

Treatment is helping this Veteran succeed

Damon: My name is Damon and I've been in the National Guard for 12 years. I enlisted in 2002, went to basic training at Fort Sill. My MOS is 94 Fox Trot. I fix electronic equipment. Deployed to Iraq, September 2006 until October 2007. Then again I went to Afghanistan in March 2010. Still in the National Guard today. I'm a Staff Sergeant. It's been a great career for me and I'm hoping to make, you know, 20 years out of it if not more.

When I came back from Iraq, I just, I don't know, I just came back, I started back up school again. Tried to finish my degree in chemistry. Just wasn't really myself, but I didn't know why, it wasn't like I was having any kind of nightmares or repeated thoughts or anything, but I just knew I wasn't myself. I couldn't concentrate in school like I had used to. At the same time, I had honed my skills in Iraq playing poker, so I became a professional poker player for three years, and then I deployed to Afghanistan again, came back, made a decision to finish my degree and get a job and everything and that's when I really like came to terms with the fact that when I came back, I couldn't really remember things too well.

I did have like a little bit of anxiety and just a little bit of anger and exasperation at times. I made a decision not to play poker anymore so I could focus on basically having a very productive life with my wife. And so, at the same time I came back from Afghanistan, I was unemployed, so, I'm going through that whole transition. So, it's kind of hard to pinpoint everything, but for me, like the one thing that I really thought was definitely related to Afghanistan was the memory. I also I moved from Pittsburg to Boston, which moved away from all my friends and family. I thought it was worth the sacrifice because I really love my wife, I thought I could make it work and so I decided to go and talk to a Counselor at the VA.

For me with the memory, the thing that kind of made things click and made it say that it was okay was he explained to me how in the military you're programmed to remember things when your under extreme stress. But the flipside of that is is that you lose some of your ability to learn when your not under stress and depending on what kind of environment you are in at one time, it just takes a while to transition from one environment to another. When I study, I like to go into like a white room with nothing there, my cell phone's all left behind, everything, which is kind of hard to do. But that was one of his suggestions was to remain totally off the grid when your focusing on trying to remember something.

The sessions that I went through with him, I think at first it was every week, and then eventually it was bi-weekly and then we had planned to set up something on a monthly basis and I felt so good that I took his e-mail address and I just said, "You know what, if I have a problem, I'll just shoot you an e-mail." but he was always just a phone call away so, that was reassuring.

I didn't have a perfect memory when I was 18, and I certainly don't now but I'd say my memory is pretty much just as good. I remember where my keys are 98 percent of the time. I finished my degree, I finished some courses at UMASS Boston, got a retroactive degree from Penn State. Got a dream job with the Boston Fire Department. I've been on for a little bit over a year with them.



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Been in the National Guard for 12 years. I got a little bit of help. It hasn't affected my career one iota. It's been a very positive experience for me. I would recommend it to anybody. Don't be afraid to get help and sometimes the help or what the solution is for you is a lot simpler than you think it otherwise will be. Seek the help, don't be afraid of it.



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