

FALL 2015

# After Action

REPORT



## MAKING IT WORK

John Johnson found his purpose again with the right civilian job. PG 8



# AfterAction

REPORT

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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).

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**Check it out:** After Action Report is also interactive, with video, exclusive photos, and hyperlinks for instant communication. Visit [woundedwarriorproject.org/AAR](http://woundedwarriorproject.org/AAR).

# FACING CHALLENGES



## Dear Alumni:

We all face challenges in life; it's how you overcome these challenges that truly defines you. I'm extremely proud of the Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) Alumni making positive changes in their lives each day and am inspired by each of their stories, some of which you'll read in this edition of After Action Report.

If you've ever worried about finding the right civilian career, you'll relate to Alumnus John Johnson's story (pg 8). He struggled to find the right job while living with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Eventually he reached out to the Warriors to Work® team and is now gainfully employed. He's found his purpose again and feels like he has a new family of co-workers, similar to the brotherhood he had in the service.

Like John, an estimated 400,000 warriors face the challenge of living with PTSD. One such warrior, Frank Sonntag (pg 12), found invaluable support by connecting with his fellow warriors. He also found inspiration in the WWP logo and has learned that becoming the warrior on the bottom – helping to carry your fellow brothers and sisters – is a key part of a warrior's personal recovery. Frank shares his thoughts on this transition in an open letter to his fellow Alumni, offering sincere thanks for your support along his road to recovery.

John and Frank found ways to thrive in the present to create a positive outlook for the future, but some of our most severely wounded need our help to secure their future. WWP is working toward this lofty goal through the Long-Term Support Trust (LTST), an initiative that helps ensure our most severely wounded veterans will receive a high level of care after their current family support members are no longer able to help. This trust provides vital peace of mind to the families involved and is a major focus of our efforts in 2016 and beyond (pg 13).

The LTST will provide significant positive change in the lives of the Alumni who need it, but change doesn't have to be "huge" to be effective. Even something small and simple, like following this month's homework (pg 7) to get better sleep, can have a major impact on your quality of life.

Warriors like yourself are achieving excellence every day, and your progress consistently puts a smile on my face. Thank you for never giving up and always striving to be better. The WWP team will be here to help in any way we can, but it's you who are the catalyst to create change in your life.

Sincerely,

Steven Nardizzi  
chief executive officer,  
Wounded Warrior Project

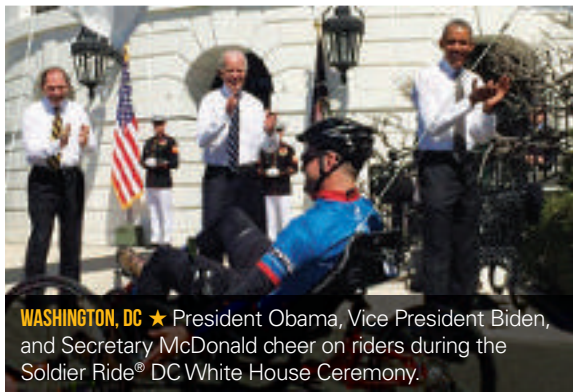
NORTHEAST REGION



WASHINGTON, DC ★ Alumni & Alumni wives compete in paintball during the DC Alumni Summit.



THE WILDERNESS ★ Alumni learn tree climbing skills while working on communication and overcoming anxiety.



WASHINGTON, DC ★ President Obama, Vice President Biden, and Secretary McDonald cheer on riders during the Soldier Ride® DC White House Ceremony.



FALLS CHURCH, VA ★ Alumni get fit during a Physical Health & Wellness event at Title Boxing Club.



POINT PLEASANT BEACH, NJ ★ Alumni enjoying a three-week cooking class at Gourmand Cooking School.



ASHBURN, VA ★ WWP Peer Support and Alumni teams collaborate for a day on the shooting range with WWP mentors and mentees.



BALTIMORE, MD ★ Alumni meet Baltimore Orioles players Tommy Hunter and Brad Brach before a game.

» Wounded Warrior Project has engagement and wellness opportunities all over the country! Learn how to get involved on page 17.



WWP Alumni teamed up with The Mission Continues Jacksonville Service Platoon and staff from Prudential for a service project in Jacksonville, Florida.

Photo courtesy of The Mission Continues

According to a recent survey, over 90 percent of veterans want to continue serving in some way after they leave the military.\* To meet this need, Wounded Warrior Project has partnered with **The Mission Continues** to help provide veterans with more opportunities to give back to their communities. Two unique programs — The Mission Continues Fellowship and Service Platoons — allow WWP Alumni and other post-9/11 veterans to put the skills and passion that were cultivated in the military to good use. These innovative and engaging programs give these dedicated men and women a means to serve their country beyond the military.

