

Find a support system to turn things around

Mike: My name is Mike, I am in North Carolina National Guard. I have been in about 13 years. I am an E5 Sergeant. I am still in, deployed in Kosovo in 2004, went to Iraq in 2009. When the vehicles would get hit and they would get blown up, the first stop the vehicles would go would be the aid station obviously, but then I had to go take the equipment out because a lot of the classified stuff that was in that would tell us where the device was, what frequency set it off, things like that. So I'd have to go in and pull that stuff out and it wasn't like they cleaned it up afterwards. So usually I'd get a lot of the aftermath of kind of what happened.

My worst one was one that they'd get the bodies out, they lock the vehicle down, they put it in a secure yard until I can get to it. Well in my case, I wasn't able to get to it until about 1 o'clock in the afternoon on a 140 degree day. It is not pleasant once you pop that thing open because it is pretty much air tight. You still have to go in and get the equipment. When these guys were driving around, they got hit. Some of the stuff is stuff they are kind of expecting to see again. Now you are going through and it is one of those "Do I need to get that for somebody?" You know was that something that was important to them?

When I deployed to Iraq my wife is a chaplain so we deployed together. She came down with breast cancer, we got home, she had a mastectomy and started the process for that and within about a month and a half we got divorced. So it was kind of the coming home, adjusting, oh yes now we have a big medical stressor, oh yeah now there is a divorce going on. Depression obviously hits after so many stressful events. I am 35 now, I was 33 then. Prior that being in a German family you think oh this guy has had his party nights. Never been drunk, not once. When the wife left I took it up as an extreme support. It is always "it is never me." I am never going to be that guy, but you end up being that guy. You don't mean to it is not something you did on purpose, but you end up being that guy. The quicker you can figure out how to fix it the better off you are going to be. For most of my life I am usually the center guy for my group of friends. I am the guy who does the plans and the guy who helps everybody out. So when I needed it it is real hard to find yourself needing the other people to be that stability. It took me about four or five months and a buddy that we deployed with actually helped me through it and gave me some things to go onto. Actually it helped me build off the help that I ended up getting, the sources that I used. They would start and then I was more willing to listen to my buddies you know when they would start giving me the advice and being that support that I needed.

They have a thing called Army One source it is an 800 number you call up for just about any issue whatsoever and they hook you up with whatever it is you are looking for. In my case I called up and said hey I am needing a counselor I am going through a divorce and yeah there is alcohol involved. The counselors that I specifically had at the time, I even remember going this isn't really doing much but then I realized as soon as I was done with counseling and I would step out and I would usually go hang out with my buddies afterwards. It would keep me talking, because I was at least now thinking okay, so as to not do this again what do I need to do? The counselor would start it he would get me thinking I would get to my support system and my support system would be you know keep talking. All of a sudden things start to click for you.



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My roommate deployed with us and this was his first deployment and again once I got counseling and once I got help I could kind of sit down and look at him and watch him where he was at and I am going I am different not just because I am a different person, but I am different because my situation is this was my second and that was his first. I could watch the mistakes he is making and go dude I was there here let me help you out.

Years ago you know you'd look and it's, I'll get to it later. Nah, now it is about getting to it now and definitely get to it sooner rather than later. The programs that are in place now are great, but you still have to be willing to jump on them. The stigma that used to exist for soldiers getting mental therapy or mental health or any type of that kind of thing. It really is going away. All of my buddies have gone to the VA to make sure their medical issues are documented. They are getting taken care of. If they can't work anymore, if they cant – if there is some sense of disability they're getting that and that is going to allow them to when they do eventually get out of the military because they can't do the job anymore. They will be able to do something once they get out. The VA helps them work with the Army to get what they need to recover from doing the job the Army wanted them to do and then still have a life to support themselves and their families once they got out. Being with the VA I always going to have somebody, somewhere, who is going to go we can take care of this guy and help him find what he needs to keep driving on.



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