

Jonathan Barrs, OIF Veteran

Testimony of Jonathan W. Barrs before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs,
May 5, 2010

Good morning Chairman Akaka and Ranking Member Burr. My name is Jonathan Barrs and I live in Cameron, North Carolina. Thank you for inviting me to testify today before this committee.

I am twenty-four and served as a Marine in Iraq in 2005-2006 and 2007-2008. During my first deployment in 2005-2006, I was in a turret gunner in a Humvee. During combat operations, I experienced two Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blasts in a period of a week. The first IED detonated approximately thirty to fifty feet from my vehicle. When it exploded, the concussion from the blast slammed me into the turret. Glass from the vehicle became embedded in my head, but I did not think much of it at the time and did not seek any medical care. The second IED blast occurred about the same distance away as the first. After the second blast, the corpsman checked me out. He shined a light in my eyes and asked me what day it was just to see if I was able to stay with him.

Documentation was never given for the IED explosions, but shortly afterwards I was kept off of mission due to stomach problems and eventually taken to another Forward Operating Base because of excessive weight loss and was given steroids to fix the problem.

I was screened by the DOD for TBI and it was diagnosed in November 2008. At the time, I never looked to see exactly how this would impact me in the future.

I was medically retired in May of 2009. The hand-off from DoD to VA was very slow. I have been out of the Marine Corps for almost a year now and I am just now getting care for the TBI. I have also been screened by VA for PTSD and I have been diagnosed with PTSD and depression.

So far, the VA care has been good, but this whole time of waiting was very hard and I had to keep asking my primary care doctor for a consult, which took a very long time. I have a case manager at VA in Fayetteville. Her name is Robin she is a great woman who does everything in her power to help me help myself by checking up on me and rescheduling my appointments when missed and currently helping me change my primary care doctor, because the doctor seems like he isn't really concerned about me, just more concerned about what the book tells him to do.

The honest truth is dealing with TBI is like a living horror film over and over again. Daily things that you know you're supposed to do, you forget. I have missed at least five important VA appointments also others not so important and I missed a job interview because I forgot about it. When you forget, the PTSD side of you rolls around because you knew you were never like this and it makes it very hard for people to deal with you. For example, the relationship I have with my girlfriend. It's been over a year now, but things aren't really right due to injuries that occurred while I was in the Marine Corps and I am still dealing with now I am out of the Marine Corps.

I went to junior college and tried to get through the coursework to get a degree, but I tried so hard and I was still failing tests. The teachers found out because I was in a special populations

group and felt sorry for me and they started giving me all this leeway and saying they will do whatever it took to get me a passing grade. I knew that getting passing grades I hadn't earned wouldn't be the way I wanted to do things. I was only trying to better myself and they were making it hard to do that because they were willing to make excuses for me.

In conclusion, of all things that have been addressed, life for me as of now is very hard because I look for jobs and when the documentation of my Marine Corps career is shown to the interviewer, just the look on their face says it all, basically judging off of what my DD-214 is telling them and when all is said and done I am denied a job just because they see the words "temporarily disabled" on my DD-214. For the time being I am focusing on getting my VA and Social Security squared away and still looking for another career path.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your time and efforts to help me and also other veterans. I will be happy to answer any questions that you have for me.