A Mission Continues Fellow is a post-9/11 veteran who has accepted the challenge to continue serving at home through The Mission Continues Fellowship Program. Participation in this program involves 20 hours of service per week for 26 weeks at a local nonprofit organization. Fellows are encouraged to choose a nonprofit to serve based on their own personal passions. Current and past fellowship participants have worked at more than 600 unique nonprofit and community organizations aimed at disaster preparedness, education for low-income youth, training service dogs for wounded veterans, and many more. This fellowship is a great opportunity for WWP Alumni to lead a community service project, work alongside other veterans, and inspire members of their community to take action. Participants

will also be able to develop professional skills, network, and learn to translate military experience to the civilian workforce, all while receiving a cost-of-living stipend provided by The Mission Continues.

In 2013, The Mission Continues introduced a new way for veterans to continue serving at home — Service Platoons. A Service Platoon brings together teams of veterans and those currently serving (active duty, Guard, or Reserve) with local nonprofits, civic organizations, businesses, and volunteers for ongoing missions that center around weekly, monthly, or quarterly events to build stronger communities. The mission of each Service Platoon is unique to the platoon and the community in which they are serving. As a Service Platoon member, you may tackle challenging causes in your community like hunger, homelessness, and mentoring at-risk youth. Service Platoons are an amazing opportunity to be part of a motivated team and take on a meaningful mission while making a difference in your community. ■

**If you are a WWP Alumnus/Alumna interested in applying for The Mission Continues Fellowship or Service Platoons, please visit [www.missioncontinues.org](http://www.missioncontinues.org).**

\*Civic Enterprises, All Volunteer Force: From Military to Civilian Service, November 2009

# RISING ABOVE

**Jen Schmid** comes from a military family with an enlisted member in every generation. To continue that tradition, Jen excitedly enlisted in the U.S. Air Force after high school. Her positive experience in the Iowa Air National Guard made an abrupt about-face, however, during dinner with a fellow airman. The man forced her into sex and threatened to ruin her career if she struggled or reported the rape.

Jen believed her attacker's threats. As a gay service member during the time of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," she believed reporting the crime would end her career. Instead, she dealt with the event the only way she knew how. Jen asked for a transfer to the Nebraska Air National Guard and focused on the larger purpose of serving her country. She spent her first deployment in Japan. As a part of the security forces, she responded to military domestic assaults, fights, shootings, and even suicides.

"It was chaos all the time," she says. "The first suicide I responded to made a life-long impression. I had nightmares of the woman for a long time afterward." Jen tried to spend time with friends and relax off base to cope, but memories from the sexual assault caused her to be distrustful of others.

After another tour as a member of the security forces in Germany, Jen was sent to Camp Sather in Iraq, where she worked base security. While there she experienced a persistent, sharp pain in her right shoulder. The pain worsened to the point where she couldn't lift her arm. After two failed surgeries to repair the muscles in her arm and back, Jen was forced to medically retire from the Air Force.



PHYSICAL HEALTH IS A KEY COMPONENT IN MANAGING POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS.

"I felt like a failure," she says. "I went to Iraq with a team, and I wanted to leave with the team. I just kept thinking that if anything happened to them, I'd never be able to forgive myself."

Unsure about her future, Jen researched online to prepare for her retirement. It was during her research that she discovered Wounded Warrior Project. The Alumni program, which provides long-term support and camaraderie through free programs and events focused on physical and mental well-being, piqued her interest.

Jen attended her first Alumni event at the Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, and through that experience, learned the importance and benefits of engaging with other warriors.

"A lot of my strength comes from meeting other warriors," Jen says. "Wounded Warrior Project has really opened my eyes to realizing that I'm not alone. Other warriors live with the same challenges I'm living with, and seeing them succeed gives me motivation. There are some amazing people out there. If I can be half as successful as them, then I'll be just fine."

After such a positive experience interacting with other warriors at the Omaha zoo, Jen decided to attend a WWP Project Odyssey® event, an outdoor, rehabilitative retreat led by trained counselors to help warriors overcome combat stress. Recreational activities — including horseback riding, whitewater rafting, and rock climbing — encourage warriors to make connections with fellow service members, and in Jen's experience, those connections become a lifeline to recovery.

