

It became hard for me to get through the day

Justin: My name's Justin. I served in the Active Army in the 101st and then I deployed during OIF-3 in 2005 to early 2007. I had an incredibly difficult deployment. I lost my best friend within the first 30 days. My battalion hit 900 IEDs and there was gunfights every other day. We ended up losing one out of every three guys in my platoon and then over 55% of my company was wounded in action.

I ended up having a little boy and an old man come up to me at a checkpoint, and I went down and I got the interpreter. And the interpreter was like communicating with them and they let me know like, hey their whole family got killed. And they want you to go and check it out and it struck me as odd when I saw it but chalked it up to just another bad day, you know, in Iraq. And months went by. It was just my time, like I had dental work that I needed to get done, so they were pulling me out of sector, and they had sent us up to the battalion base and I was up there with my team leader at the time.

We were like having a conversation that was something to the effect of, like you know, "Can you believe that it would have ever turned out like this?" And he was like, "You know what's really crazy is... do you remember that family that got killed back in March?" And I was like, "No, like what family?" And he was like, "You know, the one with the burned girl." And I was like, "Yeah, I do remember that." And he was like, "Yeah, that was us man. That was like another guy in my platoon." And that was like a bridge too far, you know, for me and I made the decision to report it. Yeah, I mean it was hard. I ended up going through trials you know what I mean and having to like relive this. It wasn't something I could like just put in a box.

I got med boarded. So, I mean I started having problems. Just the amount of stress that I was going through was like overwhelming. And not only that, but like I just started to isolate myself and it became hard for me to just kinda get through the day. I got out. I transitioned out and didn't... like I had to hit the ground running again. I started a business.

The issues kept getting worse, like my relationship at the time deteriorated. I found myself not having like emotionally proportionate responses to things. Like nightmares, you know, like trouble sleeping, forgetting things. My mind would just wander to like these terrible events, and like you'd have these nightmares so many times that your brain then starts changing what happens. And then it started to affect me professionally. Like my relationship had ended and then that was just kind of like the last straw, you know. And I was just like I've gotta do something about that and I went to the Salt Lake City VA. I'd never checked in there one time.

I walked into the polytrauma ward and I was just like I need help, like immediately. You know what I mean, like this is like a crisis-type situation because I can't... like you just feel like you're drowning. They took really good care of me. I did, you know, exposure therapy and I went to just individual therapy sessions for the next couple years.

You go through and you know, you make tapes of talking about these events and then you like listen to the tapes like over and over and over again. And you journal about your experiences, and you listen to the tapes and you talk about the experiences over and over and over ad nauseam. And functionally, it takes the power of those events away, you know, from their capacity to affect you like physiologically, like psychologically. And it was extremely hard. It was emotionally exhausting, you know, I



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mean there wasn't that moment... and I equate it to the gym once again because like what's the moment where you realize you got skinny at the gym? And you just kind of stick with it, you know, over time and you just keep drilling it and drilling it and drilling it and drilling it. And eventually, you know, like you get that piece of your life back.

You will be amazed at the amount of resources out there. And it may be a process. You know what I mean? Like it may be your first therapist isn't the right one for you. It may be that group therapy isn't right for you. It may be that exposure therapy isn't right for you. But if you attack the problem, you know what I mean, and use your military mindset that you got, you will find success, you know what I mean? And that level of success is different for everybody for sure but, you know, you'll get to where you want to be.



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