

On April 10th, 2004 I was injured by enemy fire in Fallujah, Iraq. While my platoon was responding as the battalion quick reaction to reinforce a Marine unit that had come under heavy attack, we were ambushed by an insurgent force of 15 to 20 personnel in a well-coordinated and well executed two-sided ambush. I was hit with an Improvised Exploding Device in the very beginning of the ambush and received shrapnel to my neck. Rocket Propelled Grenade's and small arms were also used by the enemy combatants. Immediately, I began to lay down suppressive fire and then was wounded a second time when a bullet deflected off my weapon and sent shards of metal into my right shoulder. I continued to return fire until I ran out of ammo. I grabbed a M249 squad automatic weapon from one of my wounded comrades while pulling him to a protected position. I returned to my squad's humvee while continuing to lay down suppressive fire to cover the movement of the maneuvering elements of my platoon.

By this time, my platoon had seven wounded in the ambush, so in order to remove my squad out of the ambush, I commandeered the squad humvee and drove four fellow platoon members to a secure location out of the kill zone to access casualties and redistribute munitions. Due to loss of blood, I became fatigued from my wounds, but continued to drive the vehicle to another secure location in order to establish a helicopter-landing zone to extract the wounded. The last thing I remember before losing consciousness from loss of blood was the medic who stabilized my condition and placed me on the evacuated helicopter with my fellow injured soldiers.

After reaching the casualty collection point, I was assessed as an urgent surgical patient. The loss of blood and the severity of the wounds to my neck, shoulder and lungs caused me to enter in to shock. I was then evacuated to Germany for further medical care. When I woke up in Germany, I was without feeling from my head to my toes. A week later, I was further medically evacuated to Walter Reed Army Medical center in Washington, DC.

I arrived in Washington, DC with little feeling in my upper body and paralyzing injuries from my waist down. Within a month, I achieved full control of my upper body with the help of physical and occupational therapy. I was still unable to feel or move anything below my waist. During this month at Walter Reed, I was awarded two Purple Hearts, an Army Commendation medal for Valor and was nominated for a Bronze Star for valor.

Several months later, I met a woman by the name of Genie Lehowicz at Walter Reed Medical Hospital. Mrs. Lehowicz works as a Vocational Rehabilitation Councilor for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Upon our meeting, she asked me if I was not planning to stay in the military, would I like to rejoin the workforce. At this point, all my hopes of staying in military were slim to none. As a father of two, I needed to start to think about my future career options.

Originally, my goal was to stay in the military for the next 20 years and to hopefully retire as Sergeant Major. So it was with reluctance that I came to the conclusion that it was time to take a new direction with my life. By the time I started with the Coming Home to work program at the Veterans Affairs, a year after my injury, I was walking again with the assistance of a walker followed by crutches and finally a cane which I still use to this day for long walks. The program called "Coming Home to Work" arranged for me to receive two new business suits to help me feel comfortable in my new office position. I met with a couple of different departments to see where I could be a good fit for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

With this new direction in working with Veterans Affairs, I was able to do

something that was near and dear to my heart and knew that I could not only make a difference for Veterans across the United States, but also for the soldiers that will be new to becoming a Veteran. I give them the information they need to be successful in their transition to becoming a civilian again in hopes that will be as successful as I will.

I was able to work in a comfortable work environment that would provide all the adjustments to my disability without bringing to much attention to them. With this programs help I am now able to work in the civilian world with the utmost confidence and skills to become successful in my new career goals in the government.