Jen has come a long way since her military retirement and is now giving back as a WWP Peer Mentor. No longer the warrior being carried, Jen has transitioned to the warrior who carries, supporting her fellow wounded service members who are facing challenges she has worked to overcome.

"There is no cure for some physical and mental injuries, like PTSD, but you can get help," she says. "You can make it to the top of recovery, and then something can happen to knock you back down, and that's okay. The number one thing to do is reach out. Pick up the phone, and call a warrior. Call me. We are on this road to recovery together." ■

"THERE IS NO CURE FOR PTSD, BUT YOU CAN GET HELP ... THE NUMBER ONE THING TO DO IS REACH OUT."

— JEN SCHMID, WWP ALUMNA





Growing up can be hard; growing up in a military family is sometimes even harder. In the past 40 years, the terms of military life have changed drastically, which has taken a toll on children of servicemen and women. Studies show that military families experience significantly higher stress levels than their civilian friends. Children are also at a higher risk for anxiety. Relocations, deployment, and the frequent absence of prominent family members are all experiences military families endure together. Service children mature quickly to brave the uprooting and uncertainty that comes with the lifestyle. Unfortunately, this means that some of them never really get the chance to just be kids.

That's why WWP has joined forces with the National Military Family Association (NMFA) to provide support and the experience of summer camp to the kids of military families through **Operation Purple® Camps (OPC)**. The program's title stems from the blending of Army green, Coast Guard blue, Air Force blue, Marine Corps red, and Navy blue to form the perfect shade of purple. Just like its name, OPC blends the families of those who serve by land, air, and sea into a community. Created in 2004, OPC offers refuge, during what can be a tough time, for kids between the ages of 7 and 17.

The camp environments are designed specifically to help reduce stress and anxiety and build self-confidence through physical exercise, targeted learning, camaraderie, and good, old-fashioned fun. The week-long camp is loaded with activities such as hiking, ziplining, and kayaking. Activities vary from location to location, but every camp gives kids



the opportunity to share concerns and fears about deployment and military life in a safe place.

Each year approximately 1,100 campers are brought to camps around the country, at no cost to their parents. To date, more than 50,000 military kids have attended. Thanks to WWP support, contributions from generous donors, and the hard work of NMFA, Operation Purple Camps will host more than 2,600 children and teens this year.

In the past, the program had been reasonably selective to accommodate costs and availability. Due to \$2.5 million from WWP, NMFA was able to expand eligibility to children of wounded, ill, or injured service members.



The yearly application time is during the month of March and priority is given to children who have a parent or guardian who incurred service-connected injuries or illness, or will have a parent or guardian deployed during a 15-month deployment window. Each application is reviewed individually based on NMFA's specific guidelines.

Programs like Operation Purple Camps have proven to reduce the emotional impact that deployment and injury have on the household. Children learn safe coping mechanisms and better ways to communicate with family members in times of distress. The goal is to give them a sense of pride and encourage them to celebrate their parents' service and sacrifice for our nation. We're proud to partner with NMFA in this endeavor. ■

**To learn more about the Operation Purple program and for a listing of camps, please visit: [militaryfamily.org/kids-operation-purple/](http://militaryfamily.org/kids-operation-purple/).**

# WWP IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

## SAN ANTONIO

**W**ounded Warrior Project teammates in San Antonio like to have fun! Join them for great events throughout the year, including family movie nights, casino nights, warrior workouts, and more. With staff from nearly every WWP program, San Antonio teammates help warriors and their families get involved. Stop by the San Antonio office anytime to join in the fun!



**LOCATION:**  
12672 Silicon Drive, Suite 105  
San Antonio, Texas 78249

**PHONE:**  
210.569.0300



## HOMEWORK

The 2014 WWP Annual Alumni Survey found that **sleep disorders** are the most common health problem experienced by warriors. Do you struggle with insomnia, sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome, narcolepsy, or other issues preventing you from getting a good night's sleep? Are you frequently irritable, unable to concentrate, and drowsy during the day? Try these tips from world-renowned sleep expert Dr. James Maas to improve the quality and quantity of your sleep:

- 1. Avoid caffeine after 2 pm, avoid alcohol three hours before bed, and quit smoking completely.** These are the three greatest sleep disruptors.
- 2. Be as active as possible.** Exercising between 5 pm and 7 pm helps bring deeper sleep, but adding exercise to your routine at any time of day will ultimately increase the quality of your sleep.

