

Letting your pack down and finding relief

James: Hi my name is James. I was an 0331 Machine Gunner with 3rd Battalion 7th Marines Lima Company, Weapons Platoon. I served in Iraq from 2005-2006 for my first tour. I was supposed to leave in July for my second tour in 2007 and I left in April, right before my 21st Birthday.

The first time it was chaos. I couldn't describe it any other way. IED's every day. We had, I think it was around 1300 attacks in 9 months. So that is more than one a day. October 4th, 2005, we lost one of the youngest guys in our whole company and he was actually the squad leader, I was the section leader, so we were pretty close.

Processing it after it happens, I think the only way in country that I was able to literally was, I started smoking, started ignoring things, stopped talking to my family. I kind of shut down because a lot of people kept asking the dumb questions, "Have you killed anybody, has anyone been killed around you?" I got jaded. I felt that people just didn't respect any of us and I was immediately checked in the VA, you know got that done, at my Father's behest, he is a Vietnam Veteran. I started getting into the writing group and when I got into that I started venting everything onto paper. Then once people heard me read it or they read it themselves, then they went, "You really need help. Like we are Vietnam Veterans, you are us the day off the boat and you have been back and out of the military for 4 months, so you should be much further along than this and you are not." That's when I started getting into more groups, PTSD groups.

I didn't think anyone got it. Then finally once I got in the group, other Veterans got it big-time. They were like "You are us 40 years ago kid." And the VA is good with that, that there are so many Vietnam Veterans. It's the passing of the baton so to speak. Go to the Veterans Centers, go to the VA. Ask people like patient advocates. You need to get the anger out and groups, for me, always gave me that, because you are sitting with Veterans. They are guys just like you and they have probably seen just as much or worse than you.

There is a term, at least in the Marines, we call it, put your pack down. You know you are done with your, you are retiring, put your pack down, you are going to kick off your pack. Let that pack down. Let the grudge go. That's what the VA and talking to other Veterans taught me. Ask for help because if you don't, not that I am saying everyone is going to end up the same, but if you don't, no matter what, you are not going to end up where you want.



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