

## Specialist Jason Capps

Good morning Chairman Akaka, and members of the Committee. My name is Specialist Jason Capps. I appreciate the opportunity to share my story with you today. From 1990 to 1993, I served as a United States Marine in the Intelligence field and was deployed overseas during Desert Storm. In September of 2006, I joined the US Army as a Combat Medic to again serve my country in its time of need. Never did I question whether or not I made the right decision to join the Army because I believed in what we are doing for Iraq.

In May 2007, I was again deployed to Iraq with the 3rd infantry Division, 2-69 Armor. My unit had already been deployed in March so I had to catch up to them at FOB (Forward Operating Base) Kalsu. I was thrilled that I had been put with some of the best soldiers the Army has to offer. We had three (3) general duties we performed. For the majority of the time, we were the QRF unit (Quick Reaction Force) that was deployed if a convoy took a hit from an IED or any other United Nations Force that needed our assistance. We also performed other daily missions as well. For three (3) days of each week, we rotated guard on two (2) different bridges (checkpoint 20 and 21). It was on checkpoint 20 where I received life changing injuries.

On June 10, an Iraqi suicide bomber drove a civilian vehicle packed with explosives, equivalent of a 4,000 lb bomb, under our bridge and detonated the device. The bridge along with our squad fell to the ground. Fortunately, our troops that were on the other side of the bridge escaped without any injuries. Out of the ten soldiers that were on our side of the bridge, three soldiers were killed and six of the remaining were injured, including me. Luckily for us, one of our lieutenants was on checkpoint 21 (approximately one mile away) and witnessed the explosion and immediately radioed our location and received no response. At this time, he radioed the Quick Reaction Force on FOB Kalsu and jumped into a vehicle and came to our aid within minutes. We were also blessed to have a UN convoy at our site within minutes. Our lieutenant along with the UN personnel secured the scene and radioed to command the 9-line medivac report. Within 20 minutes, I was on a Blackhawk helicopter heading for Baghdad.

As a result of the blast, I received two (2) spinal fractures, six (6) pelvic fractures and multiple facial lacerations which basically confined me to a hospital gurney for the next week while I was being transferred back to the United States. The medical personnel I came into contact with from Baghdad and Landstuhl, Germany were very compassionate and professional in all of my treatment needs. They also made sure that I stayed in contact with my wife and family everyday to reassure them of my health and well-being. As soon as I arrived in Baghdad, they insisted that I call my wife immediately to inform her in case she happened to see something in the news and become alarmed. My wife relayed the information to my brother and sister as soon I got off the phone with her at 0300 Monday morning. My mother was reading an article in the morning paper about the bridge blast and thought I might have been in that area and was concerned. My brother informed her that I was in the blast but I was stable. By the doctors and nurses making sure that I made contact gave my mother and family peace of mind. I will never forget their attention to detail.

I was originally sent back to Martin Army hospital at Ft. Benning. After consulting with the physicians, we determined that the active duty rehab facility would be the best place for me to

rehab. My wife Darla actually works at a VA hospital in Oklahoma in the prosthetics department. I was asked if I would like to do my rehab in my home town. I telephoned my wife and her response was "NO". Her reasoning was this. The rehab I would receive in Oklahoma would be based on an older generation and not the aggressive rehab that I needed. Our decision was made to do my rehab in Augusta because of the information that we received of the top notch care and resources that were available. Our decision was correct. I never expected the care and compassion that I received from day one at the active duty department.

My daily life now is comprised of physical and mental rehab. My in-house doctor and therapist are always asking me how I'm doing. My problems are dealt with immediately instead of later. I feel that if I'm going through something, there are sincerely concerned with my issue. I had mentioned mental rehab. Our recreational therapist, Dave James, works to no end to make sure that we have recreational events every week. He does this with the help of the community and other non-profit organizations such as the Reynolds Plantation that want to help in our rehabilitation. He sacrifices his own time that he could be spending with family for the soldiers of our unit. There are no words that could express my gratitude to him. The nursing staff is lead by Jeff Beard and is the most caring group of individuals I've ever witnessed in any hospital environment. I can actually say that we are for the most part a big family including doctors, therapists, nurses and patients. Without these professionals, this unit would not be a success story. If it were up to me, there would be a unit like this in every region of the United States. As of Monday, August 20, I no longer require the use of a wheelchair. I believe that I would still be in a wheelchair for at least other two or three months if I would have gone anywhere else. To the employees of the Active Duty Rehab Unit I say "Thank you".

We now have a platoon sergeant and squad leader who act as our liaison between the VA and the Army to make our lives less stressful and help us with our individual concerns. This will in turn take partial load off Master Sergeant Stewart who has been working so diligently to take care of our needs. They can now work together to achieve the goals that are set in front of us. We do have a few issues that need to be addressed to try and maximize our mission:

- There are a number of entitlements that most soldiers do not know about. We could use a specialist in that area who can explain them thoroughly to each soldier that comes to the unit.
- Soldiers, including myself, are having a hard time receiving our personal belongings from theater locations. We are being told that our belongings are in transit but cannot be traced.
- It would be more efficient for us to be able to receive treatment from the doctors who specialize in each individuals needs here at the VA Medical Center instead of being transported to the Eisenhower Medical center for each appointment. We are having a tough time even being seen on base because of the number of soldiers that go through their doors on a daily basis.

There are other small things that are troublesome but everyone from doctors to military is trying to eradicate this situation. From the time I was transferred here, there have been a number of groups and organizations that have come to my aid. Operation Home front, Operation First Response and the Reynolds Plantation are only a few of the organizations that have helped me

since I've been back. Airplane tickets for family, rental cars, hotel rooms and clothing are only a few things that they have helped me with.

Two weeks ago, I was invited to attend a trip to Washington DC to view different sites like the Pentagon, Capitol building, Arlington Cemetery and all of the different war memorials. The part that hurt me the most was going to the Arlington Cemetery and seeing the graves of the soldiers that were lost in Iraq. What made me sad was imagining how many more soldiers will be buried there before it's over. Hopefully, none of these soldiers perished because of lack of care. As for me, my government has done its very best to make sure that I have a full recovery. Every soldier deserves that right to heal with the very best resources we have to offer.