

Therapy helped Alex stay strong

Alex: My name's Alex. I'm an 11 Alpha Infantry Officer with the South Carolina National Guard, Army Ranger certified and served a combat tour over in Afghanistan. We were a security force, so we were attached basically to a Navy Unit and we were just providing security for that element to allow them to go do an engineering mission, surveillance, just everything in that province that they needed security for.

Some of the rough patches that we had, obviously dealing with KIAs and losing some friends. We stick it down just to drive on for the mission. We gotta deal with the problems there that's readily available at our hands.

Coming back from Afghanistan was interesting. I mean, you get that "honeymoon phase," everything's gonna be great, if you're dating somebody, you're gonna be back together, you're gonna see parents, friends, families and it's great. I mean, it's exactly that honeymoon phase, but it quickly dies off about two weeks later and you're kind of thinking, okay, party's over, everybody's welcoming you back and then it's, okay, now I got to get on to the groove and all of a sudden you haven't dealt with some things and some of those monsters are starting to creep up around your shoulder and everybody thinks that you're happy-go-lucky because man, I was just out partying with them the other night.

My brother basically found a couple of alcohol bottles and some cold medicine in the sink at my apartment and was basically asking me, "Hey is everything okay?" And clearly it wasn't because I was having some trouble sleeping and kinda how I was writing that off was I was thinking that I just had a cold and I was going through like two bottles of NyQuil just to get me to sleep and I wasn't sick.

After that, I basically realized that, I needed to go to the VA and really needed to get some help that I couldn't do it on my own. I thought, being an Officer, hey I've dealt with these stresses my soldiers can't see me getting help, otherwise they're going to think I'm weak and not going to be able to look at me for help.

So my Uncle, who was in Vietnam, basically walked me through and kind of guide me, kinda like what we're trying to do now with future Vets, is guide them. We're here to help each other. So he really was the one that kinda walked me through, get me to the OIF Director, representatives and really get some help.

So what the VA did is they basically hooked me up with a good Counselor. We met with him. We got to basically lay everything out and see kinda what career path or what plan of attack was going to be the best thing. Whether if it was gonna be, group or single, one-on-one. It was basically once a week I was going to see, and what we were doing was I believe it was called like Prolonged Therapy or Prolonged Exposure. Yeah, yeah that's it. And that was great because it's just like watching that scary movie. Playing it over and over and it's not scary anymore.

My thing was I had a 16-year-old kid blow himself up in a bazaar. So, crowds of people, the market down here, that would scare me and going to a giant baseball stadium packed, that would probably scare me a little bit, or scare me a lot. But what they did is they started working it out. Okay, hey I want you to go into a small crowd, basically like a little park. Okay, there's not gonna be that many people in the morning and so



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**

basically throughout the day, I would go back at kinda higher times when people would bring their dogs. So, more and more people would be there, so it was kind of a good way to ease me back into it.

For everybody that needs help, I mean I think they need to go there and get it. You hear about it all the time. Ah man you're hooah ranger, you're airborne, air assault, you're all these things. Just rub some sand on it, you're good. It's the wrong answer. We're learning how powerful the brain is, and as leaders we know that's our number one weapon that we have and if we don't take care of it, and that's going to get help, that's seeking treatment, that's talking to somebody about what's bothering you. Hey, you got to keep both physically and mentally healthy.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

MAKE THE
CONNECTION