



OHF INTEL

2nd Quarter 2021

A Quarterly Report from Operation Healing Forces

Helping SOF Families Build Meaningful Futures

Dear Friends and Supporters of Operation Healing Forces,

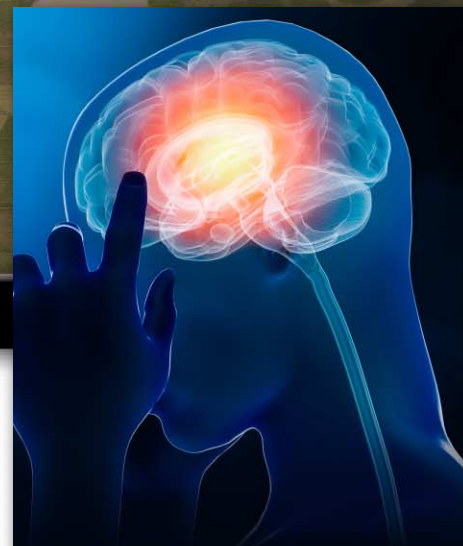
At the midpoint of 2021, the role of SOF across the globe continues to evolve in response to both emerging and longstanding geopolitical conflicts.

Operation Healing Forces is evolving as well, thanks to the remarkable creativity, talent, and generosity of dedicated donors and supporters. In addition to offering an increasingly varied menu of retreat experiences designed to allow more SOF couples to participate, we are proud to partner with OHF supporters and friends to reinforce the ongoing physical, emotional, and financial wellbeing of our nation's elite warriors and their families.

New offerings designed to heal and support the entire family unit include everything from assistance with educational pursuits, to help with medical and dental bills to expert financial planning guidance. Helping SOF families look ahead to a prosperous, fulfilling future is one of the most meaningful legacies we can hope to provide. This newsletter features the important work of one OHF supporter to bring this legacy to life.

As always, thank you for your support of OHF and our vital work to build enduring bonds within SOF families and the broader SOF community. I look forward to continuing to find new, meaningful ways to contribute to the resiliency and wellbeing of the SOF who have sacrificed so much for our nation.

*Very Respectfully,
Gary Markel
Chairman and Founder,
Operation Healing Forces*



“The brain does heal, and service members can come up with strategies to be able to deal with those stressors that have caused them challenges so they can get back to productive lives, as well as get back to the interpersonal relationships with their families and friends that many times are disrupted by TBI and psychological health issues.”

*Dr. Thomas DeGraba,
chief innovation officer
and deputy director of
The National Intrepid Center
of Excellence at Walter Reed
National Military Medical Center*

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TIME WELL SPENT

Brendan and Wendy DeLigio

As an E-9 Pararescueman in the U.S. Air Force, Brendan DeLigio of Pinehurst, North Carolina is a true frequent flyer. But while his 23-year Special Operations career requires regular travel, Brendan and his wife of 22 years, Wendy, rarely have the chance to travel together. Until this April, neither one had ever visited Big Sky, Montana, the site of their Spring 2021 OHF retreat.

Carving out time for a relationship retreat was challenging for the busy parents of two. Last year was especially hectic: During the summer of 2020, Brendan was selected to return to Pope Army Airfield as the Senior Enlisted Leader of his previous special mission unit. "It was an honor and my dream job," Brendan says.

Brendan currently serves as the Chief for a Special Tactics Squadron, his last assignment before retirement. Although he loves his work, taking a break during his final year of military service after over two decades of Special Operations deployments offered a refreshing change of pace. "My schedule is crazy, and this was an incredible chance for me to get away and hang out with my wife and do something for us," Brendan says.

The retreat involved plenty of time under Montana's famously blue skies. Most notable, however, was what the agenda did not include. "There's no 'mandatory fun,' counseling, or activities," says Brendan. "You do what you need to as a couple to be together."

Brendan and Wendy learned about OHF through the USSOCOM Care Coalition, and plan to spread the word to other SOF couples, both active duty and retired.



"The people involved in OHF are totally committed and dedicated and it shows. They take care of you," he says. "Thank you for such a wonderful opportunity. It was a worthwhile time for reconnecting. It is absolutely valuable; please continue to advocate for SOF couples like you do."



Charles and Christy Wentzell on Scrub Island.

BUILDING BONDS

Charles and Christy Wentzell

Chuck Wentzell, a longtime Special Operator with the Army, never expected to meet his spouse during a deployment. After joining the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Chuck deployed five times in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, and Operation Inherent Resolve. During one of those deployments in 2011, he connected with Christy, a police officer, via a friend's online introduction.

The couple married in 2013 and have three children together. Between the pace of SOF life and the demands of parenthood and work, they don't often get the chance to connect with other SOF couples. When the couple was invited to attend the recent OHF retreat on Scrub Island, one of the British Virgin Islands, Christy was initially hesitant about the idea of spending so much time with the other retreat attendees.

