FLYING HIGH:

FOUR WARRIORS SHARE THEIR CHALLENGES AND VICTORIES IN FINDING A CAREER AFTER SERVICE.

NewsChannel

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PLUS:

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SPRING 2014

SURF'S UP:

FELIX SANTIAGO STARTED A NEW CHAPTER IN HIS LIFE WHEN HE ZIPPED UP A WETSUIT FOR THE FIRST TIME.

WARRIORS TO WORK: TIPS TO BOOST YOUR JOB SEARCH TODAY. A DECADE OF SERVICE.



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A LIFETIME OF COMMITMENT.

WOUNDEDWARRIORPROJECT.ORG

After Action FATURES



WARRIOR PROFILE: Eric DeLion is a man who conquers mountains, no matter the size.

UP AND ACTIVE: "In the ocean you can just let go of everything and live in the moment." **MOVING FORWARD:** Four stories to inspire you into action, no matter the obstacles ahead.

THE YELLOW BIRDS: Author and OIF veteran Kevin Powers explores the lifelong consequences of choices made in war in his debut novel.

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Doctors told Lisa Hopkins her son would not wake up from his coma, but that was a diagnosis she refused to accept.



A DECADE OF SERVICE.



A LIFETIME OF COMMITMENT.

CONTACT 4899 Belfort Road, Suite 300

Jacksonville, FL 32256 woundedwarriorproject.org For more information about WWP and other veteran resources email or call us today at resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org or 888.WWP.ALUM (997.2586).

GOT AN IDEA OR COMMENT? editor@woundedwarriorproject.org

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Dear Alumnus:

"So, what do you do?"

It's usually one of the first questions people ask after being introduced. For veterans, it's a matter of pride to state your branch of service and name yourself as one of the few who swore to protect our country no matter the cost. Putting on a uniform was not as much a job as a passion and one that many expected to pursue for 20 years or more. But what do you do when that dream is cut short?

Inside this issue of After Action Report you'll find the stories of four warriors who regained their passion for life after being injured. For Tad Stuart, it was a matter of quitting a secure job to pursue his dream of flying helicopters again, despite his injuries. BJ Ganem branched off into a whole new field when he discovered his second passion was helping other veterans transition into the civilian world. David Serana used his skills as a combat medic to excel as an emergency medicine nurse. Nicky Norwood is still searching for a job, but he's discovered how to stay positive in the process and constructively fill his time. We hope these stories will encourage and inspire you on your path to success.

This issue also includes helpful tips from our Warriors to Work™ team on how to start your search for employment. If you're looking for a way to get active, check out Felix Santiago's recovery through surfing and the relief from post-traumatic stress disorder he's found riding the waves of the Atlantic. We've also debuted a new department for 2014 called Charlie Mike: Continuing Life's Mission. Turn to page 3 to find out more and submit your own Charlie Mike.

No matter your passion, know Wounded Warrior Project® is here to support your goals and help you succeed.

Sincerely,

Steve Naviding

Steven Nardizzi Chief Executive Officer, Wounded Warrior Project

NEWS AND NOTES $\star \star \star \star \star$

Dirty Ballerina. Electric Eel. Cage Crawl. That's the just beginning of the obstacles coming up this year with Tough Mudder, which kicks off the 2014 season in San Bernardino, California, on March 29th. To view the full schedule visit toughmudder.com/events, but remember Alumni get in free by signing up through Wounded Warrior Project. The weekly Post for your region will have all the sign-up details in advance, so make sure your email is up to date and accurate. If you're not receiving The Post, contact the Resource Center at 888.WWP.ALUM or resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org.

TAKING CHARGE





From left, warriors Justin Howton, Chad Watson, Kim Fox, and Richard Harrison pause for a photo at the 2K Sports Classic benefitting WWP at Madison Square Garden.



Lou Taverez breaks a sweat during an Under Armour workout at Grand Central Station in New York



From left, warriors Amber Pitts and Felix Perez get up close and personal with some parrots while touring Jungle Island during Soldier Ride Key West.



Maria Beltran had barely started walking in a recent 5K race when she decided on a whim to break out into a run. It had been more than four years since a variety of medical issues put an end to her running days and as soon as she picked up the pace her body reminded her of that with all types of aches and pains. But it didn't matter.

"It felt good to run again. It was a challenge and I overcame it," Maria says.

The 5K race in Phoenix, Arizona, was just the latest in a long string of events Maria learned about through Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) and its weekly newsletter The Post. The retired Army veteran uses WWP as a way to network with other veterans across the country and stay active and healthy. And, on occasion, prove to the doctors what can happen when a veteran puts her mind to a task.

"It's good fun and that's what I need," Maria says.

Wounded Warrior Project has dozens of events going on around the country. Learn how to get involved on page 25.

$\star \star \star$ CHARLIE MIKE: CONTINUING LIFE'S MISSION

ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

It sounds like science fiction, but two warriors studying engineering at Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas, are powering a remote-controlled helicopter using only water.

One-half of the duo is James McGarry, a selfprofessed tinkerer who's always looking to improve a gadget or process. The Army veteran served four years active duty, including one deployment to lrag.

Though they never met on deployment, Daniel Arrington, a seven-year Air Force veteran, was in Iraq at the same time as James and stationed at an air base barely a mile from James' forward operating base in Sadr City. Daniel worked in the

maintenance shop, testing the seals and hydraulic systems of aircraft.

Their paths crossed at Midwestern when James put out a general advertisement on a campus billboard for partners in an engineering project. Typically an idea this advanced is reserved as a senior design project, so James, a freshman, put out a request for students with experience. Daniel, a sophomore, was the only person who showed up for the meeting. James knew

him from an introduction to engineering course. "I didn't even realize he was military until we

started working together," James says. The challenge before them was significant. Full-scale, functional, hydrogen-fueled airplanes and cars have been developed, but helicopters represent a greater challenge because of their unique liftoff and flight capabilities.

