

A supportive network of family and friends

Hugh: I experienced the signs and symptoms of PTSD after my deployment to Panama. I didn't realize it was PTSD. I didn't have to acknowledge that it was PTSD. But during that jump in the following operations, I saw my first dead American soldier which caused just instant vomiting and I treated guys on the drop zone. When I came back, I had difficulty sleeping, I was really agitated, what people would call hypervigilant, but I was able to channel all of that in the service.

So, within a year, I'm in the desert again for Desert Shield, it wasn't quite as ominous, but even in the 82nd for an extended period of time and the prospect of going to war and conflict with then the third largest army on the planet and being an airborne unit which really didn't have a lot of tank defenses or knockout power that way, you know, that contributed to it. And I was fortunate enough to be a driver of a truck that drove up the "Highway of Death." The Apache helicopters proved their mettle in combat and so you had burnt corpses, vehicles that were still on fire as we moved to our final position, and then of course that was the end. And I still have vivid recollections of that for no reason; there's not necessarily a trigger. But after my tour in Baghdad as a transition team medic and living every day, it really doesn't matter where you are in that battle space and we were in places like Dora Market and downtown Baghdad in 2006, which is pre-surge, and it was still tenuous at best. There were a lot of events that I didn't realize that I remembered until I was out of service, and then I didn't sleep well. My wife would explain to me after I got back home and even after I retired, that I was speaking Arabic at night really loud, that I was attempting to choke a pillow and she just wanted, she would prefer if we slept in separate beds, which I don't want to cause anyone any pain or any harm, so I did.

My kids told me after I got back this time that I wasn't the same dad that left. And I didn't acknowledge any of that until, let's say, two years ago. You know, the problem with that is that time is the mother of all evil. They're adults, so it's not like you get to hit the redo button. On the other side, as adults, I believe since the conversation has been elevated to other places and other forms, they have a little more of an understanding on what they didn't know at a certain point in time. So, as a family, in individual relationships as well as the group relationship, is getting a lot better, not that it was bad, but we're moving forward in a positive way. And they all love me, my wife and my kids love me, so I'm starting out in a really good position in this race to begin with and I acknowledge that. I wish and hope that I can find a way to accelerate that path.



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