

Getting back on track through therapy

Jeff: My name is Jeff, and I have spent 10 years with the 101st as an artillery officer. For a good portion of that time I was a year about a year on, a year off back and forth. We started out with the first deployment to Afghanistan and we came back, nine months later I found myself in Iraq for the invasion, and then about 14 months later I was back again, just after Ranger school, and then luckily the next time we had about 18 months and then I was back again for another year.

The first two deployments were not bad, but after a while I think just on again, off again, it starts to wear on you. By the time I got to my third deployment I just I found myself pretty disconnected from my peers, in the middle of the desert really out without any friends, and as stuff became more and more frustrating I used I kind of withdrew more and more. I stopped dating, and it turned into kind of a real mess. I think it was frustration and anger and a little bit of resentment for everybody else, because I didn't feel like it was fair that I was struggling and nobody else was, and nobody else seemed to care.

You know, physical symptoms included, like, loss of appetite, loss of sleep, and it finally got to a place where I had my boss basically screaming at me, saying "Hey, if you can't do this job then you need to let me know," and, finally I said, "You know what? I can't," and from there they sent me away to another camp, gave me a couple days off. I met with some counselors and stuff there and then, just after a few days it was kind of it was good. I was able to kind of get back in and at least get through the rest of the deployment and basically because I was deployed I had to continue to function, so it was really, you know, "Let's figure out a way to keep you moving and then after we get back from deployment, then you can figure out how to pick up the pieces."

I was trying to throw myself into my work, but the more I threw myself into work the less satisfied I became with work and the more frustrated I became with the job in general and it just kind of started...everything I did, no matter what it was, made me disappointed, upset and unfulfilled. I lost my purpose. At one point I thought, "Oh, I want to be a division commander," and at this point I thought, "Why am I even in the Army? What's, you know, what's the point?" I had to kind of find new opportunities and new goals, and it really took 18 months.

Towards the end of that, the last, probably eight months, we were getting ready to go back again and I unfortunately tore my ACL right before deployment, but because I did a specific job that they needed my expertise, I actually deployed on crutches. They said, you know, "Come over with us for a month, train somebody else how to do your job and then we'll send you back and you can have surgery," and when I went back for surgery, back to the States, nobody was there. It was just me. All my friends were deployed and all my family lived in another state and, I found myself alone again, and I said, "You know what? I can't do this anymore." So, I made a list of about 100 different things that I wanted to accomplish in the next six months as I went through physical therapy and one of which was my emotional and mental stability. And I met with chaplains and a couple mental health counselors just to kind of talk things through.

You know, I still to this day have some trouble sleeping, but the VA's been able to help with that, you know, on medication once a month, twice a month, but I've really learned some skills on kind of how to put things in perspective, and how to understand, you



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know, what's really going on, when I have a feeling, connect that feeling to what's causing it, either something real or something, you know, from my past, and then if it's something from my past then I can say, you know, "That's a valid feeling, I know where that's coming from, but you don't need to let that control you."

There's a lot of good stuff out there to use in terms of VA benefits and resources. The best thing you can do is at the moment that you feel upset or alone or, you know, and it's just you and your buddy, talk about it at that point. I mean, that's just the most basic and most readily available type of help. As it starts to escalate more and more, I think the earlier you can get in and deal with it head on and say, "You know what? I'm not strong enough here, I need to get stronger," the better. Just like, you know, soldiers do PT every day or every couple times a week, do some stuff for your mind and your emotions, whether that's go find something enjoyable or take some time to talk.

You're not alone. There's hundreds and hundreds of people out there that have gone through very, very similar if not the exact same things that you have. Just start looking for those people that are like you, because they can help you get through it a lot easier than doing it on your own.



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