The helicopter they created sports four different rotors and its bare-bones frame is handcrafted from carbon fiber cloth. The real innovation lies in its propulsion. In the simplest terms, Daniel and James' helicopter is propelled when water is converted to hydrogen gas, which is spread out over a tiny electronic control board. The control board provides energy and directs the lift and direction of the helicopter. Its emission is pure water vapor.

HOW ARE YOU CONTINUING LIFE'S MISSION?

thev ao.



helicopter that flies using water for fuel



WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

James brings his tinkering experience to the project and Daniel contributes his expertise in higher mathematics. Both, however, are learning as

"We basically started from scratch," James says. Their initiative is already drawing attention. They are being considered for the prestigious Lemelson-MIT National Competition as Undergraduate Inventor Team of the year. Their advisor also introduced them to contacts with U.S. Department of State, which sees potential in the helicopter for drought and environmental survey type of work. It's confirmation for Daniel and James that

the work ethic, spirit of teamwork, and can-do attitude they learned in the military is serving them well in the civilian world.

"There is limitless potential for what can be accomplished," James says.

James has his sights set on a career in aerospace engineering, along with using his talents to streamline and improve special operations forces equipment.

Daniel sees a future in Daniel Arrington, left, and James McGarry have built a prototype engineering, wherever it may take him. For him, the helicopter is a stepping stone

> into a successful and productive future. "I joined the Air Force to provide a service," he says. "It's exciting because now I can help the world in another way."

Tell us your story by emailing editor@woundedwarriorproject.org.

CONQUERING MOUNTAINS

Nothing is impossible.

Eric DeLion realized this standing at 14,505 feet on the summit of Mount Whitney, the tallest mountain in the contiguous states. He was sick from the altitude and exhausted from the climb, but persistence had paid off. It was not only confirmation of his physical strength, but motivation to continue overcoming the challenges stemming from a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

"They're both physically and emotionally challenging," Eric says. "The body can handle more than you think, and mentally you've got to be strong, because whatever the challenge is, it's not going to go away without work."

Eric first developed his physical endurance as a star running back in high school. But during his senior year he broke his hand, saw his dreams of college ball vanish, and found a different kind of recruiter interested in him: a Marine Corps recruiter. Eric liked what the recruiter had to say and signed up. He was in basic training on September 11, 2001.

"They took all the guys from New York and pulled them aside," Eric recalls.

"They told the rest of us to get ready. We were going to war."

Eric was attached to an artillery unit for the initial invasion of Irag in 2003, which actually made his tour relatively quiet. Says Eric: "We did a lot of blowing things up from a distance."

His second deployment in 2004 was anything but quiet. Now part of a rifle company, Eric says he lost count of all the firefights, incoming mortar rounds, rocket attacks, and vehicles blown up from under him by roadside bombs. The worst was an

improvised explosive device (IED) that badly burned one of his buddies. Within a month after his return to the states, Eric was transferred to a unit that had never seen combat.

"I couldn't relate to them, and they couldn't relate to me," Eric recalls. "I just needed my guys back."

Eric began drinking heavily, sometimes reporting for duty intoxicated. His marriage began to fall apart. It wasn't long before he was diagnosed with PTSD.

Two years later he left the Marines and met the woman who would become his second wife. She was in the military and the two of them were stationed for several years in Okinawa. Then, in 2011, Eric ran into one of the people he'd seen combat with and the meeting stirred up painful memories and emotions.

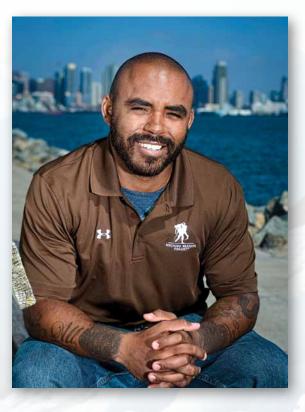
It put Eric back in therapy, where his doctor did two things that changed Eric's life. The first was to explain that the headaches that had plagued Eric since Iraq were caused by a TBI, likely due to an accumulation of concussions from IED explosions. The second was to put Eric in touch with Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) and a physical health and

wellness coordinator.

"My first event was a Tough Mudder competition," Eric says. "Ever since then I've done just about every Physical Health & Wellness event that WWP has," including a climb up Mount Whitney.

For Eric, finding that strength began with WWP, and the knowledge that he is not alone.

"For all those who are going through what I went through, know there's a light at the end of the tunnel. There are always people out there who care and are ready to help."





SURF'S UP

Felix Santiago studies the vast horizon as frigid water washes over his longboard.

Out here in the misty gray Atlantic, there's no need to keep his back to a wall, no loud noises to startle him, no crowds to make his chest grow tight. Just...peace.

"When you're in the ocean you can just let go of everything and live in the moment. You're free," Felix says.

Felix treasures freedom. It was a rare feeling when he came home from his second deployment to Irag in 2006. More often the retired Army mechanic felt trapped inside a cycle of rage and depression. His first weekend back home he got into alcohol-related legal trouble, then again a month later.

Looking back, Felix knows he was trying to blunt the jagged edges of his deployment. He was downrange just shy of a year, but it felt like one long, really hot day, Felix says.

While his primary duties in the Army kept him in the garage repairing Bradley Fighting Vehicles and Humvees, Felix also traveled outside the wire several times a week to recover broken-down vehicles. It was dangerous work, but Felix focuses more on all the times he and his fellow soldiers made the best of a bad situation.

"That's what I try to think of when I go to sleep, the good times, not losing my friends," Felix says.

The bad memories initially outweighed the good times, though. Drinking presented his best hope for escaping them, so Felix used alcohol to mask his pain. Once he attempted to enroll in the Army's substance abuse program, but when that request was denied he saw it as permission to continuing harming himself. Nothing was resolved mentally when he left the Army.

"I really was beyond caring," Felix recalls. "I was in a very dark place."

The sunshine broke through when he met his current wife through the Florida National Guard. She gave him a purpose again and Felix began reevaluating his life choices. It was also around this time Felix discovered Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) and the different events it offered through the Physical Health & Wellness program. One of them was surfing.



