Keeping the Pledge

For the past few weeks, we have had a group of 28 U.S. Marines staying at the Hilton Garden Inn Denver Airport, operated by Outrigger Lodging Services (OLS). They are members of Marine Air Control Squadron 23 and are receiving specialized radar training at nearby Buckley Air Force Base. They are a mixture of newbies and veterans, some with three or four Iraq tours under their belts. Squadron Leader Lt. Col. Cary Schorsch has served in Operation Desert Storm, Somalia, and Iraq. They are all great young ladies and gentlemen.

General Manager Gian Gandolfo and OLS CEO John Fitts decided the hotel should do something special to show these guests how much we appreciate everything they do for our country.

They started by giving each Marine a $20 gift certificate. Then every week, the hotel has hosted everyone to dinner. First it was half-pound hamburgers, french fries, homemade pasta salad, and fresh fruit salad, washed down by ice-cold sodas and beer.

This week, it was a teriyaki dinner; the HGI staff is now working hard on the menu for next week, when the unit’s commander will be present. Coors Brewery will provide the beverages.

Gian Gandolfo says the Marines really appreciate the recognition and hospitality they have received. “At the end of the evening,” he told me, “Lt. Col Schorsch and his troops all stood and raised their bottles to give a huge ‘HUUUU YAAAAA’, as only the Marines can do.”

Unfortunately, our troops are not always honored and remembered. I vividly recall the Vietnam War era, when service personnel returning from overseas were often abused, mistreated, and sometimes even spat upon by civilians at home. Thankfully, we have not reached that point in the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, but as Nancy Gibbs pointed out in a recent article in *Time*, there have been a number of snafus, and we could be doing a lot more to honor, treat, and care for our returning troops, particularly those who have been wounded or injured.

Gibbs wrote that a new Rand Corp. study concludes that one in five of America’s veterans suffers from major depression or post-traumatic stress. More than 300,000 are dealing with traumatic brain injury. Four hundred thousand are waiting for their cases to be processed. At Ft. Bragg, soldiers returning from 15 months in Afghanistan were sent to filthy barracks, with paint peeling in sheets off the wall.

In 1962, President Kennedy, addressing the men and women of the Army’s 1st Armored Division, quoted an aging etching found on the wall of a sentry box at Gibraltar. It says,

> God and the soldier, all men adore  
> In time of danger and not before  
> When the danger is passed and all things righted,  
> God is forgotten, and the soldier slighted.

Kennedy then pledged, “This country does not forget God or the soldier. Upon both we now depend.”

Congratulations to our ’ohana at the Hilton Garden Inn Denver Airport for keeping that pledge – and honoring those who serve.