

Community shows love for wounded Marine by Marcus E. Howard

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The north Cobb County community gave Marine Cpl. Todd Love of Acworth a hero's welcome as he returned home on Saturday, after losing both legs and an arm in the explosion of an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan several months ago.

After traveling from Washington's Walter Reed Army Medical Center in a private plane to Cobb County Airport-McCollum Field, the 20-year-old Kell High School graduate was greeted by a motorcade of public safety vehicles and several military support groups, including the Patriot Guard Riders and American Legion Post 111.

The community came out in force to show support.

People holding all sizes of American flags lined the motorcade route to Dallas Landing Park in Acworth, which traveled through downtown Kennesaw and on Main Street in Acworth. As it passed them by, little league baseball players in uniform covered their hearts with their caps, mothers pushing baby strollers in Swift-Cantrell Park waved, a Boy Scout troop stood solemnly and motorists honk their horns.

Some folks held handmade signs that read: "We Love You Todd Love," "Welcome Home, You're Our Hero" and "Land of the Free, Home of the Brave Because of You."

Clearly overwhelmed by the outpouring of support, Love was at a lost for words at times when he spoke to over a hundred family, friends and supporters at Dallas Landing Park. It was his first time back home in nearly a year.

"I want to get to my room in my home and honestly just sit there for a second. Just soak it in," he said after being asked what he was looking forward to.

Love assured the crowd that he was no different than any of them.

"When I got injured, God was definitely with me the whole time and he is where I get all of my strength from," he said.

The last time Love was home was when he was on leave, preparing to deploy to Afghanistan in May 2010. A third generation Marine, he signed up for service after high school and was a member of the First Recon Battalion B Company stationed in Camp Pendleton, Calif. He suffered his injuries as the point man on foot patrol on the morning of Oct. 25. After numerous surgeries, he was discharged from the Marines in November.

Since then he has called Walter Reed hospital his temporary home, where he will continue rehabilitation after his 30-day stay in Acworth that will include a birthday celebration on April 25.

"I guess I was a boy when I left," Love said. "I feel like a man now. I'm more experienced, I guess. I don't feel special."

Among those in attendance on Saturday were his parents Gary Love and Tammy Cox, brother Brandon Love, stepfather Jimmy Cox, and grandparents.

"My son coming home with no legs to me is a blessing," Gary Love said. "I'm glad he came home and I get to have my son for the rest of his life."

The scene on the beach at Dallas Landing Park was as American as it gets.

The Kell band played patriotic tunes, as boats on Lake Allatoona flew American flags and one large Marine flag in the background. The North Cobb High School Navy JROTC performed with precision as honor guard. Local soldiers in uniform stood watch. Children waved miniature flags as their parents and motorcycle groups filled with veterans cheered those who spoke. Waves could be heard splashing in between pauses as spokesperson after spokesperson from various military support organizations thanked Love for his service and presented him with mementos during the program.

Aaron Reeves, senior naval instructor of North Cobb's Navy JROTC, said to Todd Love: "You and young men like you are what this great country of ours is all about."

The Wounded Warrior Project, Young Marines, Marine Corps League, Sons of the American Revolution and the Smyrna-based 4th Marine Reconnaissance Battalion, Bravo Company, were also represented.

Once he has fully recovered, Todd Love said he might study mechanical engineering to make prosthetic limbs like those he uses or become a rehabilitation specialist.

"God has brought you home here for a reason - you probably don't know what it is yet - but for a very distinct reason," Acworth Mayor Tommy Allegood told Todd Love. "We are so, so proud of you and we're glad you're home."