"I had zero interest in surfing in the beginning," Felix says. "But the first time I actually rode a wave and discovered that awesome feeling of accomplishment I was hooked."

Felix fed his new addiction with a cheap surfboard and some secondhand gear. He learned the basics of surf gear maintenance through online videos. What really helped him, though, were the free classes he received through WWP.



"That was the biggest thing. I could have bought a whole bunch of surfboards. But without someone to show me how to paddle, how to watch the weather, how to read the surf, it would all be a bunch of waves," Felix says.

Beyond the knowledge, WWP also introduced him to a group of local warriors who also enjoyed surfing. Their camaraderie was a balm for Felix and an assurance he wasn't alone in his struggles to adjust. The highlight of his surfing experience so far was traveling to Virginia Beach with these warriors for a surfing competition. The surf was warm, the waves perfect, the brotherhood sweet.

At one point, Felix surfed three consecutive 20-minute heats. His arms felt like noodles when he got back to shore, but everyone commented on how natural he looked out on the water. The words of encouragement alone would have made the trip worth it, but Felix also returned to Jacksonville with a first-place trophy.

Felix remembers it this way: "Everyone was cheering and having a good time. It was the most fun I've had in a long time."

the moment.



Creating these new, positive memories has gone a long way in diminishing the power of the old ones from Iraq. They will always be there, of course, but when they threaten to overcome him, Felix heads for the ocean. Out there, whether with other surfers or alone, Felix gains perspective and regains his peace.

On a recent chilly morning, the swells were weak and scattered so Felix gave up on surfing and just savored

"When you're in the ocean, you can just feel that limitless energy all around you. That's what I do now: just go with the flow."

WARRIORS TO WORK

I JOINED THE SERVICE RIGHT OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL AND HAVE NO CIVILIAN WORK EXPERIENCE. WHERE DO I START?

View this as an opportunity to start fresh, not a liability. What are your interests and hobbies? What would be your dream job? Our Warriors to Work specialists can help draft a plan to reach a position within your desired career field. They can also provide a realistic picture of the education necessary for the job and the best place within the country to get started within your field. Keep in mind the process often starts with a company or field in an entry position, not a title, until you can build up your résumé. I WAS INFANTRY IN THE SERVICE. WHAT KIND OF JOB COULD I POSSIBLY GET IN THE CIVILIAN WORLD?

Your military occupational specialty might not have a direct civilian counterpart, but the qualities you've developed in the infantry are invaluable. Even the most junior ranks display excellent flexibility, contingency planning skills, and the ability to focus on organizational priorities, goals, and tasks. Veterans are also prized for the work ethic and focus on teamwork they learned in the military. Some of the career fields you should consider include operations, transportation, logistics, emergency services, and manufacturing. Also, bear in mind that ranks of E5 and higher could qualify you for management and director roles in multiple industries.

MY RÉSUMÉ IS A WRECK. CANYOU HELP ME WITH THAT?

Absolutely. Many of our Warriors to Work specialists have backgrounds in human resources and know how to summarize your experience in a format that will catch the eye of employers. We also have a network of professionals who have volunteered their time to review résumés and make suggestions so the résumés will stand out on a recruiter's desk.

-WHERE TO START IN YOUR JOB SEARCH.

HOW DO I MAKE MYSELF STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD?

Marketing yourself through your own personal brand is a great place to start.

Your brand begins with an honest self assessment. Ask yourself, "What do I want people to think about me?" Determine several core values (integrity, loyalty, commitment) that define who you are and promote those through your cover letter and résumé. Your brand should also reflect your capabilities and achievements in the service. Don't just tell what you did in the service, but show the value. So, for instance, if you were a mechanic write: "Repaired more than 100 small and large diesel engines in a four-week period, increasing business productivity by 25 percent."



I'M INTERESTED IN GOING BACK TO SCHOOL. CAN YOU HELP ME WITH MY EDUCATION BENEFITS?

Wounded Warrior Project has a team of benefits specialists across the country who can help you with that. To get in touch with a Warriors to Work, Education Services, or Benefits teammate, contact the Resource Center at 888.WWP.ALUM (997.2586) or resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org.

MOVING FORWARD

FOUR STORIES OF OVERCOMING ADVERSITY AND REGAINING PURPOSE AFTER INJURY. TAD STUART NICKY NORWOOD DAVID SERANA BJ GANEM

EQUIVALENT

Tad Stuart fulfilled a lifelong dream when he flew helicopters for the Army, but a crash in Baghdad seemingly put an end to that career.

Tad Stuart always dropped what he was doing to answer the phone in 2010. This one, he was certain, would be the call that would change everything.

But the calls always ended in rejection: "You don't have enough current flying time; The medications you're taking aren't FAA approved for helicopter pilots; We need more documentation that you're completely healed."

Doubt darkened Tad's mind after every call ended. It wasn't supposed to be like this.

"I was in the Army for 13 years," says Tad. "That's where I wanted to stay for life. It was a great career, but the crash changed all that."

The crash happened in Iraq in December 2007 as Tad piloted his OH-58D Kiowa Warrior helicopter over Baghdad International Airport. Mechanical failure forced Tad to make a hard landing that destroyed the aircraft.

"I never lost consciousness, but I couldn't move. At that point, I knew my back was messed up, but I didn't know to what extent," Tad says.

The final prognosis: complete spinal canal obliteration. Over 12 hours of surgery, doctors repaired Tad's spine with titanium rods, but they couldn't make any guarantees about his future. Tad rejected any notion he would be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. But he was certain his flying days were finished.

After medical retirement, Tad found a job as airfield manager at Michael Army Airfield at Dugway Proving Ground in Utah. Yes, it was aviation related, but Tad felt like an injured quarterback standing on the sidelines. What he really wanted was to be flying again.

When Tad got involved with Wounded Warrior Project (WWP), he met a lot of injured pilots who returned to flying after beating impossible odds. They encouraged Tad to do the same. That's why he did what every winner must do. He quit.



