

My COVID-19 STORY

By Irvin Lee

During mid-June 2020 at a U.S. military installation in Saudi Arabia, I began to feel very tired and had no appetite. After a few days I developed a low-grade fever. I tried to rest and break the fever with Tylenol. I had none of the symptoms I had heard about for COVID-19 so I thought I had the flu. My fever broke and I felt a little better, but the first day of the week saw my fever return higher than before so I decided to go to the clinic. While taking my vital signs the medical techs debated whether the pulse oxygen meter had been charged over night because they believed the readings could not be correct. After waiting a little over an hour, my test results confirmed me as COVID-19 positive. I was sent home to begin isolation and told not to leave my quarters. A couple of hours later a Doctor and med tech showed up at my door with a fully charged pulse oxygen meter to take my vital signs again. My pulse oxygen readings were low and they wondered how I could still be functioning with those oxygen levels. The Dr. told me to pack a bag because they were sending me to Germany where I could get better care if my condition worsened. By 9:00 p.m. I was walking up the ramp of a USAF cargo jet and settled into an isolation unit in the cargo bay called an Ebola tent. By 4:00 a.m. we were on the ground in Germany and I was taken to the Emergency room at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center (LRMC). After getting a chest x-ray and having my vitals looked good and I would probably be discharged in a few days. Soon a team of folks showed up in my room in “moon suits” and started making preparations for some type of procedure. The last thing I remember was being asked to remove my wedding ring.

When I woke up, I could feel something in my mouth and there was a nurse on either side of my bed. I motioned for something to write with and asked, “What day is it?” and they told me it was June 22nd. I lost a week of consciousness while sedated on the ventilator. A couple of days later the people in “moon suits” returned again. This time they put a large pad on my chest and asked me to cough. With that they removed me from the ventilator and I began my slow journey to recovery.

I looked around my room and saw notes of encouragement from my family taped to a white board on the wall that were sent to me and printed by the staff. I started to remember things that

happened while I was on the ventilator. One of my most vivid recollections is of waking up to a darkened room with the curtains drawn over the window. I could still see light around the edges. Each time I had this dream I was startled awake and felt as lonely and afraid as I ever had in my life. I remembered how many times in scripture Jesus told us He would never leave us or forsake us and I was immediately comforted. I thought of the words of Psalm 23 which says “even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”

Each day I asked the staff when they came around what was the goal for today. After they discussed my medical challenges, I told them what I hoped to achieve. My first accomplishment was to safely get a cool drink of water without choking, then standing up on my own, and next came my first wobbly steps. By the grace of God, I progressed quickly and impressed the Doctors with my daily improvement. I was eventually released to what is called the Wounded Warrior’s Facility where I waited to get two consecutive negative COVID-19 tests. Even though I was in a building of COVID-19 patients, I felt awkward to be counted among the young heroes who were there recovering from combat injuries in Afghanistan and Iraq. After a few days I got my second negative test and was discharged from the hospital to await medical clearance to fly on a commercial flight back to the US. During this time, I was reminded of the words of Paul to the Romans in Chapter 8 verse 18, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” I am tremendously blessed to have survived this COVID-19 infection and to be able to return home to tell about God’s grace during this pandemic.