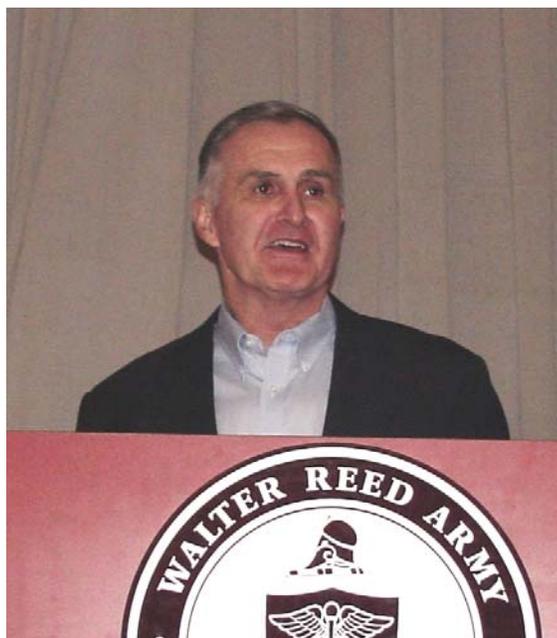


Shelton Returns to Walter Reed, Walking

by Bernard S. Little
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Retired Gen. Hugh Shelton, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, walked steadily down the aisle of Walter Reed's Joel Auditorium Wednesday. He then gave a speech offering sound advice on leadership, and answered a number of questions from the attentive and appreciative audience of mostly Walter Reed physical and occupational therapists, dietitians, physician assistants, doctors and nurses. The former paratrooper, who strikes an imposing figure at 6-foot-5, stood unassisted all the while.

Shelton standing, much less walking again, was in serious question seven months ago after a fall he severely injured his neck while he was doing yard work at his Northern Virginia home. He was brought to Walter Reed, where he underwent surgery and intensive physical and occupational therapy. He left Walter Reed in June, walking unassisted from the hospital. He still returns for therapy sessions.

"I want to thank you personally for the great work that you do," Shelton said Wednesday to those gathered for a meeting of the Army Medical Specialist Corps Guild. "I'm indebted to you. [You've] allowed me to return to a somewhat normal life. I should say, 'return to a very hectic life' because I'm trying to do too much. They got

me so I can walk again, but they still don't have me to where I can run, which is a favorite of mine. And I can't parachute yet, but we're still working. We still got the bar set pretty high.

"When I'm with you all, I'm reminded of a great team and what it takes to be a great team," Shelton said of the Walter Reed staff. "This is a world-class and a championship team, and I want to thank all of you for the great work you do day-in and day-out on behalf of thousands of active duty and retired service members."

In addition to discussing his recovery from his accident, Shelton talked about his military career and leadership. He said despite being JCS chairman and receiving honors from more than 15 different countries, the highlight of his military career was when he was a second lieutenant and a platoon leader. He said he still can remember most of the names of the 40 people who made up that platoon and how they became a team, a combat-ready outfit that would deploy to Vietnam. "I learned a lot in that process from some great soldiers -- E-6s and E-7s. It was a chance to really make a difference with people."

A low point in his military career, Shelton recalled, was a colonel he worked for "who didn't know how to deal with people. He liked to work them long and hard, and then tell them whatever they did was wrong. And he would belittle people in front of their peers. I learned a lot from him. I learned what not to do when you're a leader, how to take care of them and give them guidance up front."

Another difficult period in his career was during the late 1970s, Shelton said. It was then, following Vietnam, as a battalion commander, that most of his troops were in the military to stay out of jail. "But then we began to weed out the riffraff. By 1985, when I was commander of the 82nd Airborne Division, it was a difference between night and day. We had a superbly trained, motivated, want-to-be-here kind of Army."

If there was one thing Shelton said he wished he had changed during his more than 38 years in uniform, it would have been to have spent more of it with his sons and created a better balance between family and his professional life. He said his accident reinforced these feelings, teaching him what's most important in life -- "faith, family and friends."

Shelton said in order for people to "maximize their military experience," they must strive to "be all they can be, both personally and professionally. Seek schools to prepare for the next level up, and seek responsibility."

He said that he's optimistic about the future of the armed forces. "Sure there are some challenges out there, but this is the most respected organization in the United States today." He added that although good people may leave the military, there will be always someone just as capable and ready to "step up to the plate. It's there at every level.

"What's really important in terms of day-to-day activities is [for leaders] to do what's right and be willing to step up and do right by the people who work for them and our nation."