"I quit feeling sorry for myself. I quit accepting that I'd never fly again. And, after talking it over with my wife, Jacqueline, I quit the cushy job that was holding me back," Tad says.

There were many steps to reach that goal. Tad knew he needed to get himself off the medications keeping him from being medically cleared to fly. He needed new tests performed to document his spine was fully healed. He needed letters on his behalf from doctors and specialists. And he needed to get more current flying time.

"Step by step I checked those items off my list, and I kept sending out résumés," Tad says.

After months of rejections, Tad finally got an offer. It was from Helicopters, Inc., a company specializing in leasing helicopters for news crews nationwide, and they weren't offering a polite rejection. They were impressed with Tad's résume but wanted to make sure his skills in the air actually matched what was on paper.

"They brought me out for an interview and for a test flight," says Tad. "Everything went great, and I got the job."

The job was with NewsChannel 5, Nashville's number-one rated news station. His first week was an adventure.

"We had everything happen in the city: fires, police chases, S.W.A.T. team standoffs, multicar auto accidents, you name it," Tad says. "I'm up there in the sky with the reporter and cameraman, and we're all watching it unfold live.'

More thrilling than the excitement of the chase was sitting in the cockpit, fulfilling his childhood dream.

"I'm a pilot. This is who I am. This is who I wanted to be when I grew up," Tad says. "So my advice for my fellow warriors is simple: Figure out what you need to do to achieve your goal and then make it happen. There are success stories everywhere you look. Just know you're going to be one of them."

EXAMINATION

Nicky Norwood slid into depression when back pain kept him from holding a job for long, but an attitude adjustment keeps him moving forward.

Nicky Norwood stood in front of the mirror, taking his first self-assessment in a long time.

It wasn't pretty. He was overweight, unemployed, and doing nothing with his life.

"I looked in the mirror and decided that if nothing changes, nothing changes. I just got tired of living the way I was," he says.

It took hard work and several setbacks to get his life rolling again, but Nicky credits an email from Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) with prodding him into action. The email contained an invitation to a family bowling night at some lanes near his home in Brandon, Mississippi. It wasn't a big event, but the warriors Nicky and his wife met that night changed everything.

"I see these guys that are having all these issues, but they're still living their lives," Nicky says. "They're up and bee-bopping around and that's encouraging."

Nicky went home from that event and took stock of where he was and how he had gotten in this state. It started when he was just 17, with a pregnant girlfriend, a GED, and not much else in the way of prospects. The Army presented his best option.

A few years later he found himself on the front lines of the Gulf War, a forward observer in a scout platoon, fighting the enemy face to face. He turned 20 during that deployment.

"It was close contact. We were within a few feet of the Republican Guard troops we were fighting. It was rough stuff," he says.

He separated from the service after eight years, but reenlisted after 9/11 so he could get back in the fight. In 2004, he deployed with the Mississippi National Guard. During that deployment he was injured when a civilian vehicle travelling at a high rate of speed slammed into the Humvee he was driving. Even though the Humvee was barely dinged, Nicky immediately felt searing pain in his lower back. He had ruptured two disks.

"I was twisted at an awkward angle when I got hit," he recalls, "and that's what did a number on me."

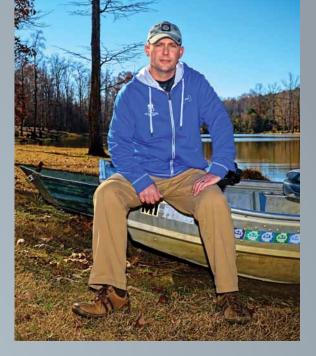
So began a long string of doctor's appointments for

Nicky decided to use his education benefits and

improve his employment prospects. But what he saw from the other students troubled him. He saw them talking in class, whispering behind the teacher's back. The lack of respect shown by the students, combined with the PTSD and the physical pain, led Nicky to eventually withdraw from school. With few job prospects and constant pain, Nicky was feeling desperate. "It was overwhelming," Nicky says. "You get to a point where you wonder whether it will ever get better." It was around this time Nicky received the bowling invitation. Nicky had previously attended a WWP Project Odyssey[®], which gave him his first exposure to the camaraderie with other veterans offered by the nonprofit. Something had to improve, so Nicky went to this local

event, and the life change stuck this time. Today, Nicky continues to search for work and relief

from his pain. But he's got a new attitude, fitness plan, and an opportunity as a WWP Peer Mentor to keep him busy. "I'm never going to be whole again, and there are rough days, but I've got my eyes looking forward and that's what matters most," Nicky says.



Nicky. A diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, primarily from his experiences in the first Gulf War, came next. Finally, in 2009 Nicky was given a chance to separate again. All he had to do was agree to take a 10 percent disability.

"When they dangled the 10 percent in front of me I just snatched it and ran. Big mistake," Nicky says.

Limited by his back and armed with only a GED, Nicky got a job selling cars, but he couldn't stay on his feet for long. He moved on to another job operating a forklift, but that only lasted two weeks because the job required heavy lifting. Other jobs followed, including working on a decontamination barge after the oil spill on Mississippi's Gulf Coast, manning a call center, a food service worker, and transporting veterans for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Each time his back pain either limited his ability to do the job or he took too many sick days to recover from the work week.

EXCELLENCE

Remaining in the medical field sometimes brings backs tough memories for retired combat medic David Serana, but it's a skill set he's used to excel in his civilian career.

David Serana doesn't identify himself to the public as a combat veteran.

If you talk to his co-workers at North Shore University Hospital, they'll tell you he's a hardworking member of the elite medical surgical team. In fact, he was honored as 2012 Nurse of the Year at the New York hospital. Few, though, know his ability to problem solve under pressure was developed first in Army training and later on the battlefields of Iraq as a combat medic.

"I wouldn't have wanted my fellow nurses to treat me differently," he says. "They just know me to be a veteran."

David hesitates to disclose details of his service for several reasons. Part of it is that for years David himself would not acknowledge the traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) he brought home from Iraq. After his discharge in 2008, David refused professional help, shut out his wife, and retreated from life in general. No matter how hard he tried, though, David couldn't escape the violent images and memories from Iraq.

