

Similarities After Service

Justin: My name is Justin. I served active Army. I was in the 101st Airborne in 6th Ranger Training Battalion, deployed to OIF 3 with 101st in the Sunni Triangle, and then spent the rest of my time down at RTB and then did some private military contracting work in Africa and the Middle East again afterwards.

Brent: My name is Brent. I joined the Army in 04, stayed in until 2012. I was in the 101st. That's where I met this guy and after that I went to 11th Cavalry out in California and the 2nd Cavalry in Germany. Deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. When you're in the military you're spending most of your time either in the field, on deployment, coming back from deployment, whatever. You're always so busy. It's super easy to kind of keep your problems on the backburner so to speak. Yeah, because you don't notice it. You don't have time to notice it. You're just always putting the next foot in front of the other. Then after getting out, I noticed like life just kind of slowed down like immediately. It was kind of like hitting a wall. Like everything because real all of a sudden.

Justin: You don't really realized like how much culture you're establish and how many relationships you've established and how kind of like reliant you are in the social structure of the institution. I mean even your sense of identity in a way is kind of changed because like you walk everywhere and you have these badges on your chest or your rank or whatever and that affects how people treat you.

Brent: When you're in the Army everything's like super easy. You show up at this place, at this time, wearing this.

Justin: Yeah.

Brent: And these are your people and you find them and do whatever right?

Justin: Yeah.

Brent: All of sudden you've got to figure everything out for yourself. Your whole like support structure is gone, your family essentially is gone, you're on your own.

Justin: Yeah.

Brent: And yeah, it can be challenging for sure.

Justin: Like I said, I had the kinetic deployment so I had some like idiosyncrasies after that in regards to like not sleeping well. Emotionally, I would say like disproportionate responses to stimulus and then there was the TBI stuff which is like cognitive, and I found myself like loosing time or thinking I did something and I didn't and then yeah, ultimately that led to a divorce, and at that point with all the stress from the business like in running my own company and that personal life stressor just kind of reached a boiling point.

Brent: I knew my wife before I joined the Army. We had been together for several years prior and then yeah, after a deployment or two then she started saying things like, "I don't even know you anymore. You're not the same person I married." That kind of thing and in her defense, I wasn't.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**

Justin: Yeah.

Brent: My wife at the time gave birth to our son, 3 months before I got out. So, between having a new baby, getting out of the Army, and all those stressors, my dad was diagnosed with brain cancer at the same time. It was just, everything just kind of boiled up at the same time, followed by a divorce and just the kind of like snowball effect of stress and life. Not getting help became unsustainable.

Justin: Owning a business you're dealing with customers and sometimes they get upset, and I remember like one of them got kind like really aggressive with me and it just messed up my capacity to like function for like the rest of the day, and it was just like a thing that snapped, and I drove to the VA, and I was like I need help, like this is like an emergency type situation. They kind of jumped through a whole bunch of hoops for me and I ended up getting my polytrauma case manager that day, and then I ended up meeting my doc soon after that and that it just, like that was how the process began.

Brent: Yeah, I've gone to the VA for care. I've leaned on friends. I think it's paramount to have some kind of support network especially amongst ourselves. When you're in the Army you take care of your own. You look out for each other. When one of your old soldiers calls you up at 3 o'clock in the morning, he's having problems, you're going to be there for him and you know that he would be there for you to. You've got to first maintain the current support structure you've got, the network you've got, your friends, your family essentially, and secondly you've got to get out there in the community and make new friends, make new relationships.

Justin: Everyone kind of builds whatever works for them, like attack the problem the way that you would attack anything else. In the military it's like if you needed to up your PT score you go to the gym, and people look at really strong people in the gym and they're like, "well, how did you do that." It's like I picked up a bunch of heavy stuff and I put it back down again. You know what I mean? And that's legitimately what you have to do with this, and so for me like I found a system that works.

Brent: I have a 6-year-old son. He keeps me going.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**