

Everyday Heroes

They Came Running

The heroes of the Boston Marathon bombings answered the call to help at the finish line and beyond

BY BETH DREHER & CAITLIN O'CONNELL

A Team of Soldiers Saves Lives

At 2:45 p.m. on Monday, April 15, Army Sgt. Bernard Madore, 1st Lt. Steve Fiola, Staff Sgt. Mark Welch, and 12 other soldiers from the Massachusetts National Guard gathered near a medical tent to watch runners finish the race.

A few hours earlier, they had completed Tough Ruck 2013, tackling the 26.2-mile marathon course dressed in combat uniforms and carrying 40-pound military backpacks filled with water, food, and other essentials, to honor comrades killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. When the bombs exploded, the men ran toward the site of the first blast. "A switch turns on [inside your head], and you just go," said Fiola.

They pulled back a chain-link fence to allow doctors and nurses access to the bloody scene and helped remove burning debris from victims. "That's a sight I'll never, ever forget," said Welch.

A Father Salutes His Son

One of the fallen soldiers being honored by the Massachusetts Tough Ruck team was Marine Lance Cpl. Alexander Scott Arredondo, who died in Iraq in 2004.

Arredondo's father, Carlos Arredondo, 52, isn't a runner, but he makes regular appearances at the Boston Marathon. Last year, he carried his son's boots across the finish line. This year, he was handing out American flags when the first bomb exploded. "I thought of what my son went through in Iraq," he said.

He ran to a man whose legs had been injured by the blast. Arredondo extinguished flames on the man's shirt, pinched closed a severed artery in one of his legs to slow the bleeding, and helped rush him to an ambulance in a wheelchair.

Arredondo and the man, later identified as Jeff Bauman, 27, reunited recently. "You saved my life," Bauman told Arredondo. "I was meant to be there," Arredondo said.



"God gave me the strength to help," said Carlos Arredondo.

A Victim Pays It Forward

Bag. Saw the guy. Looked right at me. Jeff Bauman scrawled those words on a piece of paper when he regained consciousness at Boston Medical Center after having both legs amputated. Bauman, who had been waiting for his girlfriend, Erin Hurley, to cross the finish line just before 3 p.m., went on to describe to the FBI the baseball cap, black jacket, and sunglasses Tamerlan Tsarnaev was wearing, as well as the bag the suspected bomber dropped near Bauman's feet. Bauman also identified Tsarnaev in a photograph.

"He was standing right next to me," said Bauman. "He was there, then he was gone, and then boom!"

A Vet Whips into Action

On race day, Bruce Mendelsohn, 44, had one of the best views of the spectacle: He and his brother were hosting about two dozen people at a post-marathon party in an office building across the street from the finish line.

"The blast knocked me to the floor," said Mendelsohn, a Gulf War veteran. He ran down to the street and helped reunite a mother and son, tied a tourniquet around a victim's leg, and helped wounded people into ambulances.

Mendelsohn was in awe of the first responders' quick action. "Within 15 minutes, the scene was completely under control," he marveled.

BRIAN BABINEAU/GETTY IMAGES



“Marathon Monday should be about uplifting stories,” said Joe Andruzzi.

A Lineman on the Offense

Former National Football League player Joe Andruzzi helped the New England Patriots win the Super Bowl three times, but on this day he used his brawn for a higher purpose. Andruzzi, 37, and his wife, Jen, were congratulating runners at the finish line when blasts ripped through the crowd. He noticed an injured woman who couldn't walk, so the six-foot-three-inch, 290-pound former offensive lineman picked her up and helped her to an aid tent.

Andruzzi remained modest about his act. “The spotlight should remain firmly on the ... first responders, medics, EMTs, runners who crossed the finish line and kept on running straight to give blood, and the countless civilians who did whatever they could to save lives,” Andruzzi said.

Doctors Race to Help

Natalie Stavas was among perhaps dozens of medical professionals to go the distance, both as runners and first responders. The bombs detonated

when Stavas was a few blocks from the end of the race. Despite a nagging foot injury and severe fatigue, the Boston Medical Center pediatric resident sprinted toward the marathon's finish line, where she jumped a police barricade and rushed to the aid of a young woman bleeding profusely from her thigh. Then she helped one man with a mangled foot and another with a broken leg.

“It was a battle zone,” said Stavas. “I thought, How could someone do this to so many innocent people?”

Medical Miracle Workers

Few of the medical staff on duty at eight Boston hospitals that afternoon expected an influx of patients with gruesome lower-extremity injuries more commonly seen in war.

Still, at the first news of the explosions, doctors and nurses at such world-famous facilities as Tufts and Brigham and Women's Hospital cleared emergency rooms and operating rooms. Because cell phone service was limited following the incident, medical-team members communicated through text messages. The result? Not one death among the more than 260 bombing victims who had reached the hospitals alive.

An Online Outpouring

In the hours after the bombings, a *Boston Globe* staff member created a spreadsheet for local residents interested in offering temporary housing, amenities, or transportation to those affected by the disaster.



“Not one person opted to go home,” said Ron Ernenwein (in gray blazer), CEO of AA Transportation.

The document was posted on the *Globe* website that Monday at 5:39 p.m.; within three minutes, more than 100 people had responded. By 6 p.m., 1,000 Bostonians had opened their homes to strangers, offering a hot shower, a futon for the night, or cuddle time with a household pet.

The Road Less Traveled

Eight AA Transportation Company school bus drivers, who had parked at the finish line to shuttle exhausted runners to medical tents, found themselves in the thick of the confusion when the bombs exploded.

Rather than evacuate, the bus drivers returned to the scene again and again to transport runners and bystanders to safety, picking up anyone who needed a lift, allowing shaken participants to borrow their cell phones to reach loved ones, and even offering hugs.

Donations for the Desperate

In the aftermath of the horrific incident, runners donated their most precious commodity—blood. *NBC Sports* tweeted: “Reports of marathon runners that crossed finish line and continued to run to Mass General Hospital to give blood to victims.” Only a few hours later, the American Red Cross responded via Twitter: “Thanks to the generosity of volunteer blood donors, there is currently enough blood on the shelves to meet demand.”

Comfort Food for All

Sometimes gratitude is best expressed with a hot slice. Sympathizers took to the social media site Reddit to order pizza for emergency workers and anyone else who had helped during the disaster. Anytime Pizza in Cambridge filled most of the 1,500 orders and offered free slices to first responders who needed a meal. ■