Says David: "I felt abandoned and alone in my own world."

Another reason was the reaction of people when he finally mentioned he served downrange. He was shocked when they demanded gory war stories and asked insensitive questions like "Did you kill anybody?" The intrusive questions brought back a flood of memories for David, whose duties included preparing bodies for transport back stateside. It hit home hardest when David escorted the casket of a close friend from Long Island.

"It was truly traumatic to answer that," David says.

The turning point for David was when two of his best Army buddies committed suicide after returning home. He didn't want to inflict that pain on his family, so he sought professional help from a neurologist and psychotherapist at his local Veterans Affairs hospital.

They helped him manage mood swings ranging from



rage to depression and suicidal ideations. It wasn't a quick fix. People would be talking right to his face, but David wasn't there. He says his mind, in a defensive mechanism to blunt the pain of his memories of Iraq, would simply go blank, like a computer in sleep mode.

Progress was made, though. Community activities brought him out of the house and his brother, a Catholic priest, helped David strengthen his faith. He contacted Wounded Warrior Project, which provided him a network of other injured soldiers who could relate to his difficult recovery and keep him accountable. David also found purpose through obtaining his nursing degree and getting back in the workforce. In spite of the painful associations with Iraq, providing medical care was David's passion. His compassion, calm demeanor, and experience in a variety of medical disciplines, led to his promotion to the medical surgical team at the 19th largest hospital in the United States. He describes his success with more than a hint of pride, suggesting his new team is the "Green Berets of North Shore LIJ."

In addition to the satisfaction of putting his combat medic skills back to work, David says it feels good to provide financially for his wife and two sons again. His work also keeps him focused on managing his PTSD. Treating car accident victims in the hospital is particularly difficult. The injuries these accidents inflict on civilians — broken bones, cuts, and burns — remind David of the aftermath of bombs in Iraq. What David remembers in those situations is he's been given a new lease on life to provide care for those in need.

It's hard to keep it together some days, but David knows he has to keep moving forward. Prayer gives him peace. Work gives him direction. Most importantly, he knows to talk about whatever is troubling him with trusted family and friends.

"Honesty is liberating," he says. "It's how you accomplish life after war."

EXCITEMENT

BJ Ganem had a job waiting for him when he returned home from Irag, but it wasn't until he took a risk and changed careers that he discovered his passion.

It's hard to get passionate about paperwork when you've been in combat.

Sure, a district sales manager position pays the bills. But for BJ Ganem, a retired Marine who earned his Purple Heart by sacrificing his leg, his old job was no longer exciting or fulfilling.

"I always came home from work unhappy, unsatisfied," says BJ. "It reflected on my job performance and ultimately affected my home life."

The stale career was something BJ suspected would ultimately be waiting for him when he woke up in Walter Reed Army Medical Center. He had previously served in the Marine Corps Reserves, but volunteered for full-time duty after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The Corps sent him to Iraq in 2004, where a roadside bomb took his left leg and killed another Marine. It also ended the military career BJ loved.

"The hardest part wasn't even getting injured, it was knowing I'd be taken away from my unit," BJ says. "I wasn't upset about the prosthetic. I was upset about not being able to finish the combat mission."

Twenty-two surgeries led to medical retirement and put BJ back into the civilian job he held during his time with the Reserves. As he made his way through the daily grind, BJ turned to Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) to keep him inspired. WWP sent him to Soldier Ride[®] and cookouts with other veterans. His watershed moment came when he signed up to become a Peer Mentor and discovered a new passion for helping other veterans in their transition to civilian life.

In 2011 he took a job as a veteran services officer with Dane County in Wisconsin. There he helped veterans understand and gain access to benefits while also helping place them in jobs or school. Looking for a more grassroots concept, he moved on to the Semper Fi Fund in 2013. Today he helps veterans write résumés and prepare for interviews. He seeks out veterans

a job.

While he'll never report for drill again or defend his country in combat, BJ has found a new way to fulfill his drive to serve. Today, service is empowering a veteran to launch a business from a wheelchair. It's helping a wounded Marine sign up for benefits or go back to school to start a new career.

BJ has also found a way to help civilians through his work. After the April 2013 bombing at the Boston Marathon, BJ went into the recovery rooms where runners and bystanders had limbs amputated and their bodies burned – much like what BJ saw and experienced in a war zone. BJ and other counselors gave them advice on fitting prosthetics and what to expect in recovery. "This is the kind of stuff that happened in Iraq and

BJ says.

Like he tells his fellow veterans to do, BJ is also thinking about upward mobility. He is working on a master's degree in social work and hopes to open his own business one day. A passion for helping veterans has become its own career path, and he's going to continue helping service members find their own callings. "I was given a second chance," BJ says. "I want to show others there's one for them, too."



across 28 states and helps connect them with funds to repair a home, buy a car, or move across the country for

Leaving a corporate job for a nonprofit meant less money and more hours. But every veteran case he works helps BJ heal as well.

"I took a pay cut going to work for a nonprofit, but it's more therapy for me, too," he says. "I get to meet and work with guys going through the same things. We're all just trying to find our way together."

Afghanistan, and we knew these people were going to need more support than what was available,"



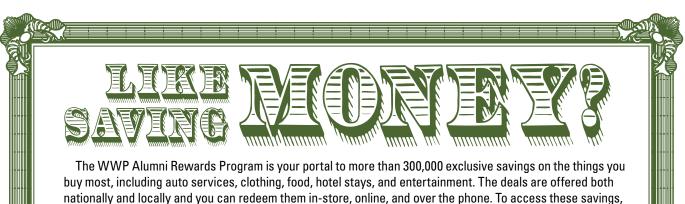
teammates: 15

LOCATION:

2468 Historic Pecatur Road, Suite 150, San Piego, California, 92106

PHONE: 619.981.9642

FUN FACTS: Teammates in sunny Southern California foster a family environment in their office, which sometimes includes spontaneous stress ball battles. They also welcome warriors to stop by and have lunch with the team. More often, though, they are out of the office, soaking up the rays and serving warriors in the community.



