

Reaching out after deployment

Mark: Hi, I'm Mark, I served in the US Airforce and deployed to Iraq from 2006 to 2007 and I focused on the Counter-IED Mission while I was deployed, and I was an Intel Analyst by trade. While I was out there, we had lost six people that I served with doing this mission and I had to actually respond to one of the response calls where we lost three. Really something that changed your life forever.

While deployed, definitely became a lot more secluded and I really didn't want to interact with anybody, I just kind of wanted to keep my head down and get through the deployment. My life, really from the nine months I was gone total, turned upside-down. Came back to initiating a divorce, selling a house, everything kind of all hit me at once in addition to the grief and shock of all the losses.

Once I made the decision to get out, it was really stressful trying to balance the work obligation that I had, but also trying to find a job, relocate to a whole new city and area and then making the decision where I was going to relocate was stressful, where my family is up north, am I going to stay in Florida? And I basically got overwhelmed, I had an anxiety attack and I felt like I needed to talk to somebody.

In the military, I had a few weekly sessions leading off and then she recommended once I transitioned out to continue and to reach out to the VA and so that's what I did when I got down to Tampa. During your initial transition, you have the temporary kind of focused on the OIF and New Dawn and OEF type of Veterans, you had that hands-on kind of attention and so, I immediately had a connection with the Counselor and felt like he was really being helpful. You kind of felt like it was almost seamless from active duty to the VA treatment on the medical care, the concern, and you didn't feel like you were going to fall between the cracks, that they were really there to help you.

One of the things is that they try to get you to really live more of the vividness of the experience that you had. What were the smells, what were the colors? And, because, I don't know, your brain may just put up a natural defense. I think those type of exercises and really taking it to, peeling it back to the next level, helped, to me it helps with closure. Just hearing your own voice say it to somebody or getting the head nod from the person sitting across from you is some kind of like "OK, somebody get's it" and I don't need to just keep having this conversation over and over or being upset about it. It's how it happened and I have to move on. Over time though, things become less real and you can get past it and not dwell on that and dwell on trying to, in my case, trying to honor their memory. I owe it to them, and I owe it to their families and my family to really savor every day that I have. Part of the therapy for me was finding a volunteer outlet because when your active duty military you're encouraged to be part of the community and there's, whether you're volunteering out in the local community, you've got the camaraderie, too. To find fellow Vets that are passionate and working together you get right back into that positive reinforcement and the taking care of each other.

I would definitely encourage anyone that's having any type of unresolved issues to go down to the VA. If you go down and you meet with a Counselor that just isn't the right fit for you, there are a lot of different people there that can help, but the first step is getting your foot in the door, make an effort, because your whole well-being, your whole quality of life, your whole outlook and perspective has potential of changing and you could really just turn it all around.



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