

Sometimes it's more than a physical injury

Leif: My name is Leif, Army Infantry. I was stationed in Camp Virginia and Kuwait. I was a gunner doing convoy security from Kuwait all up and down Iraq.

During an IED blast a car swerved and we hit a big pothole and just the compression of all of the weight just smashed my spine. I ended up with three compression fractures, full tear in my ligament and then concussion syndrome.

When I got home I wasn't kept on orders. When I got home I was just told wait for your terminal leave which will be two weeks for me and then just go to the VA, they will treat you. When I first joined up my wife was supportive, but then when I got back and she knew I was going to deploy things kind of got a little rough. I believe she just didn't want to be alone. Then when I left she was alone for a long time and when I got home, I guess me being a little bit more angry like just kind of in rage. I think arguments and things just didn't work out. We ended up in a divorce.

My first panic attack I had I was actually still with my wife at the time and we were walking in the shopping mall and all of a sudden my neck just started clenching and I was tripping, just going whoa what is going on. It was an overwhelming feeling that there was like a sniper pointing at me. I was crying, but trying to hold it in, be tough. Then all of a sudden my training took over and I don't really remember much but I guess I grabbed her and we went like a foot against the wall and just went out this back way of the mall.

I was really explosive coming home, getting in a lot of fights, getting really depressed, wanting to end it a few times. I was always scanning, because I was always the gunner up in the front of the convoy. So always scanning on the freeway, I am driving 80 mph because I want to get through the kill zone, I don't ever want to be driving slow. When my girlfriend drives I am constantly being the truck commander, "Jared go, go, go". She gets kind of annoyed sometimes, but luckily she is very patient.

The first two years I drank every single day, morning to night. I was self-medicating, trying to hide feelings and things like that. I had the suicidal thoughts and I just felt worthless, completely worthless like I am not a good dad, my son is not living with me, I am not working... just everything. Then the things that I did over there. I decided to check into the psych ward at the VA. That was a big help because I got to see a bunch of other guys and we were all in the same boat.

When I got into the VA that is when my care really starting taking place. A lot of guys are scared to go to the VA, or they just thought oh I am less of a man, nothing is really wrong with me I don't need to go; but me, I really did have the problems, but going through I learned the process and it was real easy. You go through some warrior transition center and they give you a case worker and then that case worker books all of your office visits. You don't really have to do much, you just call them and they did everything for me.

At first I felt stupid, embarrassed, I didn't want to admit it to people that I was doing it, but once they start helping you and you are in the meetings and you have these Vietnam Vets helping everybody when you go in. They give you tips and tricks and stuff on how to deal with it, but then they also tell you - you have to learn how to live with it.



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