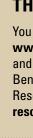
visit woundedwarriorproject.org/login and sign in with your Alumni credentials.

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Asked & Answered

- What employment assistance programs are offered for veterans? Three big ones are Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E), Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVERs), and Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP).
- 2. How can VR&E assist me? VR&E can assist in multiple ways. It could provide you with special accommodations for your job (chairs, ergonomic keyboards, speech-recognition software programs, etc.), résumé assistance, and lessons in job-seeking skills. VR&E can also help you assess your career goals and abilities, find your next job, further your education and skills, and identify places where you can get job training. If you're unable to work in a traditional employment setting because of a disability, VR&E can assist you with independent living services. Finally, VR&E can also help you open your own business.
- **3.** Who is eligible for VR&E services? Service members transitioning out of the military, veterans, and caregivers are eligible for VR&E services. Family members caring for service-connected disabled veterans may also be eligible for career assistance, job training, and other program services.
- 4. What can the LVERs do to help warriors seeking employment? Some of their responsibilities include identifying ish expertunities with federal contractors and

job opportunities with federal contractors and agencies by monitoring employment listings. They're also tasked with ensuring eligible veterans receive





priority in consideration to these employment opportunities. LVERs also assist veterans in federally funded employment and training programs through collaboration with the VA to identify and aid those veterans who need work-specific prosthetic devices, sensory aids, or other special equipment to improve their employability. LVERs can be contacted through your local employment service offices such as the Department of Labor.

5. How is the DVOP different?

DVOP representatives create employment and training opportunities for veterans with an emphasis on service-connected disabled veterans. They provide community outreach services, including supporting employers with veteran training and promoting apprenticeships and onthe-job training programs. DVOP specialists may be located at VA regional offices and VA medical centers or VA-based veterans' outreach centers, state or county veterans' service offices, Job Training Partnership Act program offices, community-based organizations, and military installations.

HOW DO I GET IN TOUCH WITH THESE AGENCIES?

You can start at

www.va.gov/explore/employment-services.asp and by reaching out to the Wounded Warrior Project Benefits and Warriors to Work teams through the Resource Center: 888.WWP.ALUM (997.2586) or resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org.



Marty Gonzalez expected to die in Iraq.

If life was anything like Hollywood, it made sense: he was a retired Marine coming back to fill a combat-depleted pool of non-commissioned officers; his wife was pregnant with their first son; and, most damning, he had prayed to fight in Fallujah.

But Marty didn't die in Iraq, in spite of the enemy's best efforts.

Instead, Marty was sent home to Houston, Texas, with a busted arm, a broken back, a chest full of medals, and a head spinning with the traumatic memories of closequarter combat.

It didn't make sense.

"People were calling me a hero and it was consuming me," Marty says. "I had planned to die, but I didn't have any plans for coming home. I was scared to do anything."

Marty cruised through medical retirement on autopilot, going through the motions of being a Marine and a father with a fake smile planted on his face. The only thing that pierced the haze was physical pain. Therapy for the bullet wound was helping him regain function again. But he was only receiving over-the-counter painkillers for the back injury he sustained when an explosion threw him into a wall.

Back home in the rear detachment, Marty scanned the casualty lists daily to see who under his command was wounded or killed. As squad leader, he often volunteered for the most dangerous assignments and made sure he was the first one in the door when clearing a building. Now, he had no accountability for his men and he took each new casualty personally. At the time, the only resource for

post-traumatic stress disorder Marty knew about was the chaplain's office, and no one wanted to admit they needed help. That signaled weakness. So Marty just faked it.

"My mind wasn't there. If you had looked at me from the outside, you would have thought I was all right. But nothing was in my control," Marty says.

Marty hit bottom in April 2008 when he got behind the wheel of his car after taking multiple painkillers. His son in the backseat was just two years old.

At some point on the drive home, Marty blacked out, struck a parked car, then smashed his vehicle straight into the living room of an empty house. Marty woke up surrounded by the wreckage and his son screaming. "Daddy, daddy, daddy."

"Obviously it was a bad, bad situation," Marty says. No one was injured in the wreck, but Marty was arrested that night on a charge of felony driving while intoxicated with a child passenger. It was the wake-up call he desperately needed, but the cost was high. Such a serious charge carried up to 10 years in prison.

"I realized how stupid I had been. I couldn't believe I had given up on myself," he says.

Marty realized such a serious charge did not deserve a second chance, especially with a child involved. But a reformed Marty was eager to restore his name and prove himself worthy of a second chance.

The day finally came for Marty to stand before a judge and account for himself. Marc Carter, Harris County district judge in Houston, saw no reason to help someone who posed a threat not only to the public at large but to a child as well.

Marty had one chance to explain everything, so he handed the judge a file he had compiled detailing his service, including his three Purple Heart citations, two Bronze Stars with combat Vs for Valor, and a Navy Marine Corps Achievement Medal with a combat V.

He pleaded: "Look sir, I don't know how to explain this. I just gave up when I came home from war. I don't know how to turn my mind off. I've been staying up for nights and nights. I'm not this person, though. What can I do to prove myself to you?"

The judge, a veteran himself, was moved by Marty's sincere plea. So instead of handing down a heavy sentence, he gave Marty two years of intense probation. Some of the conditions included frequent drug tests, regular appearances in court, and complete access to his records from the local Veterans Affairs hospital to prove he was attending therapy.

"I put a lot of pressure on myself to earn my life back," Marty says. "I'm not a felon and I'm not going to let myself be that person."

Marty continues to mentor and counsel the veterans that come through the judge's docket. As Marty puts it, you never go into a firefight alone in the Marine Corps, so why start tackling heavy problems in the civilian world by yourself? Marty witnessed firsthand the improvements in his life by connecting with other veterans who understood what he went through in Iraq.

"There are different twists, but basically they are all the same story, just like mine," says Marty. "The difference is that we have each other now and veterans can connect with each other."

