

Resources for getting back on track

Ernest: My name is Ernest. I was drafted and went to Fort Meade, Maryland for my basic training. I transferred into the Air Force and that's where I served all of my time.

In May of '44, that is when the war escalated. It got to the point that they couldn't get enough men in the air and they were losing the battle. Ordinarily you'd fly one or two sorties a week. They put us on a daily sortie. Sometimes we would fly two times a day, two missions. We were fighting against the Germans, when the lead pilot looks over to the left and I can see it out because I was in a turret right behind him. We were devastated, then he went to me and he motions jump. Jump? I never jumped, even in basic training. I don't remember pulling the rip cord, I don't remember descending, I was so traumatized I didn't know where I was. I unbuckled the parachute and start flubbing around in the water, the waves and the water was ice cold, it was an early morning mission. I looked behind me and I seen two air sea rescues from the British that was pontoon planes and they spotted me. I was the only one that was saved. Never seen anybody from that day to this.

As I got out I didn't know what I was doing. I was a lost person. I had no training for anything, I didn't have any profession, I didn't want to go back to work for 31 cents an hour. The most they was giving us was \$20 a week and that wasn't enough so I just sort of hung out. I was like one of those millions of other Soldiers, lost.

I enjoy going to the Vet's. It's just better than any private facilities. You call, you got a primary doctor, and then they go down the list of your ailments. I have a Psychiatrist, a Psychologist, and I joined the PTSD, and I went in there and met a lot of...almost everybody there had—was 100 percent. They had either Agent Orange or frozen feet, but I listened to everybody else's story. We had a very good instructor. She had the knowledge because she had been interviewing these soldiers and she knew more about what was going on than we did, and she'd tell the story and I was there to get information that I could use, that would help me.

At that time I was very much shook up. I cried constantly with anxiety and PTSD and my Psychologist, he's the one that's...what he did the first thing, he got all my medical records and the first thing he did, he went down all of my medications. He says, "No wonder you're dizzy and you're falling down, you've got four medications for the same thing in different dosages," and he changed all of my medications almost immediately. Then he said, "You should have a Psychiatrist," which I didn't have, and he says "I have one I think you should go to." She was very compassionate and she understood me, and I went to her every week for a year. Gave me a little aspect that somebody was really trying to do something for me which she did.

Oh, I'm better off now, absolutely. As far as the Veteran that comes out of the service, whether he needs it or not I think the first time he should get associated with them, get to know the system, get himself a Veteran's card and you never can tell when you need it, and you'll be prepared, because the longer you're out, there's more things that enter your mind besides your health. You try to make a living for your family, you're trying to do the right thing. They took care of me and done a good job and these are things that I wouldn't have done on my own, so maybe that's why I'm here at 90 years old.



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