- 3. Go to bed early and wake up at the same time every day.** The key to getting the optimum amount of sleep your body needs is to set and stabilize your internal clock.
- 4. Sleep in one continuous block.** Napping disrupts the natural sleep cycle, so it's best not to nap unless you truly have to.
- 5. Make up for lost sleep.** Do so as soon as possible by sleeping one extra hour over the next few days until you feel better. The best way to catch up is to go to bed an hour earlier, not by sleeping an extra hour.
- 6. Eat well.** Researchers have found an association between diet, sleep, weight control, and overall health.

Courtesy of Dr. James B. Maas, CEO of "Sleep for Success" and "Sleep to Win!" and former professor and chair of psychology at Cornell University.



This information is intended for your general knowledge and is not a substitute for medical advice or treatment for specific medical conditions. Before trying any home remedy for an injury or medical condition, you should consult your physician.

# MAKING IT WORK

“In the military, you have a sense of belonging,” says **John Johnson**. “It’s like a really big family, except you don’t fight at Thanksgiving.”

It’s a little joke that John has no doubt told many times, but it still manages to draw a wry smile from his face. Oddly enough, it came to him while discussing a very serious topic: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).



“WITH WWP, YOU’RE AROUND PEOPLE WHO GET IT. THEY UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU’RE GOING THROUGH, BECAUSE THEY’RE GOING THROUGH IT TOO.”

— JOHN JOHNSON, WWP ALUMNUS

As John transitioned from his position as an emergency manager in the Air Force to his civilian career, he struggled with PTSD. The anxiety of interviews and dealing with an uncertain future only exacerbated the triggers and fears from his memories in the service.

"I was looking for work for more than 15 months after getting out of the military. I put my suit on, went to interviews, and



WITH THE HELP OF WARRIORS TO WORK, JOHN WAS ABLE TO FIND A POSITION WHERE HE COULD WORK TOWARD HIS CERTIFICATION ON THE JOB.

then went to another one and another one, but the frustration of rejection was overwhelming. You become physically and mentally exhausted from trying and failing to find a job. I was not adjusting to civilian life at all."

To make matters worse, the few jobs John did land weren't positions he believed he was able to perform. He felt hopeless and frustrated by the limitations of his PTSD when above all else, he wanted to provide for his family.

"My very first job after service required me to work outside alone at night, and I ended up in the hospital. I just couldn't take that working environment anymore. I knew that if I stayed, I'd end up in the hospital again, so I had to leave that job."

**"YOU BECOME PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY EXHAUSTED FROM TRYING AND FAILING TO FIND A JOB."**

John admits that the hope and potential he felt in the beginning of his job search quickly dwindled against the battering of interviews, rejection, and ultimately, his health restrictions. As time passed, the pressure to find a job felt like an impossible, daunting task.

"Other people search for the perfect career, which is hard enough, but I also needed a position that could work within the confines of PTSD. After so many months of job searching, it didn't seem like I would ever find one."

John says the worst part was trying to shield his family from all the negativity: "It was hard. The kids were little. I tried to shelter them from our adult problems, but we were barely able to pay the bills. Everyone was doing the best they could, but it got to the point where I was honestly about to give up."

That's when — as John puts it — "I hooked up with Wounded Warrior Project." The Warriors to Work® program really gave John the boost he needed.

"I was actually sitting in the waiting room of the doctor's office when I saw a Wounded Warrior Project commercial on TV. It kept nagging at me, so I went to the website, filled out the online form, and submitted it to them. I didn't really expect anything, but they called me and wanted to help. And I thought, 'Hey, these people really care.'"

WWP helped John search for employment opportunities that were the right fit for him and his needs. An interview with U-HAUL came his way, and it was the first time in a long time that John was excited about a potential job.

"The most equivalent civilian job to my position as an emergency manager in the Air Force is in project management, but I worried that I would be required to work my way up from the very bottom while I earned my certification. The role of warranty analyst at U-HAUL was the perfect match for my military experience and needs, and I could work toward my certification while on the job. I felt like there was finally a ray of hope."

John nailed his interview and was offered the job. He felt comfortable in his new position because of its crossover duties and responsibilities compared to his service position and, according to John,

**"I DIDN'T REALLY EXPECT ANYTHING, BUT THEY CALLED ME AND WANTED TO HELP. AND I THOUGHT, 'HEY, THESE PEOPLE REALLY CARE.'"**

there are many opportunities for him to advance his career.

"U-HAUL is all about their employees, and that's a big deal. I can continue to work toward my project management certificate with the hope of both lateral and upward movement within U-HAUL, so I don't have to go through another job

search. There's multiple opportunities right here. It's not the same family I had in the military, but I finally have a sense of belonging."

