

JOHN REGO



John Rego decided to join the U.S. Army shortly after high school and reported to basic training on September 7, 2001 – just four days before our nation was pulled into war. His goal from the outset was to be an Army Ranger. “I knew all of the training was going to be extremely meaningful because there was a solid chance I would put it to use,” remembers John.

As it turned out, he put his training to use even sooner than anticipated. His Ranger unit deployed to Afghanistan in 2002 and Iraq in 2003. Both deployments were intense, and John was involved in countless confrontations. In March 2003, he was a part of one of the most iconic battles of the Iraq War – the battle for Haditha Dam. After the dam was secure, John’s team went to clear a nearby building full of weapons that had been used by the Iraqi Army during the battle. But while John was inside, it collapsed.

“It buried me alive,” says John. “Luckily, I was the only one who was inside. My guys spent a large amount of time digging me out. From what I was told, when they pulled me out of the rubble, I was dead. I didn’t have a heartbeat, and I wasn’t breathing. So, right away, they started CPR. Then, because of my injuries, I started seizing and ended up dying for a second time. And they were able to get me going again. There’s no doubt in my mind that I would not be here today if it wasn’t for serving alongside the most well-trained humans on this earth.”

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“I FELL IN LOVE WITH THAT SENSE OF CAMARADERIE – THAT WAS WHAT I LOVED MOST ABOUT THE MILITARY. AND I FOUND THAT I WAS ABLE TO GET THAT FEELING AGAIN THROUGH WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT.”
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John spent a week in a coma, then another two months in the hospital with damage to his right arm, pelvis, ribs, stomach, bladder, and intestines. Shortly after that, he was home. While his body continued to heal, his mind struggled. “I always looked at myself as an injured vet,” says John. “I thought there was no way I’d ever be as good as I once was. That led to weight gain and destructive habits like drinking too much and isolating myself away from others.”

Thankfully, while John was in the hospital, he’d been visited by Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) and was given a backpack full of comfort items. He didn’t even realize he’d signed up to be a part of WWP until he got an email one day inviting him to a Tough Mudder event. “I showed up to the event and there were guys in wheelchairs with missing limbs who were hurt way worse than I was,” says John. “All of a sudden I had to say, ‘wow, I can’t feel sorry for myself anymore.’”

That event led John to get connected with other WWP Physical Health and Wellness programs, like a weekly warrior workout and healthy nutrition classes. Within two months, he’d already lost 60 pounds. “It took me a while to realize that I’m never going to be the guy I was in the military,” admits John. “But I can use what I have to work with to become the best man I can be.”

Now, John puts that mindset into action as a dedicated husband and father of three young children. Though his primary mission is to be there for his family, John still finds time to help his fellow warriors connect with the programs that have helped him so much.

“Finding out about Wounded Warrior Project’s programs comes from doing something small first, like the Tough Mudder I did,” says John. “That first interaction is extremely important because it can lead to a life-changing experience.”



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