

Sergeant John Keith, United States Army, Combat-wounded Veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom

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On November 09, 2004 while responding to an insurgent attack on a Battalion convoy, the vehicle I was riding in was struck by a Rocket-Propelled-Grenade (RPG). The RPG struck the driver's side rear door where I was sitting. The blast shattered the femur bone, taking a big chunk out of my thigh. My ears were ringing and I felt like I was on fire. The medics came and took me to the International Zone that is the last thing I remember, I woke up 14 days later. After leaving Iraq they sent me to Langstul Germany, that is where my wife Pam, and my parents John, Sr. and Brenda met me. They were told that I would stay in Germany for two weeks, due to my double lung injury. Within 4 hours of arriving, the doctors told them my lungs were improving so I could be flown back to the states. My wife flew back to the states with me and took care of me. I was taken to Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC). While at WRAMC I underwent surgery every other day on my leg. I was able to keep my leg until Dec 22, 2004. The doctors and I decided to take the leg off since I wanted an active life. After spending 60 Days as an inpatient, I moved to the Mologne House, where we spent the next five months living in a one room hotel.

All during this time I was still assigned to Fort Hood, Texas and maintaining a house there with full utilities. Also, supporting a family of four here in Washington D.C. with food, eating out three times a day, renting a car, gas and purchasing clothing for two growing children was very hard to do on a sergeants pay. We went through our savings and more during this time.

The way I learned about the insurance was through Wounded Warrior Project team I met at WRAMC. Every time I saw them they gave me an update on the progress of the bill. At first, we did not know if it would apply to me because I was injured before the bills were passed. But as time went on, I understood it to be retroactive to the start of the war. I remembered thinking that my government really is trying to take care of my family. Being that I was just an enlisted sergeant in a big army.

After receiving my TSGLI, payment of the maximum payment, due to the loss of my left leg above the knee, being in a coma for 14 days, hearing loss in the left ear, traumatic brain injury, and third degree burns to my abdomen. I was able to replace my savings, pay off most debts, and buy my wife a new van. So, whatever the Army will decide to do with me, either by staying active duty or move to the VA system, let me stay in or let me go I will be OK, We will be OK. I hope the Army will let me stay in to finish what I started.