None of this would have been possible for John if he hadn't first recognized his emotional issues and sought help through Wounded Warrior Project.

"With WWP, I'm around people who get it. They understand what I'm going through, because they're going through it too. I was so depressed, had it not been for WWP regularly keeping in touch, who knows how things would have ended up. They brought me back from the dark, angry place I was stuck in."

John had such a positive experience with the Warriors to Work program that he decided to become even more involved with WWP programs. He enjoyed an outdoor retreat with Project Odyssey® to help him face some emotional issues he's still



WWP HELPED JOHN OBTAIN A SERVICE DOG TO HELP WITH HIS PTSD.



AS A WARRANTY ANALYST FOR U-HAUL, JOHN FINALLY HAS THE SENSE OF BELONGING HE LONGED FOR AFTER LEAVING THE MILITARY.

working through, including an ongoing battle against PTSD. To further facilitate his healing journey, WWP helped John obtain a service dog.

"My PTSD has gotten a lot better with a service dog. He helps me immensely. My anxiety has dropped to half of what it was, so I'm able to deal with issues so much better than I'd ever been able to before."

In addition to the support he received at Project Odyssey and with his service dog, John says that a major player in his recovery is simply engaging with the fellow warriors he met through WWP.

"A lot of my friends I knew before didn't understand how I'd changed from my time in the military, but my fellow warriors really get it. You can build relationships with people from that shared experience and understanding."

John admits he still has a bad day every now and then, but they are few and far between.

"Now even my wife jokes with me, asking, 'What's gotten into you?' I look at where I am in my life, and I say to myself, 'Man, it's great to be here.'"

## An open letter to my fellow Wounded Warrior Project Alumni:

You don't know me — but in reality, you do. You don't know how much you've helped me, but you did. In fact, you helped save my life and in that process, start a new one.

My name is Frank Sonntag, retired Master Sergeant, United States Army. Like many of you, I went through a lengthy period of time in medical treatment for physical and mental injuries as a result of wartime service. In my case, it was the war in Iraq, but it could have been any war of U.S. involvement — anytime, anywhere.

When I was nearing the finish of my time in the Army, I faced an unknown future while still dealing with issues that would not be resolved for many years to come. Although improved physically, my mental outlook on the future was a blank slate, something I had never experienced. I was scared, even more so than when faced with bullets or mortar rounds fired in my direction by insurgents. I always had a plan and a strategy for the future I envisioned, but when it came time to leave the Army, I had none.

At that time I got the same lucky break as all of you fellow Alumni. Not just some of you, each and every one! I had heard about Wounded Warrior Project for the first time while still at my warrior transition unit. Since they were having an Alumni Summit near San Diego, California, where my WTU was located, I asked — on the spur of the moment — if I could go. Those four days changed my life and gave me a future filled with meaning. I met Alumni who had gone through exactly what I had and were donating their time to help others in the transition from wounded veteran to civilian. They had been where I was and were now enabled to help change the lives of others.

I underwent the same transformation during those four days. Hearing the stories of Alumni — including a cross section of the issues we all deal with — gave me back a spark I had lost. My new life was beginning, and I knew from that moment that I, too, could make a difference. After being carried by others, it was my time to help carry those who would need help through their transition. I dedicated myself to that premise on that day, four years ago.

Since that time, I have been lucky enough to be selected as a Peer Mentor for Wounded Warrior Project. We learn as mentors that it is not about us, but about the person we are mentoring. I have lived by that creed with my mentees, but as any mentor will tell you, giving back has many of its own rewards. My life has meaning. My life counts. And so does yours!

Wounded Warrior Project changes and saves lives. To all Alumni, I say thanks. I feel like I know you all — in the same way you know me — and I am more grateful than words can express. Thank you for my life and the future you gave back to me. I will never stop helping others to find theirs.

— FRANK SONNTAG  
WWP ALUMNUS



## WWP RESOURCE // THE LONG-TERM SUPPORT TRUST



**Kelly Eakins** never served in the military. But her son, Steven, did. On October 20, 2009, as he prepared for deployment, he suffered a catastrophic accident that compromised 90 percent of his brain. Now, six years later, what Kelly looks forward to most are the warm, honest, heartfelt moments when Steven expresses an emotion — like when she sees the, “Look what I just did, Mom” glow on his face after he pulls himself up during physical therapy.

