting our residents at ECMC."

Stepping into the operating room at the Landstuhl military hospital took his breath away. "My son lay on the table a year earlier. It was an emotional moment."

The injuries were unlike anything a trauma surgeon faces in civilian life. "We see very few mangled extremities," says Bone. "Even the street shootings here involve low-velocity guns. Over there, it's

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"Young soldiers come in missing extremities. But it's still anatomy," he adds. "It's still surgery."

Bone was struck by the devotion of the doctors, nurses and physician assistants who are pulled out of private practice and sent to care for injured soldiers. "They were extremely dedicated and all were very good at what they did," he says. "Our boys [he treated no female soldiers] are getting good care."

Care they deserve in abundance, Bone's experience as a volunteer surgeon underscored. "Seeing these injuries, it was sobering that we have these young people protecting us," he reflects. "I've never been in the military. I just don't know what being a soldier is like. They come from all stations in life and they really do bond. It's amazing."

Christian Bone completed his enlistment in March 2007. He now is in his second year of nursing school at D'Youville College in Buffalo.

"He said he never would have pursued nursing if he hadn't been injured," says Bone. "He saw how important the nurses and doctors were in getting him back to where he is today."

Bone, meanwhile, volunteered to go back to Landstuhl, but the grateful Orthopaedic Trauma Association that made it possible said, "Thanks, but you've done your part." Other physicians now were waiting their turn to serve. **BP**