**My Greatest Success By Robert Tackett**

 The Blast was deafening! Dirt and debris showered the quiet little town. It was one o’clock in

the morning. We were all out enjoying a quiet evening on the town and suddenly found

ourselves amidst a chaotic battlefield. Kaboom! Another bomb exploded, this one a few blocks

away, billowing thick dust into the air. People were screaming, men, women and children, some

running, some crawling, some not moving at all. Smoke and dust were hanging in the air, the

smell of gunpowder and blood plugged our noses. Car horns, sirens, people wailing-all at the

same time, incessant! We quickly accounted for each of our battle buddies, conducted a quick

self-assessment to check for injuries and then we looked at each other and ourselves, quickly

taking stock of our situation. We all knew the dangers of being here in the dark of night, but

here we were nonetheless. Our base was three long miles away. Our safety protocols stated that

the outpost would be on lockdown and no immediate rescues would be undertaken. We knew

without speaking that we were on our own, in potentially hostile territory, unseen enemies and a

long way to go without weapons. Another blast further away, still close enough and big enough

to shake the whole goddamn city!

“We need to get back to base, NOW!” Stated LT Nelson, my PA, and Team Leader.

“I will take point.” I stated. “Follow me and keep tight.” As the Medical Platoon Sergeant and

the “Old Guy” of the team I led the way back to South Camp at a 6 Minute Mile pace. A pace I

knew my troops could keep up with. Never would I have thought that this moment would impact

me and my outlook on life forever.

 Reflecting on my life, I would have to say that My Greatest Success has been leading Warrior

Medics into combat. Being well-trained and well-equipped for emergencies is one thing. It is

quite another to take this beginning and transition it onto an unforgiveable battlefield, where even

one mistake has the potential to cost lives, the lives of your Battle Buddy or even your own.

 We maintained 2 meter intervals as we zig zagged through the war torn city, dodging burnt

out and destroyed vehicles. Skirting away from the civilians who were screaming, wounded,

pleading for help; we stayed focused on getting back to base camp. We did not know who the

bad guys were, so we ran. Without supplies, without weapons without communication systems,

we ran. Through the night, through the dust, through the chaos until we finally cleared the city

lights, we ran. Our base was still two miles away in the dark. My troops, following closely,

running quick, running quiet, we knew that we would be silhouetted against the bright lights of

the remote outpost when we made the last 2 mile dash. As we approached the first Security gate,

I yelled in my loudest, deepest voice I could muster,

“Americans coming in! Seven Americans coming in!” As I ran through the gate I yelled,

“One”! I noticed SGT Witcher on the M60 behind the K Rail watching us. He immediately

recognized our Medical Platoon Team and looked past us for anyone who might be following.

SPC Hernandez was all geared up and waving us through.

SPC Young, right behind me, “Two”!

SGT Collins, “Three!”

Doc Nelson, “Four”!

SPC Navarette, “Five”!

SPC Ngyuen, “Six”!

SPC Johnson, “Seven! All clear”!

 People measure success with different measuring sticks. How much money is in my bank

account? How big is my house? How many cars do I have? How many trophies have I won?

Me? I measure Success by how many lives I have saved in Combat. This particular night has

forever changed my outlook on life. I consider my actions and the actions of my Battle Buddy,

Doc Nelson, My Greatest Success. Before this evening, I was just your everyday happy-go-

lucky, Combat Medic, just trying to get by doing the minimal amount of work for the most

amount of fun.

 We did not stop running until we made it to the Inner Security Gate. We made it. South

Camp, Multi-Force Operations outside the small tourist town of Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt. It was

a hot night in July, 2005. Doc Nelson looked at us, we were covered in dust, debris, small

scratches and lots of sweat. “Get geared up guys, lots of people are going to be needing our

help”. Doc Nelson said solemnly. After the lower enlisted left, I spoke to Doc alone.

“Doc, those civilians need us right now. You know it will take hours to cut through the red tape

and let us go outside The Wire. It’s been fifteen minutes. I haven’t heard any more bombs”. I

looked him in the eyes. He knew, without speaking, I intended to “cross the wire” one more

time, with or without permission. People were dying as we spoke.

“Meet back here in 10 minutes. Trauma gear only”. He nodded to me in the darkness, “I’m

going with you. I will inform the “Old man”. He turned and jogged away into the night. I

disappeared into my hooch to get my gear.

 I look back and I am grateful for having had the opportunity to serve my country. I have gone

on to teach my fellow Medics to prepare for Combat. Anyone can teach from the book Basic

First-aid, Prehospital Trauma Life Support, Tactical Care under Combat. My Greatest Success

has taught me in a very profound way, that Attitude can change the outcome. I preach to those

who bitch, whine and complain, “If people aren’t shooting at you and actively trying to kill you,

It’s too easy”! Most people will scoff or feign understanding. But my family, close friends,

Brothers and Sisters understand. So, I ask you in all sincerity and humility, how has Your

Greatest Success improved your life?

 After going back into that town and triaging wounded, bandaging and splinting all kinds of

traumatic injuries, deep cuts, penetrating chest injuries, amputations, second and third degree

burns, avulsions, major arterial bleeds I have realized how easy my life is now. It was a lot to

fathom, that night in Egypt, almost overwhelming… almost. We found energy and strength in

providing comfort to the dead and dying and acting as a rock for civilians in shock to cling to,

demonstrating courage and competence in the face of unknown danger, helping pull dead people

from buildings and cars, holding the dying in my arms as they passed into the next world.

Looking at the loved ones who looked to me, expecting some miracle, broke my heart. I knew I

could not help everyone. I helped everyone that I could as best as I could. I knew that this is

what I was meant to do. Help heal the wounded and provide comfort to the dying, my whole life

I had been preparing for that moment. I did not fail my fellow man. After most of the city had

been cleared of wounded, Doc Nelson and I took stock of our situation. We were out amongst

the public. In a predominantly muslim city where The Taliban still held sway. We worked

closely with the local populace, the ill-equipped EMTs were overwhelmed and out of their

league, but stayed true to their calling. The local police tried to regain some semblance of order

in the chaos. We had been at it over three hours, clearing the wounded from the streets. We

were out of supplies, tired as hell and we knew that the moment was far from over. We looked at

each other, took a deep breath and headed to the hospital. We knew we still had lots of work

ahead of us. More wounded would be heading that way. It was going to be a terrible day.

 My outlook on life has been forever changed after this long dark day. I would look back on

this life event and fall to my knee, weeping deeply. I can never forget this night, the horrors and

the humanity I witnessed. I tear up whenever I try to speak of the details of that long ago night.

Writing about it gives me a positive outlet. I am tearing up as I write these words. My Greatest

Success was being prepared and taking the appropriate action when lives were hanging in the

balance.

 How My Greatest Success has improved my life is not so cut and dry. Improving myself to

be a better person, a better father and a better teacher has made my life so much more fulfilling. I

understand all too well that life is not fair. Seeing people die who should have lived and helping

people live who would have died makes one understand that each of us just needs to give it our

best shot and not to quit, ever. I enjoy all aspects of life to the fullest. Many of my family, peers

and good friends have all said at one time or another, they appreciate my extremely positive

outlook on life. Some even quote me when things get tough: “If no one’s dying, it’s too easy”!

 I like to think that my attitude inspires others to also be better. To look on the bright side of

things. Stay as positive as you can. When you have hurdles in life, take a deep breath and start

knocking those obstacles out, one at a time. And even if I do not change many lives now after

my 23 years of service and 5 tours has ended, I stand tall and proud for knowing that My

Greatest Success has allowed me an opportunity to save countless lives, on and off the

battlefield.