

## Treatment and Veteran support helped him recover

**Tom:** My name is Tom. I was in the Army from 1983 to 2008, active duty, reserve and guard. 19 Delta during my active duty time. I re-classed as a Combat Medic. A particular IED attack that I was involved in having to evacuate some wounded, it kind of rocked my world a little. It was a big IED. It took out the lead Humvee, the Suburban, and my Humvee. The guy that was more critically wounded I took in my Humvee, but we couldn't shut the back door. The back door wouldn't shut because the stretcher was too long. So, I got in the front seat holding pressure on his wounds hanging over the seat, holding pressure on his wounds and trying to hold this 500-pound door shut. Not realizing it at the time, I completely shredded my shoulder and my spine trying to hold that door shut.

When I came back from Iraq, I didn't enjoy doing anything. I didn't want to go anywhere; I don't want to be around anybody. I definitely didn't want to be in crowds. Waking up in the middle of the night screaming. One night in particular, I woke up and I could hear my wife screaming "Oh God, don't hit me." We've been married 23 years; I've never laid a hand on that woman. That was really unsettling. It was really difficult for me, too, because I was medevacked out and my unit was still in Iraq. And, you know, I felt like I'd failed, I felt like I let them down, so, there's a lot of depression going on with that. Of course, I didn't think it was PTSD and here I am, I'm a Combat Medic, I'm an Army-trained nurse, I'm supposed to be able to recognize these signs and symptoms but I guess you're supposed to unless they're happening to you.

The VA sent me to Brooke Army Medical Center. Three days of really rigorous testing came back with a moderate to severe TBI. Once I knew what was going on, you don't fix a TBI, a TBI fixes itself, but you learn how to adjust until that happens.

I had an individual therapist that I'd meet with on a pretty regular basis. I would see him at least once a week if not twice a week and I was going to group therapy probably every day. The individual therapy was great to me because we could talk about the things that just were really going on with me. But when I started going to the groups, and I didn't go to groups with just OAF/OEF guys, there was Vietnam guys in there, we even had a World War 2 Veteran in there. What happened to us in combat might have been different, but what happened to us after combat was very, very similar. It dawned on me that what's going on with me can happen to anybody. There were many, many, many guys just like me and we all had a brotherhood and we were able to work through that together.

The symptoms don't necessarily go away. You learn how to deal with whatever that sign or symptom is at the time. When I have a nightmare, I'll get up, get a drink of water, maybe sit up for about five or ten minutes instead of staying up all night like I used to do, get into a quiet place, do some deep breathing. I'm ready to go back to bed. I try to start my day every day with 15 minutes of just sitting quiet and deep breathing and it makes me feel better. I used to have panic attacks. I haven't had a panic attack in six, seven months. I'm definitely enjoying life a lot better now than I did in 2007, 8 and 9.

I wouldn't trade any of these experiences because they've made me stronger and they've made me a better person, but one thing that I've really been able to do more than anything is when I see one of my brothers suffering I can tell them "Look, get plugged in. Don't try to do this by yourself because you can't." Whatever it is, find something that will take you from that place and put you where you need to be.



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