

## The effort to overcome challenges is worth it

**Mark:** My name is Mark. The Reserves, National Guard, pre-enlistment as a high school student. I went to OCS in Benning and went to EOBC in Belvoir and got out as a captain in 1990. I went to work for a contingency contractor that does a lot of work with special needs and emergency projects. We were in Iraq, some of our guys went forward with the 3rd ID. One of my first experiences in Iraq that was very positive was meeting several Egyptian Iraqis, one of which knew me. I was his, I'm going to stay student trainer. When I started the course, I originally had one Tunisian student. By the time it was I done I had all the Arab students from the basic and advanced class as my students.

It was my job to help them learn, and they were having trouble getting food in and stuff, and I ended up bringing in baby formula for them and got to know the families and everything quite well, right there in Iraq. I had a lot of interaction with them. In fact, that was one of the reasons I was recruited to come back into the Army. I was actually sworn in in the PCO annex in Bagdad in 2004 in September. You bottle feed a baby a few times and you get to know the family and you kind of bond with them, and coming across the mother and some of the other kids in just a bad situation, that started me having nightmares in Iraq. As much death and everything I'd seen, that was the thing that started my PTSD. My nightmares were about things that happened to adults and children I knew over there that I knew well that things happened to, some of them soldiers, but that was what started it.

I started running late at night so I could sleep better, because I couldn't sleep, so I was running twice a day. I started going to the combat stress clinics and stuff a little bit to get some help. I was one of the ones that was smart enough to jump into the mental health side, and it helped me stay effective and on the mission until I fell in a hole running late one night and basically blew out my knee, so they sent me back to Ohio on a home recovery program for four months.

I ended up back in Iraq as a civilian again in September of 2006 in the same program I was running before, training soldiers on how to deal with small satellite terminals. I went up to turn one on and got electrocuted and fell and banged my head on the side of the conex on the way down, and didn't realize I had a severe head trauma because the emphasis was on my heart and kidneys due to the electrical shock. I wasn't remembering things, I was having total blackouts, so to speak, memory-wise. One of the things that the VA has helped me get past is just the panicking when that happens. I don't panic near as bad.

I continued seeing mental health folks at Womack when I was there, I've got DVDs and things they gave me. Actually some of the therapy they had me do there I'd still do. He had me doing a therapy not where I tried to change the end of the dream, but I acknowledge to myself that I'm in a dream. I have had several groups I've belonged to. The longest one is a maintenance group that I go to in Fort Thomas that is my foundation. I also go to the track program which is a recovery and maintenance-type program and there's a spirituality group I go there. You are able to go into your values and use your values to assist you instead of your values being a club, because for PTSD your values can be a club, "Why am I so messed up? I should be better. I know I can be better." So you learn forgiveness and do what you can do and just different religious



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aspects, but it's a denominational-neutral thing. You have to make the effort, and if you can't make the effort you have to find someone who will help you make the effort.



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