

Gitmo doctor treated friends and enemies simply as patients

By Bill Hendrick

Dr. Evander Fogle honed his surgical skills and his bedside manner repairing the shattered bones of enemies - at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba and at a major Navy trauma center at Camp Pendleton, Calif.

Fogle, 37, who was born at Piedmont Hospital in Buckhead and left the Navy as a lieutenant commander in 2007, works out of St. Joseph's Hospital in Sandy Springs for Resurgens Orthopaedics, which recruited the surgeon after his hitch in the service.

Fogle did not want to discuss his political stance on Gitmo, the nickname for the US military base that became the site of a prison for suspected terrorists after the American led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

President Barack Obama has promised to close the detention facility, Fogle said his interest there wasn't political, but medical - to mend bodies, even the wounds of suspected terrorists.

Fogle was stationed at Gitmo for a year early in the war on terrorism. He was one of about 10 physicians taking care of the base's 8,000 residents including Marines, sailors and soldiers, in addition to the hundreds of prisoners captured in the fighting half a world away that followed the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

"Some prisoners had injuries from when they were fighting and had healed up, but maybe they weren't healed up completely but had complications from the injuries they had sustained," Fogle said during an interview at Resurgens' headquarters offices in St. Joseph's. "There were some bullet and shrapnel wounds. I was seeing problems such as battle wounds that had initially been treated in a quick and dirty manner. They were not completely treated previously because of the lack of access there to good medical care."

He said he was pleasantly surprised to see they were obedient and intelligent in general, they were always very respectful toward me, and, really, I felt like they were any other patient. You had the sense there might be deep-seated hatred, but I didn't see that come out in our interactions."

His attitudes toward the detained prisoners did not change, Fogle said. "When I arrived I simply treated each as a patient, rather than as a friend or enemy. I strive to treat a patient as I would one of my own family members

After a year at Guantanamo, a "Hard-ship tour" for which he volunteered, Fogle was shipped in 2005 to the U.S. Naval Hospital at Camp Pendleton, where his job was to operate on and help rehabilitate Marines and sailors "with battle injuries" sustained in fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq against men like the detainees he treated at Gitmo.

He frequently saw "Things like blast injuries to the extremities, very frequently to the hands, to the legs," he said.

Fogle's academic career was stellar, which is one reason he was highly sought by Resurgens, Georgia's largest orthopaedic practice with 97 physicians in 20 offices and six surgery centers located around Metro Atlanta.

A graduate of the Westminster Schools, Fogle received a bachelor's in economics from Stanford University in 1994 and was a member of the Naval ROTC Program at the University of California-Berkeley. He earned his medical degree at Vanderbilt University and completed his residency training at Emory University.

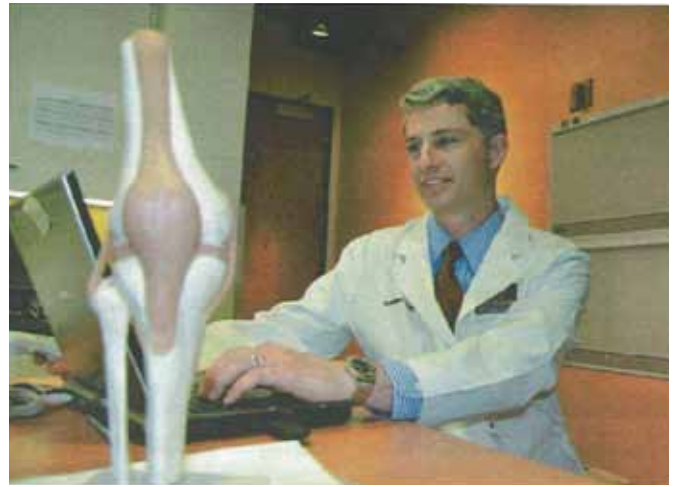
He chose medicine even though he was keenly interested in engineering early in life.

"I felt orthopaedic surgery was the best combination of engineering and medicine, putting things back together," Fogle said, sitting behind a laptop and gazing at the hazy image of a bone on the computer screen.

Though he felt early on that he'd be a doctor, he decided to join ROTC and take on a military commitment because one of his grandfathers, George Fletcher Schlatter, served as a brigadier general during World War II, flying combat missions against the Japanese.

"I was inspired by my grandfather," Fogle said. "Additionally, I wanted to take financial responsibility for my own college educations and help ensure that my two younger siblings, Adam and Suzannah, would not be restricted in their college choices due to financial considerations." Adam Fogle lives in Buckhead and is director of strategy for Quantum Radiology Group. Suzannah Fogle, an accounting analyst, lives in Virginia Highland.

"It was a good mix, doing things I could and to be responsible for my own expenses," the physician said. "The additional benefit was to serve my country."



Orthopaedist and Navy Veteran Evander Fogle, who treated military personnel and terrorism suspects at Guantanamo Bay, looks at bone images at Resurgens Orthopaedics at St. Joseph's Hospital, where he has worked since 2007.

He volunteered for the hardship post at Gitmo because that obligated him to a one-year tour, rather than two, and didn't want to be away that long.

His tour in the Navy, he said, was exciting and gave him the chance to learn firsthand what combat troops do. He spent time on a destroyer, a week on a submarine, and flew in an F/A-18 fighter jet and an A-6 bomber catapulted off an aircraft carrier.

After such "amazing" experiences, he almost decided to become an aviator instead of a doctor.

What many American know about Gitmo comes from a Jack Nicholson - Tom Cruise - Demi Moore movie, "A Few Good Men." Nicholson's character stresses the dangers of living and working at a base within range of Cuban Snipers.

Fogle said that possibility didn't alarm him. He showed off pictures of himself in scuba diving garb and in swimming trunks on the beach at the tip of Cuba.

As the only orthopaedist at the base, he was on call 24/7. Men and women with time on their hands, including prisoners, find ways to hurt themselves, Fogle said.

But Gitmo had its lighter moments.

"Outdoor movies played every night at the base theater, and that was one of the main places to gather," Fogle said. "The best restaurant was an authentic Jamaican jerk chicken stand."

Some animals, such as the Cuban Rock iguana, "essentially run the place," he said. "There's a \$10,000 fine if you hit one with your car or otherwise harmed them. There is also a species of animals, banana rats, a cross between gigantic rats and squirrels."

The strangest creatures, he said with a laugh, may have been the "Gitmo specials," 30-to-35-year old American cars that, once taken to Gitmo, never leave.

"Gitmo is where cars go to die," he said. "If you have a car down there, it's like gold."

Fogle lives with his wife, Robin, a physician at the Atlanta Center for Reproductive Medicine, and their sons, Fletcher, 4, and Alex, 2, near Sandy Springs.

Dr. Steve Wartime, copresident of Resurgens Orthopaedics, said Fogle "has been a wonderful addition" to the company and is well-liked by patients.

"His background, training and experience have been a tremendous asset, and he has provided high-quality and professional care to our patients," Wertheim said. "They seem to really like both his compassion and bedside manner, as well as his clinical skills."



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