

Donor Spotlight: MSgt. William Kelly, Jr., USAF (Ret.)

The Armed Services Blood Program is grateful for all those who give the gift of life by donating blood or platelets. While the ASBP knows how much every donor means to military members in need, some stand out.

William Kelly, Jr. is something of a celebrity at the Fort Bragg Blood Donor Center (BDC). At 76 years old, this retired Air Force Master Sergeant, who served for 20 years as a flight engineer on C-124 aircraft, continues to support the military by regularly donating platelets. He became a blood donor while still in the Service in 1968. "I started donating back when we lived in San Antonio," recalls Kelly. "When we came up here I started donating at Fort Bragg."

As a platelet donor, Kelly provides a valuable blood product that military medical personnel rely on. While a unit of whole blood can be separated into platelets and other components, six to ten times as many platelets can be collected through the platelet donation process.



MSgt. William Kelly, Jr., USAF (Ret.) helps his wife, Gloria, display some of the quilts she has made for wounded troops.

These tiny cells are particularly critical to those recovering from combat-related injuries, trauma, burns and surgery because they initiate the formation of blood clots and reduce blood loss. Platelets are also important for patients undergoing chemotherapy, who may need six to eight units of platelets a day.

Donating platelets takes 70 to 90 minutes and platelets can be donated every ten days. According to Jayme Proctor, a technician who specializes in collecting platelets at the donor center, "Most platelet donors say that the time goes by really fast. They know that platelets save lives. Typically our donors watch movies or television shows."

As a regular donor, Kelly has spent a good deal of time with the Fort Bragg BDC staff who have gotten

to know him pretty well and have come to view him as a national treasure. Proctor notes, "Mr. Kelly really likes "Matlock" and always tunes in if it's on. He often brings bagels and hot rolls and spends time chatting with me or other staff members. He usually talks about how proud he is of his wife."

Kelly has good reason to be proud of his wife, Gloria. Following years of supporting the military as a spouse and mother, Mrs. Kelly has found another way to support the troops—making lap-quilts for the wounded. Mrs. Kelly relates, "I saw a program with my daughter ... about the wounded coming home to Walter Reed [Army Medical Center]. I wanted so badly to do something. I quilt; that's my only skill. I thought about them in their wheelchairs and wondered if maybe a lap-quilt would comfort them."

Mrs. Kelly's lap-quilts are adorned with an unmistakable theme of patriotism, an American flag. This revered emblem serves as a fitting tribute to the courage of our troops and the sacrifice the wounded have made and Mrs. Kelly artfully transforms it into a quilt that comforts and warms. The quilts are rich with symbolism and it is easy to recognize the time and care woven into each one by tireless hands. Mr. Kelly says his wife has made more than 500 quilts, "Probably 600."

"That's his count. I don't know, I just make them," offers Mrs. Kelly.

In order to distribute her quilts, Mrs. Kelly recently rode along with injured troops being transferred by bus from Womack

Army Medical Center to Walter Reed Army Medical Center. She recalls, "An older gentleman back from Afghanistan was hurt pretty bad. He was lucid, but just barely. I'll never forget him because, as hurt as he appeared, he was only worried about his son, a gunnery sergeant on a Humvee serving in Iraq. He wasn't thinking about himself! We can't show our guys enough love. They just need to know we care and think about them."

It is clear that both William and Gloria Kelly care a great deal. They provide warmth and comfort to wounded military members, each in their own way. And they show no signs of stopping.

Mrs. Kelly continues to quilt and Mr. Kelly plans to keep donating, but is concerned that other veterans and military retirees may not donate because of their age. He notes, "You're never too old to donate. Most people think if they're past 60 they can't donate blood, but your blood and platelets are just as good as anyone's!"

By their lifetime commitment, William and Gloria Kelly inspire us all to support the troops and we thank them for their generosity.

For more information on blood and platelet donation, visit the Armed Services Blood Program Web site at www.militaryblood.dod.mil.

For those who quilt Mrs. Kelly is happy to share her pattern. She can be reached through the Fort Bragg Blood Donor Center at 910-396-9925.