

Professional support had a positive impact

Rich: My name is Rich and I'm a Vietnam Veteran. I was in the United States Marine Corp for 3 years. I served in Vietnam for 13 months. I started out as an Ammo Carrier and worked my way up through Assistant Gunner, the Forward Observer, to Squad Leader, and then Section Leader.

Our mission was mainly search and destroy Viet Cong. When I got wounded, I believe it was around 2 a.m. We had just a 2-man watch in every gun pit and just all of the sudden out of nowhere we heard the whistles. Mortar rounds whistle real loud as they're coming in and the explosions, and I think it was the second incoming round I got hit. It scared me to death. There was nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. The shells were raining down on us. I saw so many of my buddies that were hit real bad, a couple were dead, it's a sight that I will never care to see again.

I had a lot of trouble getting along with my wife. I was constantly arguing and bickering with her. I had two children at the time, they were 10 and 11 years old, and I would find myself losing my temper with them. I had a bad case of road rage. This was ongoing. Always, whenever I'm driving somewhere, at the time I had to be the first one there. If I'm driving down the interstate, I have to be the first one there. I have to be ahead of the pack.

I was starting to have some problems with my bones aching. My joints aching. So I thought, you know this could be related to Agent Orange. So, I went to the Cincinnati VA, and I went to the Agent Orange Clinic and was interviewed. I was assigned a primary care physician. I told her that I sometimes have nightmares, and she right away recommended that I see someone in the mental health clinic. I'd never heard of PTSD before, and the psychiatrist explained to me what PTSD was and told me that I had a lot of symptoms of PTSD such as night sweats, heavy nightmares, waking up in the middle of the night. I would be hollering, screaming. My wife was afraid to touch me when I was sleeping because sometimes I may wake up swinging.

They were starting group therapy at the time. The biggest part of the group therapy was the camaraderie. Forming a friendship, a bond with all the other members of the group, and it was great. They wanted to bring up what's hidden inside us, and once we could talk about some of our deepest hidden problems it seemed to get a little easier to talk about.

I was selected I think to enter this program called IPRP. Intensive Pain Rehabilitation Program. It was an 8 hour day. We would have 4 hours of physical therapy in the morning and then we would have 4 hours of psychological. I was in the initial class that the first class that they had of the IPRP. We all had a better outlook on life. Our PTSD was a lot better. I learned how to control my temper and after going through this counseling I was taught different relaxation techniques. I have a wonderful relationship with my wife now. Both of my kids are in college. They're both seniors.

VA will do anything for you that you need them to do. You've got to go to the right department and ask the right person and you will get what you need. I owe the VA a huge debt, and I would recommend anyone, any Veteran. If he has the choice, use your VA.



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