Steven's family was introduced to Wounded Warrior Project when he received a WWP backpack in the hospital. But today, the impact WWP has on their lives goes far beyond that initial backpack. “They are a support system, an avenue leading us in the right direction for finding vital caregiving programs, and a tireless advocate whose desire is to give us peace of mind.”

Doctors refer to Steven as being in a minimally conscious state. Some days he's very alert; other days, barely connected. Caring for him is a 24/7 job. Kelly and Steve's dad, Mark, knew they needed help, but guilt kept them from reaching out for it. She credits Wounded Warrior Project for helping her realize there must be care for the caregivers. “WWP has embraced us,” says Kelly. “I'd feel guilty for any moment of happiness I

**“WWP SHOWED US HOW TO BETTER CARE FOR OURSELVES, SO WE'RE ABLE TO BETTER CARE FOR STEVEN.”**

**KELLY EAKINS,  
CAREGIVER**

The Independence Program helps these warriors live life to the fullest, on their own terms. It's a partnership between the warriors and WWP, designed to adapt to the ever-changing needs of the warrior. The program is a team effort, bringing together the warrior and his or her full support team, while creating an individualized plan focusing on life skills and goals.

The Long-Term Support Trust is an additional safety net designed to avoid possible institutionalization. The Trust is funded by WWP through a mix of investments and life insurance policies, at no expense to the caregiver or warrior. The goal is to empower each warrior to live independently with the highest quality of life and the finest, most compassionate care possible.

Kelly says much of her peace comes through her family's involvement with the Long-Term Support Trust. “The program takes the worry out of something no mother wants to worry about — what will happen to my son when my husband and I are gone. Thanks to Wounded Warrior Project, we know Steven will be cared for with a program that fits his exact needs.” ■



had away from him, but WWP showed us how to better care for ourselves, so we're able to better care for Steven.” Today, not only are they getting needed breaks from Steven's day-to-day care, they're also able to rest easy knowing he will be taken care of for the rest of his life.



**Donna Zephine** knows what it means to adapt and overcome. When Donna deployed to Iraq as a lightweight vehicle mechanic in 2002, she was challenged to get her bearings in a foreign, war-torn land.

"It was different the first time. The war had just started, and there was nothing established. We had to bring plywood to build our own showers and latrines from scratch," she recalls.

When Donna's unit returned to Iraq the second time, she found herself having to adapt in a different way. The mission had changed from building up to covering down, and Donna soon got used to wearing small arms protective insert (SAPI) plates and riding in up-armored Humvees. Though the Army had adapted to warfare in Iraq, Donna found it difficult to acclimate now that rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) regularly threatened their convoys.

When Donna returned to Long Island, New York after her second deployment, the anxiety brought on by memories of those dangerous moments began to resurface.

"I got scared of going over garbage [on the road], because I thought it was a bomb," Donna says. "There is something about holidays, too — firecrackers remind you [of Iraq]."

Despite her struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and physical wounds, Donna was determined to

adapt to her new normal. Though it took her over a year, Donna found a position working in support of veterans and was inspired by the camaraderie she experienced. "Veterans inspire other veterans and when you see that, it inspires you," Donna explains.

She also became involved in sled hockey, a sport that forced her to adapt once again.

"Learning to sled, having to get fitted, and propelling with the sticks plus all the gear, the helmet, the gloves — it was a lot of upper body workout. But I like to challenge myself," says Donna. "Sled hockey helps me physically and emotionally, and also helps me focus. Seeing my teammates' disabilities motivates me to overcome my own."

Soon, Donna found herself enthralled with the adrenaline rush of sled hockey and began finding even more adventures to conquer, like water-skiing, sky-diving, and an extreme adventure race. Beyond the physical trials, Donna has challenged herself to adapt mentally by attending a Project Odyssey® and engaging in regular meditation exercises designed to keep her focused. She also remains involved in sled hockey, suiting up for the *Long Island Rough Riders* in various tournaments throughout the year.

