

Treatment and hope after Vietnam

Mike: My name is Mike and I was in the United States Marine Corps. I joined the Marine Corps in December of '66. My first tour in Vietnam was in November '67. My first tour was pretty tough. There were a lot of bad situations going on. A lot of death.

My second tour, pretty crazy. I was medevacked out and I was in the hospital down in San Diego. I was suffering from malaria, dysentery, and I went through a lot of stuff, including my wounds. It took me a while to get through it. I knew they were gonna put me out under medical, because I wanted to reenlist and they said "No you can't, because of your condition." I fought a Hearing Board and I stayed in.

I never really got into drugs but I drank a lot. I realized that I had to stop that because it was now affecting the Marine Corps and my duty. So I thought well maybe I better do something. So on weekends and whatever I was doing, I was looking for jobs. And almost 95% of the companies that I went to and applied, here's my military background, here's my application. Same thing, oh Vietnam Veterans, we don't hire Vietnam Veterans because you guys are a bunch of drug addicts. My mentality was you know, I'm just gonna do everything I can to stay in the military man until I find something. That went on for quite a few years.

I was waking up in the middle of the night just horrible. I mean my own screaming would wake me up. I went out a two-story window, landed right on top of my car, just from my flashbacks. Then I started getting mad at everything. Mad. And it was getting worse.

It was right after I come back from the Desert Shield. I ended up back in the hospital again. They put me on a medical hold cause they knew I was done. Couldn't get a job. I knew I had to find something. Just one day I got in my car and it was raining. Driving down the street, I drove maybe five or ten miles, and I was crying. I found this parking lot and I pulled into it, I backed into the stall. And I'm sitting there and it's raining, and it's on the windows you know and I'm just watching it run down the windows. And I'm just like what happened? Nobody wants to hire me. Nobody wants to deal with me.

I had a gun underneath the seat, pulled it out, stuck it to my head, and I'm looking out the window and my mind's going, how many years in combat, in a foxhole, getting over run, you're losing your guys, you're going down. So all that shit you went through. Why do you want to take your life? I couldn't understand it. Why?

Some guy walked in front of me. He walked over to this building. Well through my tears and the rain, I see the side of the building and I really looked at it and it said Vietnam Veterans Outreach Center. I walked up and knocked on the door and the guy let me in and he said, "Oh shit, you need some help dude." That's exactly what he said to me. "Come on in."

I started, I think it was twice a week, going in there and sitting down meeting these guys. One day one of the Counselors he said to me, "I want to hear what you have to say." I started talking about it. That was my biggest therapy in the world. I got it out. I started talking about it. My wife saw the difference. She started coming to the Vet Group and then they created the Wives Vet Group.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**

Thank God that through the talking and the issues that I was dealing with for many years, I realized that you know to me still, family is the most important thing. My children are the most important thing. My family is the most important and my wife. And I realized that if I can't take care of myself I can't take care of them. The biggest thing that will tear a family apart in a second is if you don't get help or at least talk to somebody. Open up, speak about it. You want to cry? Cry. We spend our lives trying to do the best we can do for whatever we have, our children, our wife, our family, to create this. Why do we want to destroy it? The VA has helped me and it has helped me a lot.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

MAKE THE
CONNECTION