

SGT Daniel Purcell

Senate Hearing On Veteran Mental Health Issues

I, SGT Daniel Purcell, am a member of the Washington Army National Guard. I deployed with my unit to Iraq in February 2004. Our unit was assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division in Baghdad.

Prior to my deployment I had worked at Boeing, Spokane and was going to school full time to obtain credentials to begin a second career as a medical assistant. At the time of my mobilization in January 2004 I had to withdraw from my college program.

During my tour of duty, I both served as an embedded photojournalist and saw action during combat operations with the 2-5 Cavalry Regiment in Sadr City from March to August 2004, and then I was sent to the 4th Brigade Combat Team area of operation at Camp Taji from September to December.

On May 29, 2004, while on an early morning mission to capture one of Muqtada Al-Sadr's lieutenants I rolled my foot stepping off some stairs and injured my foot severely. By the time we returned to our base my foot was so swollen I was unable to walk and was taken to the aid station. The initial examination and x-ray did not indicate a broken bone so I was given seven days of bed rest to allow the swelling to go down and then I was to report back to duty.

In the months following the incident, my foot never healed properly and continued to plague me while on combat operations. Several visits to the aid station only netted me more IB Profen.

Following my return to Washington State in February 2005, I brought my previous injury to the attention of the redeployment clinic at Madigan Army Medical Center. It was determined that my injury was nothing more than a bone spur despite my expressed concerns regarding the difficulty I was having in walking.

I was told I could get it looked at while using my six months of Tricare Transitional Assistance. In March I returned to Spokane and sought treatment at Fairchild AFB. I was told that I could go but would only be seen on a standby basis only. Without an appointment I opted not to go and sit all day in the waiting room to see if there was a cancellation and they could fit me in.

In April I accepted a job offer working for the Washington Army National Guard at Camp Murray as a military technician. I took this job because for the most part it would put me next to the VA and MAMC where I thought I would have access to medical treatment for my foot. This was a very painful decision because I had already left my daughter for the year I was in Iraq, but now I had to leave again for some indeterminate period.

After assuming the new job, I immediately tried to get seen at MAMC. First, I was told I had to go to the VA. Then when I was finally given an appointment for Podiatry I had to wait three months (May to July).

Beginning with my first appointment in July, I was seen once in August and again in October. In November they finally did a bone scan and had determined what the issue was. When I tried to

make a follow up appointment for a treatment plan, I was told my six months of TA was up and that I would have to go to the VA for further treatment despite my many protests.

For the next year and a half I languished at the VA awaiting treatment or surgery for an injury that was now deteriorating rapidly.

In July 2005 I was referred to the American Lake VA by a Dr. Colson (VA Psychiatrist) for a mental health intake interview. At the time I was experiencing severe panic attacks. Getting the appointment took only days, however, it took four months to actually get a follow up appointment with a counselor. I was eventually diagnosed with PTSD following another six more months of counseling.

Since my return from Iraq in 2005 I have not been able to fully integrate back into civilian society. I place a large part of this problem on our government bureaucracy and its agents.

Though I have been diagnosed with PTSD I have not been able to find relief. I have had to spend, literally, a majority of my time trying to find medical treatment for my injuries sustained in Iraq. I have been bounced from the Army to the VA back to the Army and almost bounced back to the VA again.

I have had to wait, literally, for months at both the VA and Madigan Army Medical Center to be seen just for my foot injury. I have even gone so far as to use my personal insurance and money to get my other injuries looked at by civilian doctors.

What kind of government and its agents vote to send its citizens to war, and all but refuse to treat their injuries when they return?

Why do our elected officials have access to better medical treatment than the soldiers who protect and defend this country with their very lives? But more importantly, why are so many of the same elected officials so grievously unwilling to do the right thing by the same veterans they sent to war?

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