



On his 18th birthday, less than a month after watching the events of 9/11 unfold, Mike Larson joined the Marines. His high score on the entrance test meant he could choose practically any job he wanted — and he chose the infantry. “They go where all the action is,” says Mike. “I wanted to go fight.”

While Mike liked the challenges that came with being a Marine, what he liked most was being in a group of people with the same thoughts, likes, and dislikes. His unit was a brotherhood — which made the events of December 1, 2005, even more traumatic for him.

It was the unit’s second deployment to Iraq in as many years. They were wrapping up a five-day patrol on the outskirts of Fallujah when a chain of buried artillery shells was detonated. Ten Marines were killed and at least 11 others were wounded.

When he woke up in Landstuhl Hospital in Germany, Mike faced months of treatment to help him recover from his physical wounds. He had lost the use of one leg and his right hand, lost hearing, and suffered a traumatic brain injury. It would be a number of years before he realized that he also had severe post-traumatic stress and survivor’s guilt.

“I was in charge of most of those guys at some point and half of my team got killed,” says Mike. “I felt personally responsible for that for years. I took it hard.”

Mike’s anger, anxiety, and depression got so bad that he didn’t want to go anywhere or do anything. His wake-up call came when his wife told him that, if he didn’t get things under control, she would leave him.

A friend talked Mike into going to a Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) event, which he cites as the first step on his road to recovery. “I learned that we all had similar problems and things we were dealing with,” says Mike. He had found the camaraderie he so desperately missed and the motivation to become more involved.

Mike’s new mission became helping other warriors. He landed a full-time job with the Department of Veterans Affairs and plans to lead his own WWP Peer Support Group in the near future.

“WWP has had an impact in all aspects of my life — mind, body, and soul,” says Mike. “And they help you from the beginning to the end. At first I didn’t realize that, and I needed a lot of help. Now I’m at the point where I can help someone else if they need it, and WWP helped me get here.”

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