"I understand why people give up. There are so many irritating things in your life, but you've got to find the positive when you're tempted to dwell in the negative."



Marty Gonzalez and his family, from left, Alyssa, Adryan, his wife, Tawnee, and Kaylen.

After his close encounter with the law, Marty volunteered to teach law enforcement and firefighters in Houston and other major cities in Texas how to approach veterans during a traffic stop and communicate with veterans in crisis.

He also serves as an advisor for a free phone service in Houston that connects veterans and their family members with much-needed resources, from job placement to mental health counseling.

"It's cool to be able to do that and know I'm helping a veteran I'll never meet," Marty says.

At home, Marty just welcomed his fourth child, a girl, Emry Pearl. The responsibilities of being a father give him a reason to face each day and keep pushing to make a difference in the world. When he looks at his oldest son he's sometimes reminded of how close he came to losing him and it's a sobering reminder of all he has to fight for. "It's cool to be a father and know you're responsible for bringing them up," Marty says. "I try not to think about it too much, but there are men who never got a chance to meet their kids."

For all he's accomplished, Marty knows how easy it would be to slip back into his old habits. His chronic back pain is a nagging issue and obtaining effective, permanent relief and treatment has been an uphill battle. The memories of the Marines he watched killed in action haunt him at night and there are days the survivor's guilt squeezes harder than normal.

REWRITING the Diagnosis



Lisa Hopkins knew her son's potential. Even when he was locked in a coma and wrapped in bandages, she was certain Josh Sommers would not only survive but thrive.

"At the time they told us that was as good as he was going to get," Lisa says about the eight months Josh spent in a coma in 2010. "But I would do anything to try and get him better."

Lisa was at her son's bedside as soon as she received the news he was injured by an enemy grenade in Afghanistan. Doctors were not optimistic about his chances of survival, but Lisa knew Josh was capable of pulling through and kept vigil at his bedside from sunup to sundown. When his feeding tube was removed, Lisa wheeled him to the aquarium in his comatose state and pointed out the fish and whales in hopes of getting a response.

Josh finally woke up in March 2011 after he was brought to a Cleveland hospital so he could be closer to home. That was the start of a new life for the two, where Lisa became a full-time caregiver and Josh a full-time patient.

Over the last three years, Josh has had to relearn how to brush his teeth, pull on a shirt, feed himself, and other basic tasks. He remains partially blind, deaf, and paralyzed on the left side, but with his efforts and Lisa's round-the-clock care, he has already rewritten his diagnosis.

"For a while there, it was looking like I was going to be a vegetable my whole life," says Josh, 26. "I'm not invincible, and everybody has their (problems), but what I've learned is that I can't give up."



Josh soon requested to be transferred to infantry so he could help his team on the front lines.

Four months into his deployment, Josh was hiding behind a tree to monitor a Taliban training camp when a rocket-propelled grenade exploded nearby.

When he got home, Josh depended on Lisa for everything. She had to bathe him and brush his teeth "just like a baby, but bigger," she says.

With physical therapy, Josh has regained speech and some mobility but still needs help for almost everything. It was hard at first to accept he would not be living the way most men do in their 20s, but Josh says he knew that risk when he enlisted.

"I look at it as a part of life and what happened

happened," he says. "I don't regret joining the military because of this. Not for a second. I wanted to do my country a service. I wanted to be a part of something and get out there and do something other than odd jobs."

The family found some sort of normalcy when Lisa started receiving emails about Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) events.



Part of Josh's therapy is riding a tandem bike with his mom on the country roads around their home in rural Ohio.

Eager to meet people who could relate, they traveled to Chicago in August 2012 for the air and water show. Josh says it was the first time he found veterans who understood his struggles and could share stories of recovery.

The WWP sporting events also helped Josh stay active in ways he never thought he'd be able to again. In the past year, Josh has gone water skiing and cheered for the Cleveland Indians with other veterans.

"It's amazing that they give soldiers like me an opportunity to do things we would have never done before or been able to do, disabled or not." he says.

In October, Josh walked about 1.000 feet for the first time without the assistance of a treadmill. His goal is to be fully mobile in five years and to learn Braille so he can return to his love of reading.

Most of all, he wants other veterans to know hope is out there.

"I want to inspire people," Josh says. "People may look at me and say 'If this guy can do it, we can do it.'"

If you are a caregiver of an injured service member, you are eligible for a wide range of benefits and programs from Wounded Warrior Project. Learn more at woundedwarriorproject.org/programs/alumni.aspx.

BOOK REVIEW

private reflections

The brutality of warfare and its lifelong consequences on a warrior has been a subject of authors dating back to antiquity. From The Iliad and All Quiet on the Western Front to The Things *They Carried*, every generation of veterans has had a fictional book grounded in their experiences. For veterans of Operation Iragi Freedom, The Yellow Birds represents their voice.

The story opens in the fictional city of Al Tafar, Irag, near the Syrian border, where our narrator Private Bartle and the rest of his platoon have been awake for the past four days waiting for orders and engaging in the sporadic firefight. By his side is Private Murphy, a wide-eyed 18-year-old soldier Private Bartle has been unofficially assigned to protect. Author and OIF veteran Kevin Powers instantly draws the reader into the scene with the vivid, yet direct language that is the hallmark of his first novel. When the soldiers' interpreter is shot and killed within steps of them, spattering them with his blood, Private Bartle only remarks: "I was not surprised by the cruelty of my ambivalence then. Nothing seemed more natural than someone getting killed ... I had to see the world with clear eyes, to focus on the essential. We only pay attention to rare things, and death was not rare."

That insight follows the two privates deep into the remaining combat missions of their deployment. What they encounter is not the type of warfare glorified in a John Wayne movie, but the gritty, ugly truth about men killing men. When the platoon circles around a fallen soldier, Private Bartle asks the sergeant who held the soldier's hand to reveal the casualty's last words. The sergeant resists, but finally admits: "He goes, 'Hey, man, check if I sh*t my pants.' Then he was dead." Those images, moments, and, ultimately, the decisions made by Private Bartle and other soldiers follow them home, which is an equally important part of this novel.