From Donna's point of view, "There are modifications for all types of sports, you just have to have the drive to seek out places like WWP. There is hope for everybody." ■

## DARING TO ADAPT



**DONNA ZEPHRINE,**  
WWP ALUMNA

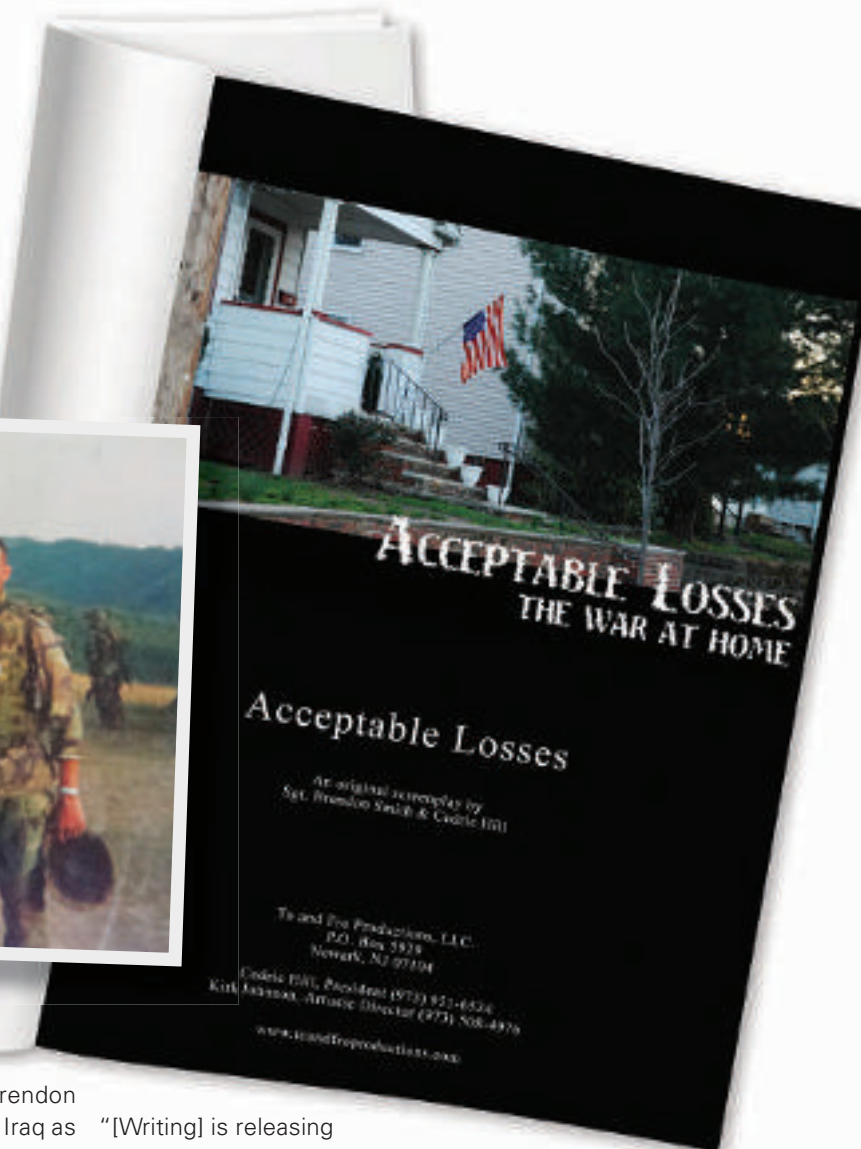
## FINDING PEACE ON PAPER

Inspiration often comes from the most unexpected places, and for WWP Alumnus **Brendon Smith**, his script was no exception.

After spending six years as an active-duty Marine, Brendon was still adjusting to civilian life when terrorists attacked the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. His sense of duty kicked back in, and Brendon drove straight to the nearest Marine Corps Reserve Center to report in. One year later, Brendon and his Marine Corps Reserve unit were deployed to Iraq as part of Task Force Tarawa.

It wasn't long after he returned to the states that Brendon began struggling with the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He and his family were frustrated with the long wait times and lack of communication at his local VA medical center. Little did he know these struggles would lead to a powerful screenplay, which would have a profound impact on his family and his fellow veterans.

Though Brendon hadn't always been a writer, his experience as a theater major — and his love for writing poetry in college — served as a perfect jumping-off point. At first, Brendon began writing three different stories based on his experiences as a veteran. One focused on a veteran who couldn't seem to move forward with his life; another focused on a veteran who struggled with suicide; the third depicted a veteran who found peace and support. Brendon soon found that, through his darkest memories and pain, he was slowly finding a sense of peace he hadn't experienced since his return from Iraq.



"[Writing] is releasing emotions onto paper. You can relive them in a safe environment," Brendon says.

Soon, with the help of co-writer Cedric Hill, these three stories intertwined to become a gritty, emotional play titled "Acceptable Losses." Brendon believed his play might actually help others struggling with similar experiences. He spent several years working diligently to bring his play to the public, and most importantly, to his fellow veterans. In 2005, Brendon became involved with To and Fro Productions and was able to see his play performed at an off-Broadway stage in New York City. Though some veterans found it too difficult to watch, many were amazed at how real it was to them. At last, Brendon's goal of inspiring other veterans through his struggles was brought to life.

