

We owe it to others to take care of ourselves

Kyle: Hi, my name's Kyle. I've been in the Army since 2008 as a Civil Affairs Sergeant now, and I've served in Africa and Afghanistan in Kandahar.

I joined the military because three generations before me had joined, so I really wanted to serve. I had gone to college first, so I felt that in a time of war, it was important for me to serve the country and to give back.

I deployed to Afghanistan in 2011. My TBI resulted from a firefight in June of 2011 where I was in the kill zone of where a grenade went off. We had a house that was on the perimeter. I was going along with my team and we were paying off all the locals for taking over their houses and bulldozing their fields.

We knew we were going to get hit. We were listening to their radios. They had RPG, they had small arms. They took out a truck that was next to our position.

We had guys that were knocked out, guys with shrapnel wounds and we had all the TBI issues right away. But it's tough to tell if it's having an affect on you when you're there because you're in that operational environment.

So, for me, I didn't really notice anything until I really came home.

We came home right before Christmas, and so I had to do all that Christmas shopping right before Christmas, so I'm in a crowded mall and something that seemed so innocent, being in a crowded mall, was, that was a tough circumstance to be under.

I scanned every room I would go into. I sat with my back against a wall. I never, never let anyone come up from behind on me, anything like that.

And it was hard. I think you get a little bitter, knowing that you had seen things that 99.9% of the population hadn't seen, and knowing that it was hard to find other people, other than the guys that you were with. So for me, it was 31 other guys that I knew that could relate, but a lot of us were having a hard time adjusting. We were trained well for war, but we weren't really trained to come home.

Some of the symptoms of TBI, you do get irritable, you get frustrated. Your memory is not what it used to be. That's one of the biggest one I see. Chronic migraine headaches. And for me, they were headaches that I never had experienced before in my life. Debilitating headaches.

A lot of sensitivity to light. To this day, I still, I have to make sure I have sunglasses with me because the sensitivity to light will really affect me. You know, flashes from cameras, things like that. I usually have to remove myself.

I went to the Bedford VA in Massachusetts and they have an OIF/OEF team. So, they've seen a lot of Veterans come through. Not only did they know... they could get you enrolled in the VA system, but they could also tell you a little bit about some of the services that were offered by the state and offered at that particular VA. So it was really helpful, it was really helpful to have someone kind of hold your hand through that, because you're so overwhelmed at that point.



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After seeing the OIF/OEF team, I went, saw a primary care physician. From going and seeing the primary care doctor, they made some referrals so that I could see occupational therapy and I guess for lack of a better term would be a therapist. And you talk about some of the issues that you're having.

Part of the new normal that I was dealing with was not having the memory that I was accustomed to, and I was, it was easy for me to get frustrated. I never made lists ever in my life. I had to make lists. I would go shopping and I didn't know what I was there for. When you go to the grocery store, Why the hell am I here? And that was hard. It was really hard. So, at the VA, I was able to get occupational treatment.

They help you with coping strategies. Some of it was taking notes, some of it's taking a deep breath and it is a change, and you have to be a little bit more conscious about your own health. You have to make sure you get eight hours of sleep, and that you're taking care of yourself.

I've been back more than a year and a half now. I can go into rooms, I can, sometimes I can sit with my back to the door if it comes down to it. I don't scan every room. I don't get as irritated with the general public as much. I can handle questions, about my service, about what it was like over there. And I've definitely noticed it's a lot easier now to handle that, and you have your bad days, but I know how to cope a lot better nowadays because of the treatment that I sought and that I received from the VA.

There's a lot of reasons why I like joining Veteran organizations. One is the camaraderie. You get to meet other Veterans that have served in other wars. You get to hear their stories, you get to pass on their stories, and I think that's very important.

We owe it to our brothers and sisters that didn't come home to make sure that we take care of ourselves. And not only do we want to take care of them, but I don't want the enemy to win. And if you don't take care of yourself, in a weird way the enemy wins a little bit.



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