



OHF INTEL

Summer 2017

A Quarterly Report from Operation Healing Forces.



OHF past retreat participant, Sergeant First Class Brant Ireland prepares for track events for the 2017 Department of Defense Warrior Games in Chicago, Illinois. OHF will be sharing more about our participation in this year's Warrior Games in the Fall Newsletter.

(U.S. Army Photo Illustration by 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) Public Affairs)

America's Most Resilient Warriors

America's Special Operations Forces have been in a continual state of combat rotations for almost 16 straight years.

Special Operators are often away from home not only during deployment, but spend additional time away from home during training, skills exercises, or attending specialized schools or required classes. It is not uncommon for an operator to spend around 80% or more of his time in service away.

Not surprisingly, rates of divorce, suicide, substance abuse, illnesses, and cancers continue to rise amongst our most fit fighters and their families. Even after horrific post-injuries, more than 73 percent of seriously wounded, ill, and injured SOF return to full active duty

status compared to only 25 percent of all other branches of the military.

Operation Healing Forces has seen the effects of war on the couples that attend our retreats. We've seen how wounds (physical, mental, emotional), deployments, and illnesses can tear apart relationships for those who've sworn to love each other through it all.

We are grateful to all those who give for this healing process, so these elite warriors can repair their marriages, relationships, and successfully return to the fight or transition to civilian life.

"The retreat helped us hit the reset button on our marriage."

■ Active Duty Navy SEAL with multiple combat deployments and injuries

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Gary Markel, OHF Founder

A salute to our SOF couples.

You're about to meet some SOF couples who have taken that all-important step toward healing by attending an OHF retreat. The positive effect we're having on these couples' lives is profound. It was an incredible coincidence that at a recent fundraiser in Naples, former retreat recipient Brant met the parents of the helicopter pilot who evacuated him after receiving an injury that ultimately cost him his leg.

We can never repay these brave men and women, but we can help with their recovery. They are keeping the extremists who would destroy our very way of life at bay. Whether they are healing so they can return to the fight or transitioning back into civilian life, retreat recipients can rely on

their new and expanded OHF support group to guide and encourage them.

Our goal is to raise \$3 million to cover the operational expenses associated with hosting 111 retreats from 2017 through 2019. My brother and I will continue to cover all administrative and fundraising costs. It's the least we can do to recognize them for guarding our nation's freedom and keeping our families safe.

We've met a lot of generous people who are supporting these amazing heroes and their spouses. Each and every gift is important to us, as you're about to read why in these stories. Their ordeals and the outcomes they all experienced at OHF retreats will both humble and inspire you.

Four Retreats, Four Life-Changing Outcomes.

Jonathan and Colleen discovered "what healthy looked like" on their retreat.

Colleen is shown here tickling his hands, even though the right hand has no feeling in it, to help him remember what a loving touch feels like. To date, he has had small spurts of tingling when she does this.



A Special Forces Sergeant, Jonathan was on combat patrol with Afghan Commandos pursuing a Taliban leader in Afghanistan when a 105mm Improvised Explosive Device

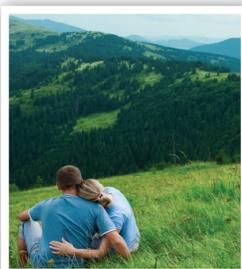
blew up three feet away from him. One of his teammates was killed instantly. Jonathan suffered multiple shrapnel wounds from his face to his legs as well as to his aorta, lost 50 percent of his right hand, and suffers from a traumatic brain injury and PTSD.

The will to rejoin the fight with his team is still strong, which leaves him feeling frustrated, doubtful, and fearful for the future. His wife, Colleen and the OHF team were able to gently urge the couple to go on a retreat, which was something Jonathan was not willing to do with any other organization prior to learning about OHF. After the first few days, Jonathan

began to open up as he realized they were in a safe place to share their feelings. Discussions led to tears and eventually to laughter as they discovered they were not alone.



Navy SEAL and his love reconnect in Vail, Colorado.



After completing six combat deployments and also serving for two years as a SEAL instructor while fighting ISIS in May 2017, Jim was shot in the chest. A hemothorax ensued as his lung and chest cavity filled with blood, and Jim died but was resuscitated. The large-caliber round had grazed Jim's body armor causing additional shrapnel to penetrate his chest also. The round lodged 5/8th of an inch from Jim's heart, and doctors are still trying to determine how to remove all the shrapnel also embedded in his lungs.

An important part of Jim's recovery was a recent OHF retreat to Vail, Colorado where he was able to speak with fellow SOF warriors about their ordeals and spend time away from the hospital with his wife, Jody. Just as important, the retreat provided Jody time to share experiences with other wives whose SOF husbands were in various states of recovery. Still active duty, Jim is under doctor's order to only walk – not run as is part of his training. During the retreat at a Vail ski resort, he was up at the crack of dawn each morning walking up the mountain to get ready to return to the fight.

"This is a great program that has facilitated my recovery so much. As a recent wounded warrior, this even has enhanced my ability to rehabilitate my mental status as well as my relationship with my wife."

Director's Report



Jeff Hudson,
Lieutenant Colonel (R),
U.S. Army,
OHF Executive Director

**You are helping
to win the fight.**

In this Newsletter, we've highlighted a few of our Special Operations couples. Their uncommon valor, both SOF and spouse, possess super human characteristics to persevere against seemingly insurmountable odds and are indicative of the fabric of the Special Operations community.

These real life heroes and their loved ones live by the words loyalty, duty, respect, honor, integrity, personal courage, and selfless service. To them, they are not just words but a way of life—a code.

It is absolutely amazing to witness SOF couples quickly create, build, and bond in lifelong friendships amongst operators, between spouses,

and with fellow couples, which facilitates healing. People may ask, how is this possible?

When tight knit groups share a code, a way of life and have suffered and sacrificed greatly to live by it, they quickly recognize and embrace new friends who've felt similar pains and hardships. Furthermore, the realization that people do care and show their appreciation through OHF reinvigorates our elite warriors and their spouses. Such new bonds strengthen resiliency.

A sincere debt of gratitude to all our OHF donors and sponsors for aiding all our SOF heroes, spouses, and for those we've yet to reach.

Turn Your Airline Miles into Hero Miles

Operation Healing Forces and Fisher House's Hero Miles Program are teaming up.



Dedicate Your Gift To Someone Special.

Many benefactors of Operation Healing Forces choose to make their donation in honor of someone important in their lives. Recently, the following donors have chosen to remember another person through gifts to Operation Healing Forces.

Donor Name

Kirby Montgomery
Mr. and Mrs. Mark Boykin
Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Kahn
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In Memory

Lt. Col. Hunter M. Montgomery; U.S. Army
SSG. Thomas E. Vitagliano
Seth Edward Kahn (WWII)
Major Ronald O. Scharnberg

Donor Name

Ms. Linda Amato
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In Honor

Phil Rapp and Tony Markel
Sidney Ulmer

It's easy. Call or email Desiree Holley to find out how to donate your airline miles and put them to work for Operation Healing Forces.

813-480-6078

desiree.holley@operationhealingforces.org

Thank you for your support of Operation Healing Forces



Comments? Questions?

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Creating bonds that cure.

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