

Subj: 109th Birthday of the Hospital Corps

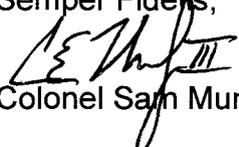
On 17 June, 1898, the Navy Hospital Corps was established by an Act of Congress. That same year during the Spanish-American War, the first Navy Corpsmen began serving alongside Marines of the Marine Expeditionary Battalion who landed at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Since then, Corpsmen have served with Marines in every clime and place. Their long and colorful history is replete with examples of sincere dedication, selfless service and noble sacrifice. On behalf of all Marines in the 13th MEU, I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to all Corpsmen who continue to live by the words of their oath.

Throughout my career I've had the privilege of serving with many outstanding Corpsmen. However, one epitomizes what it means to be a combat "Doc." While attacking north along Highway 1 in Iraq on March 25, 2003, the lead elements of my battalion were ambushed by a large number of Iraqi soldiers. Navy Hospital Corpsman 3d Class Michael Johnson occupied one of the lead HMMWVs. Tragically, while maneuvering against the enemy this vehicle was struck by an RPG round that severely wounded the gunner and killed PO3 Johnson. Later, I moved to the head of the column and found the remaining Marines inside the vehicle somewhat shaken and trying to stem the flow of tears. You see, this was the first individual killed in our Battalion – not a Marine, but one of our beloved Corpsmen, a good friend and our medical champion. Since that day, I often reflect on Doc Johnson and the sad irony that, in a conflict involving tens of thousands of Marines, it was one of our Navy brothers who first paid the ultimate price in combat. He and all other Corpsmen will forever have my deepest respect and admiration.

Today, Navy Corpsmen in the 13th MEU are continuing their honorable and faithful service alongside us while engaged in combat operations in Iraq. I encourage every Marine in the MEU to pause and celebrate the 109th birthday of our Navy Hospital Corps – and ask that you offer a simple "thank you" to the Corpsman on your left or right. Whether in the air, on land or at sea, Marines know their Corpsmen will be with them every inch of the way, facing the same dangers and taking care of wounded comrades.

Happy Birthday, Doc!

Semper Fidelis,



Colonel Sam Mundy