"At first I thought it might be more like a group therapy session, and that we'd be forced to 'bond' with other couples," she says. "But I was really pleasantly surprised. We actually enjoyed every couple there and found ourselves wanting to

build those relationships."

While Chuck and Christy found plenty of time to connect as a couple, they also made time to build lasting friendships with their fellow retreat attendees. One of their favorite memories from the retreat is a group dinner and bonfire on the beach, Christy says. "The friendships never felt forced. We built these bonds with the other couples because we shared so many similar life experiences."

Post-retreat, the couples remain in touch. "The wives have our own group text thread, and we can just joke and laugh together," says Christy. "We can talk about stuff our husbands aren't interested in!"

For Chuck, the opportunity to attend an OHF retreat offered a chance to thank Christy for her steadfast support of his Special Operations work. "My military career has taken precedence over her career goals and aspirations. Since the beginning, she has given up so much to be with me and is the one who holds down the fort when I'm gone—and when I'm home too," he says.

"I just truly want to express our deepest appreciation to the donors for this experience," notes Christy. "With military life, we would never have had this type of opportunity to take this trip. To be able to experience Scrub Island was truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and something we will never forget."



Charles and Christy Wentzell with their fellow Scrub Island retreat attendees.



*Carl Rousch and YuYa Wyne
in Pensacola, Florida.*

ROYAL TREATMENT

Carl Rousch and YuYa Wyne

parasailing and jet skiing, and the free time to just relax,” says YuYa. “It was probably the best couples experience we could have had.”

Program manager and retreat lead Billy DeLong of OHF set the tone for a week focused on restoration.

“What I appreciated most was the flexibility,” says Carl. “Billy is the absolute best and embodies every single bit of what OHF stands for.”

Adding to their young family during a global pandemic made 2020 an eventful, memorable year for Carl Rousch and YuYa Wyne of North Carolina. After sustaining multiple injuries over nearly a decade of service with Army Special Forces, Carl was accustomed to a brisk operations tempo with little time for recovery. Now the parents of seven-month-old Inzali Ella, time for reflection and relaxation have all but evaporated for the pair.

When the couple received an invitation to attend the OHF retreat in Pensacola, Florida in April 2021, the offer seemed almost too good to be true. While most marriage retreats available to military couples have a structured therapeutic itinerary, this one focused more on building authentic bonds and meaningful memories. “I loved

The unexpected reprieve from daily life helped the couple begin to transition into their next phase—military retirement. “This meant the world to us. We’re having a very rough couple of years, and we didn’t know how badly we needed this and how much it would help us,” says Carl. “For just a few days we got to catch our breath and let our brains and bodies rest.”

Married for two years, the couple looks forward to giving back to OHF as a way to pay forward the gift of unconditional, unwavering support. “This is a wonderful organization with a huge heart and incredible purpose,” says Carl. “Thank you for including us in your family!”



Josh and Brianna Vanderpool with their children.

For Josh Vanderpool, a critical skills operator with the United States Marine Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC), 2021 has been full of surprises. In March, he returned from a six-month deployment in the Philippines, just in time to prepare for another adventure. In April, Josh and his wife Brianna attended a restorative OHF retreat in Big Sky, Montana for a long-overdue chance to rest and reconnect.

When the retreat ended, however, real life reemerged. Later that month, Josh and Brianna found themselves triaging multiple home and car repairs. “Our drain clogged, and our dishwasher stopped working. We felt like our house was, basically, falling apart,” says Josh. “On top of that, our car and truck needed repairs. It felt like everything was just imploding.”

That same week, Josh received an email from OHF SOAR Program Manager Stephanie DeZern. The friendly note welcomed new OHF couples and introduced the organization’s programs for alumni, including its Immediate Needs program offering swift, flexible support for SOF families.

The message couldn’t have arrived at a better time, says Josh. “We wanted more information about possibly getting help with our daughter’s orthodontic bill, so I set up a call with Stephanie. She ended up telling me that OHF could help with the repair bills, too. I’m still just really floored.”

The Immediate Needs program lived up to its name: help was swift and seamless. “Stephanie said, ‘Tell your wife to stop worrying and send me the bills.’ They took care of our washer repair bill and the car and truck bills, and we’re in the process of getting help with the orthodontics bill,” says Josh.

Josh is grateful for the help—and even more grateful for the impact on Brianna’s stress level.

HOME FRONT

The Vanderpool Family

“The wives do so much in our organization, when we leave and when we come home. We don’t have our parents nearby, and we don’t ask for help. To have someone like Stephanie reach out with complete empathy, it’s obvious that this organization is run by people who understand military life,” he says. “We can’t say thank you enough.”

BY DEGREES

Eric Hayes

"I joined the military right after September 11, and it's very humbling to know that there are private citizens who are so appreciative of military service. I think it speaks volumes about the kind of moral standards our country still has."

