

'God was watching out for him' mom says of the Delta grad

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MUNCIE -- A soldier from Muncie is recuperating from serious injuries suffered while on patrol in Afghanistan.

Murphy Hueston, a Marine corporal and 2008 Delta High School graduate, is in Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., following the Sept. 11 accident in which a buried IED exploded under his left foot.

"His spirits are pretty good," said Hueston's mother, Carol Williams. "Yesterday he was a little down. I think his brain caught up with the whole journey of what's going on."

Hueston, a swim team member and wrestler at Delta, joined the Marines right after his May 2008 graduation. He's been stationed in Hawaii, was sent to Afghanistan in April and was due to return to the United States in November.

But on Sept. 11, Hueston was leading a patrol, looking for Taliban soldiers possibly burying IEDs, an improvised explosive device commonly used by Taliban to inflict casualties on U.S. troops.

While the Marines were waiting, Hueston crouched, unknowingly, over a buried IED.

He stretched out his left leg and inadvertently brushed the explosive device.

"The IED did not fire like it was supposed to," Williams said. "His left heel and left lower leg took the brunt of the injury. He's a very lucky man."

Many of the bones in Hueston's lower left leg were broken, his mother said, and he lost a lot of blood.

Hard decision to make

After brief hospitalizations in Afghanistan and Germany, Hueston was brought back to the U.S. on Sept. 16 and taken to Walter Reed. Family members and friends, who had been alerted to his injury a few hours after it happened, went to Walter Reed to be with him.

Hueston has had 11 surgeries since the injury and has received 16 units of blood, Williams said.

On Sept. 23, doctors told Hueston that his left leg wasn't healing properly and he had a decision to make.

Hueston made that decision and his left foot was amputated on Monday.

During every-other-day surgeries since, Williams said, doctors have been adjusting bones and tissue, particularly as swelling goes down. But his recovery has been impressive.

"After his lower leg was amputated on Monday, he was up and walking with a walker the next day," she said.

On Thursday, Hueston received his Purple Heart and became an uncle for the first time: His sister, Diana Hueston, had a baby boy at Community Hospital North in Indianapolis.

"Yesterday he got his Purple Heart and the family got a baby, so that's a good thing," Williams said.

'Now I can relate'

Hueston has weeks of recovery and rehab ahead of him before he gets to come home. Williams said he hopes to be in Hawaii to time to meet the other members of his squad when they get back in November. The family also hopes he and his girlfriend, Shelby Morgan, will be back in Muncie before the holidays.

Williams said her son will be fitted with a prosthetic lower leg, a fact that seems ironic considering conversations he had with family members in the past.

"His goal for when he got out of the Marines was to become a physical therapist," she said. "He said all along, 'I have to go to combat so I can relate.' When he made the decision to amputate his foot, he said, 'Now I can relate. When guys complain and say they can't go through with physical therapy, I can pull up my pants leg and say, 'Now let's get this done.' "

Hueston also plans to return to activities he enjoyed in Hawaii, including spear fishing and cliff diving.

As for Williams, she said she's received tremendous support from the Marines, the Wounded Warrior Project and Rep. Mike Pence, who visited Hueston in his hospital room on Friday.

"He's a remarkable guy," Pence said Friday of Hueston.

Williams' colleagues at Community Physicians of Indiana donated vacation hours to ensure she would have as much time as she needs to spend time with her son.

And Williams said she's awaiting details of a Dec. 4 fundraiser in Muncie for the Wounded Warrior Project. The program might include recognition of Hueston.

"It's been a rollercoaster ride," Williams said. "When you hear your son is going to lose his foot, it's hard news, but compared to his friends who have lost both legs and worse, we're grateful. God was watching out for him."