

## The biggest thing was losing the brotherhood

**Jake:** My name's Jake. I served four years in the United States Marine Corps, served in Iraq in 2007 in the Anbar province and then in the Helmand province in Afghanistan in 2008. It starts from the moment you kind of step foot in Iraq. Two weeks into my first deployment we hit an IED, had a couple guys injured and one guy killed from my squad. That kind of sets you down the path for what the deployment's going to be like and things didn't really slow down for us there on that first deployment. In Afghanistan with the sniper platoon, that's different because you're going out and you're not getting in major firefights as often, but the difference is that you could look through a scope and you play God, largely. You decide who walks away and who doesn't, and that's mentally and emotionally very draining over the course of seven months.

Coming back, you lose the brotherhood. When I got out, guys from my team, guys from my platoon got out largely around the same time and everybody kind of scattered. Everybody went back to their home towns, very few guys kind of stayed around in the same region, and suddenly you go from having this very tight-knit group that you trust with everything, that you share everything and that you've been through everything with, and now suddenly they're just gone, and so you find yourself in a new environment, a new community, and you have really no one that you trust like you did just months prior, and for me that was the hardest part.

My family when I came back said that I was a changed person and I couldn't tell it, I didn't know, I couldn't—I didn't know what they were talking about, but they told me on a number of occasions that that was the case and I think it's just something that you have to accept. If you go to war and you do two deployments and you see everything that a guy in the infantry sees, if you're not changed when you come back then there's something wrong. That's been the case with war for thousands of years, but I couldn't see what they were talking about.

I was a lot quicker to anger. I still am, I find myself getting angry over things that I really shouldn't be. Generally I'm able to control all that, but I can feel it kind of welling up inside, just the smallest, simplest things will get to me and start to trigger things that aren't that bad, aren't that dark but just make me angry. I've had difficulty sleeping. There's just some days that are worse than others. I can't really say how often, but there are nights when I just can't sleep where I definitely wake up in cold sweats with nightmares and stuff like that.

I started to see the VA for a couple of physical issues, saw a counselor while I was there. I was encouraged by one of my friends who had been in my sniper team to go and see a counselor. It's very hard for a Veteran to identify or admit that they have some sort of weakness, but you have to really change how you think about PTSD, how you think about the issues that you're dealing with coming back from overseas. It's not a weakness, it's a normal reaction to all the abnormal stuff you had to do.

I think PTSD's an overused term. I think that often Veterans like to think that they have the market cornered on PTSD. PTSD isn't just a phenomena of war, it comes from car accidents and poor childhoods and abusive households, so I think it's one of those things that you have kind of have to expect going in that you're going to come out the back end with a changed mental outlook. Was I surprised I was diagnosed with it? Yes and no. I don't think that my battle with PTSD is life-altering, I don't think that it affects



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my quality of life. Do I have it? Absolutely. I'd be more concerned if they told me that I was perfectly normal. I'd feel like a sociopath. You need to find someone that you can talk to, someone who can identify with what you're going through, and it doesn't have to be a Veteran. It often will be but it doesn't have to be, and just find someone who you trust and just talk about it. They don't even have to say a word, all you have to do is just talk, and all they have to do is listen.



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