Though Brendon acknowledges not every veteran is meant to be a writer, he encourages his fellow warriors to find an outlet to get out their emotions. In Brendon's words, "Face your emotions and embrace them as part of yourself. This is who you are from now on." ■

# EXERCISE YOUR BRAIN

Try cognitive exercises or “brain games,” including puzzles like crosswords and **Sudoku**. Solving these puzzles actually helps stimulate your brain’s function and improves learning ability.

- Each row, column, and square on your diagram must have each number once but no more. This puzzle is 9 by 9, meaning each row, column, and square must have the digits 1 through 9 once — without duplication.
- Analyze the location of squares that are already filled in. If a box has a 5 and 9, you know the box needs the other seven digits to be complete. Look at the diagram in terms of three sections — the top, middle, and bottom boxes in rows.
- Use a pencil to fill in possible numbers so you can erase them if you’re wrong. It’s easier to write “5 or 6” in a box than to remember that the number in that box needs to be one or the other. Use a pen to finalize your answer if you know a number is correct.
- Continue filling in boxes until each row, column, and box has all digits once and only once.

1	2					4	6	
4		9				7		5
	6		2		4		9	
		1	5		6	2		
		6	4		7	5		
	1		6		3		5	
2		3				6		1
6	9						7	3

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## WWP NATION HAWAII

WWP HAWAII has had an eventful year already. Here are some of the life-changing things they’ve done in 2015:



★ Brought a wounded veteran over 2,000 miles from the Marshall Islands to have a brand new, state-of-the-art prosthetic hand and arm installed — only the second of its kind.

★ Went into immediate action to get the best help and support possible for survivors of a V-22 Osprey crash on Oahu. The five survivors now reside at the Warrior Transition Battalion at Kaneohe Marine Base, and the Hawaii team continually checks in to offer any help they may need.



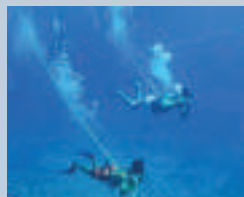
★ Treated competitors from the Army National Guard Best Warrior competition to a private tour of Pearl Harbor.

★ Were invited to attend Defenders Edge, a new customized mental health program designed to help security forces manage combat stress.



★ Had a day on the course when 40 warriors took part in the VFW Golf Tournament.

Being located in a tropical paradise also allows them to engage wounded service members and their families through unique and awe-inspiring adventure experiences. Here are a few:



Speedboat Dolphin & Snorkel Tour



Alumni & Family Support Dinner aboard The Star of Honolulu



Catamaran Sail & Snorkel Tour



Family Support Dinner at the highly acclaimed 12th Avenue Grill

## GET CONNECTED

Looking for opportunities to engage with veterans in your area? Check your inbox for the weekly issue of The Post, an interactive email from Wounded Warrior Project highlighting events specifically in your region. Not only does The Post keep you up to date on events, but it also lists local job opportunities.

If you’re not registered as an Alumna or Alumnus or receiving The Post, contact the WWP Resource Center at 888.WWP.ALUM (997.2586) or resourcecenter@woundedwarriorproject.org.



### WEST

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Call 206.441.7096 to connect with a teammate.

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#### HOUSTON

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### NORTHEAST

#### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WASHINGTON, DC

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#### MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

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**RICHMOND TEAM**  
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### PUZZLE ANSWER

1	2	8	7	5	9	3	4	6
4	3	9	1	6	8	7	2	5
5	6	7	2	3	4	1	9	8
9	4	1	5	8	6	2	3	7
7	5	2	3	9	1	8	6	4
3	8	6	4	2	7	5	1	9
8	1	4	6	7	3	9	5	2
2	7	3	9	4	5	6	8	1
6	9	5	8	1	2	4	7	3



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WWP Alumni pose with Colonel Judith A. Lee, Commander, Landstuhl Regional Medical Center (LRMC), during their trip to Landstuhl, Germany, to thank the LRMC staff and boost their spirits.

Enjoyed this issue? Pass it on to someone you feel could benefit from Wounded Warrior Project programs, and encourage him or her to register at [alumni.woundedwarriorproject.org](http://alumni.woundedwarriorproject.org).

You can also share After Action Report electronically at [woundedwarriorproject.org/AAR](http://woundedwarriorproject.org/AAR).