

## **Matt faced his challenges head on**

**Matt:** My name is Matt. I was in the Air Force for 7 years. I was stationed at Hill Air Force Base in Utah and Pope Air Force Base North Carolina. I was an aircraft electrician and I deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Coming home from my deployments was...they definitely changed me. When you're that close to death, for example, it does change you. And then transitioning to civilian life is... I'm still having trouble with it. It's a different world.

I do volunteer search and rescue with the Civil Air Patrol. I got a phone call at 4:30 in the morning, July 27<sup>th</sup> last year, 2013. And it was for a civilian helicopter, 5 individuals, and it went off radar around midnight. So, we gathered up at the meeting point and I got selected to take a team into the woods. And we're going along. We're going along. And I hear the guy in front of me yell, "FIND!" And that means that he found either some baggage or he found the actual aircraft. Well, I was 4 feet behind him, and I looked up and straight ahead there was in the...upside-down, no survivors. All 5 were DOA.

The very next day I actually went to the VA and walked in and I said, "Hey, I have an appointment today, but I also would like to see a social worker or a counselor, somebody right away." The conversation with the social worker...that was probably the first time that I really started to shake, and everything started to hit me because it was pretty rough. But we talked about the crash.

She helped me by explaining, "Listen, you got to talk to people. You can't keep it in." And then she gave me a list of places to go if I needed in the middle of the night if I wake up in a cold sweat and I need somebody to talk to and she checked up on me every time that I've gone back.

She brought up that I have a temporary non-combat PTSD. Everyone thinks that PTSD is all combat related. If you say, "Oh, yeah, I have a mild case of PTSD." They're like, "Oh, how many times were you blown up?" Never. It doesn't have to be. And I talked to her about that and she helped me out.

But then she brought up about how I have an anxiety from Afghanistan. I have anxiety working with big crowds and going to places that are fairly packed with people. I'm not comfortable with it. I get really nervous. I get really agitated and pushy and just like I don't want to be there. Almost like claustrophobia. I get a claustrophobic feeling. I talked to her about that and she was like, "Yeah, you definitely have it."

There was a good feeling of, not really a relief, but just a hey, there is something. I'm not...it's not in my head. Something is going on and somebody else that has a degree or has some type of knowledge about it knows and sees it and I can talk to about it and they can try and figure out and get me some help.

I did it while I was in the military when people were like, they're going to write you up and you're never going to go anywhere, and they'll kick you out because of it. I went to them then and then I got out and because of my experience there I went to them again. And it's been nothing but helpful. They help.



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