

Deploying for hurricane relief impacted home life

Herman: I'm retired U.S. Air Force 20 plus years. Was an Aircraft Crew Chief for the military. Well, a thunderstorm comes in and decides they want to go ahead and threaten, you know, the populous there in Louisiana. So, as soon as Katrina came in, I was about to get deployed and I had to tell my employer about that. It didn't go well. Next thing you know, I'm on an aircraft taking off to Louisiana so I'm given a weapon. I'm having to leave my job. I'm having to leave my wife who was pregnant with our son. I left the home construction process that I undertook earlier that year and then having to deal with my civilian employer thinking, oh, there goes Herman off to another vacation with the military.

Well, not necessarily this time. This was, I mean more real than anything else, you know, because people's lives were at stake with this. I need to go do this other job that the military is asking me to do. I mean, I will drop everything to go and do that. Why? Because it's in the best interest of my country. I remember that cargo door opening. As soon as they open it up and you just feel that vacuum. And it was a smell and a site that I still remember to this day. Everything just smelled wet. It was like a war zone. It was just a site that was just devastating, but I knew that I had to maintain my gung-ho attitude and I've held everything else in just to kind of make sure we're here to do a job. It took a toll.

I endured whatever scars I endured while there and I'm on a plane back to Austin where I find out that my employer wants to fire me, in a roundabout way. I was able to secure another job, but I left that particular job. So, now I'm at this new job; horrible hours, horrible pay. My wife's still unemployed, you know, and I was doing whatever I could to just kind of make ends meet financially and friends and family, you know and the VA are coming in to try to like, it's as if I called in the cav, the cavalry. They came in and they kinda started helping me out.

The VA was there for the emotional support. Over the course of my career towards the latter part of it, I came up with one acronym and it was Post Military Career Stress Disorder. I run myself a certain way. There's a level of accountability, discipline, integrity, and how I do things and I found that I was a little bit too square, so to speak. You know, I had to do things a certain way and it was to do them the right way. When you're asked to do something, you do them right and I apply that to everything that I do and in the civilian sector, it's just a little bit of a different environment because in their mindset, it seems and you can hear it in conversation, they're out at a bar already while we're trying to do a job or they're out playing soccer when we're trying to do a job. So, if you're not focused on your job, you're obviously focusing on something else because then it's going to affect the performance of what you're doing and that'll eventually affect, you know, the outcome of a task.

So those are the frustrations that I kind of deal with. Going to the VA and talking with them about these instances was definitely a help. VA support, outreach programs or VA groups with the social media network that is at hand, it's amazing how you can share experiences. When I think of the VA, I think of a focal point where there's a lot of Veterans there that yes, we want to be given a certain service, but they're also there for the camaraderie. We come to see the docs or whomever, but we're also there to talk with other Veterans because they may have similar stories. It's amazing the wealth of knowledge that they have to disseminate so as long as you want to come and get it.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**

And that's what it's about, the resource is there. I wasn't kidding when I said, "They educated me." The Montgomery GI Bill helped out and they continue helping out.

Katrina still lives in my mind and, you know, being deployed overseas in support of Operation Desert Storm, OIF/OEF, you know, and I was deployed over to Spain to help that relief effort, you know, that still lives in me, so I'm still deployed. I may be physically here right in front of you, but I'm still deployed. But I know now that there are resources out there that can help me with what I'm still finding myself deployed for.

So, whenever I feel down in the dumps, I rely on those resources and I get back on my horse again. I continue to ride because sometimes I fall off my horse, you know, but we're still knights. It's how we get back on it and the attitude it takes to get back on there and take care of business. So, we need to go where there's professional help and guidance because the soldier is not the only person that suffers from, you know, the battle zones, the combat zones, the humanitarian relief efforts that we're faced with, but it's the families. We need to use the faculties that we've been gifted with and apply them to like, getting help. We got training and we welcomed it, let's get the help and welcome it. You know, but the VA has all kinds of resources available; I mean tons and tons and tons that they've helped me with. They just have an enormous amount of talent and when you talk to the representatives there, they wanna help you out.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

MAKE THE
CONNECTION