Interspersed between chapters set in AI Tafar, we're walked through the somber flight home stateside, and the emotional turmoil that follows in the hours, days, and months following deployment. We catch Private Bartle startling awake over the Atlantic Ocean, reaching for the stock of a rifle no longer slung over his shoulder. His initial time home is spent either in his room sleeping or on aimless walks that inevitably end with him purchasing a case of beer that lasts him a day. One of the most poignant moments of the novel is a long string of stream-ofconsciousness as Private Bartle sits by the river lost inside his head. It begins: "Or should I have said that I wanted to die, not in the sense of wanting to throw myself off of that train bridge over there, more like wanting to be sleep forever because there isn't any making up for killing women ... but then even your mother is so happy and proud because you lined up your sight posts and made people crumple and they were not getting up ever ..."

The novel ends with Private Bartle making an uneasy truce with his thoughts. A reader of *The Yellow Birds* has a variety



of emotions to choose from when he or she closes the book, including sadness, relief, and shock. What's not variable is the enduring respect and appreciation any reader will have for what warfighters of any generation endure.

The Yellow

Birds

Kevin

Powers

Kevin Powers was born and raised in Richmond, Virginia. He served in the U.S. Army as a machine gunner in Mosul and Tal Afar in 2004 and 2005. His second book, a poem collection entitled Letter Composed During a Lull in the Fighting, will be released in April.

To read a sample of the new poetry and an interview with Kevin about The Yellow Birds, visit woundedwarriorproject.org/aar-exclusive.aspx.

ASPARAGUS WITH SHIITAKES, BOWTIE PASTA, AND SPRING PEAS

Early spring is a great time to "go green" in the kitchen. As our thoughts turn to gardening and farming, it's time to turn over a new, green leaf.

In early spring, farmer's markets will put out their first crops of the season – peas, asparagus, and early greens. One of the "greener" farmer's traditions is to plant peas on St. Patrick's Day. The sturdy peas take root in the cold ground and provide the spring kitchen with one of the sweetest green treats.

The following recipe uses three different varieties of peas - sugar snap peas, snow peas, and green peas for a bright, spring flavor. The vegetables are cooked minimally to help retain their bright green flavor and natural sweetness.

Makes 8 servings

Ingredients

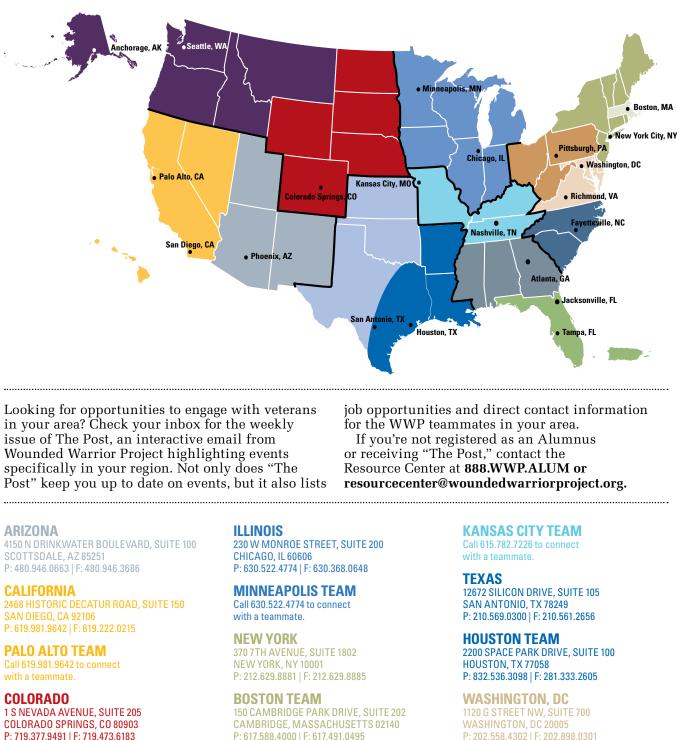
- 3 pounds asparagus, peeled and trimmed 3 tablespoons olive oil Salt and pepper as needed 1 cup snow peas 1 cup sugar snap peas 2 cups frozen green peas 2 cups dried bowtie pasta 1 tablespoon butter 3 cups sliced shiitake mushrooms 3 tablespoons minced shallots 3 tablespoons chopped marjoram
- 2 bunches scallions, split lengthwise, thinly sliced Parmesan, shaved, to taste

Directions

- 1. Bring a medium saucepan of salted water to a boil to blanch the peas and a large pot of salted water to boil to cook the pasta. Preheat the broiler.
- 2. Toss the asparagus with the oil and 1 teaspoon of salt. Place in a baking pan under the broiler, turning occasionally, until tender and lightly browned, about 8 minutes. Slice the asparagus on a diagonal into 1-inch pieces and reserve.
- 3. Cook each type of pea separately in the boiling water until almost tender, about 2 minutes each. Remove them from the water using a slotted spoon or small strainer and rinse with cold water to stop the cooking. Drain well and reserve. (The vegetables can be prepared in advance and held in covered containers in the refrigerator for up to 12 hours.)
- 4. Cook the pasta in boiling water until tender to the bite, about 10 to 12 minutes. Drain well, reserving some of the pasta water to adjust the consistency of the dish.
- 5. Heat the butter in a sauté pan until it begins to turn brown. Add the shiitakes and shallots and saute until they are light brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the asparagus, green peas, snow peas, sugar snap peas, marjoram, 1 teaspoon salt, and a pinch of pepper. Sauté, stirring or tossing, until the vegetables are thoroughly heated, about 3 minutes. Add the hot pasta and toss the pasta with the cooked vegetables and scallions until evenly blended. Add a little of the pasta water to moisten the dish if necessary. Top with shaved Parmesan.

This and other green recipes can be found in The Culinary Institute of *America's Vegetables Cookbook*. or more information on the CIA, visit ciachef.edu





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IN THE NEXT ISSUE: Strength in Numbers