

## An Air Force officer found strength in support

**Reedy:** Hi, I'm Reedy. I served in the Air Force for 28 years. I was a Colonel; retired as a Colonel and my job when I was deployed to Iraq from 2004 to 2005 was the Director of Logistics to equip all the Iraqi police throughout the whole country. I'll tell you the first time I rolled through the wire I wasn't and still not particularly a religious man but I went to the Chaplain who I talked to, I said, "Look, I'm worried." I really didn't know if I was coming back. I didn't tell my children or my family that I was going outside the wire because I didn't want them to worry but it was nerve-racking.

I had only been back a couple weeks and I was, at that time, stationed in Montgomery, Alabama. I had my family in the car and we were bringing extras, friends of the kids. I rented a Suburban, which is exactly what I drove when I was in Iraq and we got to a traffic jam and next thing I know I hear this, "Stop the car; get out the car. You can't drive the car anymore." And I was basically pushing people off the road; driving down in the medians.

That was the first indicator that, "Okay, maybe something's not right." But then I was stationed in the Pentagon after that and I noticed things like I was just not the same outgoing person that I was. I just didn't want to be in crowds; I didn't want to be around people not knowing what's going on. I became hypervigilant; to this day I still am reluctant to sit in a public place without my back against the wall so I can see everybody coming in.

A buddy of mine who was with me in Iraq got stationed in Washington and I found us commiserating together. At first you think, "I'll talk to somebody, they'll understand." Well, you find yourself reliving it all and then the next thing you know you're reliving it all with a bottle beside you. We both came to the realization that was not helping. So, actually I ended up going to the clinic inside the Pentagon and seeking out help, mental health help. I was stationed in Germany and I, again, sought help over there. Actually there was a young lady who was very good, who had been trained in PTSD and that lasted about six months and it was very difficult because the process they used, they make you relive and tell the story over and over and over and relive those things that you're going through but it helps immensely.

Life is better now because my children have said... my daughters were young when I came back. They were six and eight maybe, I think and they have said, "Wow, what a different person you are. We don't remember this. You're outgoing; you're smiling; you're happy." And I think that's a combination of a couple things but a big one is getting help.

I'm able to enjoy more things now in the public setting. I still like my time alone but I'm more readily able to go out. I don't always have to sit with my back against the wall in a restaurant. I don't always have to see the door. I'm not the poster child but, by God, if I'm out there doing it, everybody should be doing it. I'll tell you this, seeking help did not affect my career adversely at all. I reached the pinnacle; I did what I wanted to do and it was time for me to retire because I was ready to retire; had no adverse impact. If you're seeing this and you're in the military and you have supervisors or superiors who are telling you, "Tough it out; be a bulldog." Please don't listen to them. Please go get help. They're going to chew you up and spit you out and there'll be another marine; there'll be



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another airman; there'll be another soldier, seaman right behind you to take your spot if you stumble and you're not doing yourself any good. Go seek help.



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