After nearly 20 years of military service, Eric Hayes of Virginia Beach, Virginia, is preparing for his next life stage. When he encountered unexpected barriers to post-graduate education, the OHF Immediate Needs Program stepped in to help.

A newly minted graduate of Norwich University, Eric recently completed a bachelor's degree in defense analysis. Having used his military sponsored tuition assistance to pay for his undergraduate degree, he was searching for scholarship options for pre-MBA certificate programs to help prepare for enrollment in graduate business school. "Then I learned that scholarships don't cover these types of programs, so I was kind of stuck," he says.

A military colleague referred Eric to OHF's Immediate Needs program. Right away, the program provided assistance to pay Eric's pre-MBA coursework. "We're a single income family and we have three children, and it's a struggle to pay for furthering my education. Without an organization like this, it wouldn't have been possible," he says.

Eric plans to pursue a career in the private sector after earning his graduate degree. Knowing that OHF donors support his ongoing professional development is tremendously gratifying, he says. "I joined the military right after September 11, and it's very humbling to know that there are private citizens who are so appreciative of military service. I think it speaks volumes about the kind of moral standards our country still has."



DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Alex Valdes Financial Advisor, Merrill Lynch Private Wealth Management

Sharing her time and expertise to help Special Operations Forces couples plan for retirement is one way Alex Valdes gives back to the military community. "Everybody has their different specialties. I speak the financial language, so that's what I can share. They're keeping our nation safe, and I'm helping them plan for their retirement," says Valdes, a financial advisor with Merrill Lynch Private Wealth Management in Tampa, Florida.

Alex learned about OHF through a client in July of 2019. Soon after, she began working with OHF Executive Director Jeff Hudson to develop financial planning services for couples involved with the organization, free of charge.

Over the course of several meetings, Alex helps couples assess their current financial situation and build a plan for the future. "We start with a wealth outlook worksheet, which helps me begin to put together a retirement plan for the couples," she says. "We look at where they are today, and what they're planning on spending in retirement, to begin the process."

Working with each couple individually allows Alex to get to know them and hear their unique stories, she says.

"I always start out our first meeting by asking to hear about their story. It's not just about giving them a financial plan; it's about building more of a connection. I want to hear what the military meant to them."



OHF Supporter Alex Valdes

So far, Alex has worked with over a dozen couples with the assistance of her Merrill Lynch colleagues. Witnessing the relief that couples experience after completing the process is extremely rewarding, she says. "When I present the plan, I can feel the relief they feel. They can see the light at the end of the tunnel, because they feel that they can not only take care of themselves, but the next generation.

"It's been a wonderful experience, and I'm proud to work with this organization. I don't plan on quitting any time soon."

CONNECT WITH OHF

Please share this newsletter.

Help spread the word about OHF and the battles faced by our nation's Special Operations Forces. Forward this newsletter to a friend, relative, or colleague today.

"In an environment of quiet professionals, sharing is not the first response, especially if it exposes a vulnerability. So, articles like these give us a glimpse into a world we otherwise would not have. It helps us take action to heal our families and care for our spouses, instead of being a bystander, watching the train wreck without the tools to stop it. Thank you for what you are doing."

— Autumn, SOF spouse

Helping SOF SOAR

Now more than ever, SOF couples need your support. In 2021, OHF is expanding its support for immediate needs, crisis needs, career transitions, employment, caregivers and spouses, and financial planning. To contribute or learn more these programs, please contact SOAR Program Manager **Stephanie DeZern** at stephanie.dezern@ophf.org or (619) 316-7043.

SOAR (Special Operations Additional Resources) Programs

- Immediate Needs Program
- SOF Caregiver & Spouse Retreats
- Ambassador Dinners
- Legal Assistance Program
- OHF Employment Services
- Alumni Support
- Financial Planning

A Home for Healing:

Operation Healing Forces staff plan, implement, and personally oversee incredible, once-in-a-lifetime retreats for our couples. Every detail, every meal, and every activity are planned to maximize our participants' relaxation, healing, and personal and relational growth. But our retreats can't take place without the homes provided by generous donors.

The phenomenal growth in our retreat numbers means more couples can participate. This growth also means that Operation Healing Forces needs homes to house our heroes and their spouses.

Providing a home for an OHF retreat is an unforgettable gift and an extremely rewarding way to support SOF couples.

OUR NEED:

5-bedroom, 5-bathroom destination locales throughout North America.

TIMING: Retreats take place over 5 days. We have immediate needs for retreat locations in 2021 and beyond.

LEARN MORE: Contact **Jim Zuba** at jim.zuba@ophf.org to learn more about opening your home or how else you can aid our nation's Special Operators and their families.



Four Ways You Can Help!



1 Cash Contributions (100% to program costs)



3 Donate your Airline Miles

It's easy. Call or email Desiree Holley to find out how. (813) 480-6078
desiree.holley@ophf.org



2 Donate a 5 bedroom/ 5 bath Home for a Week



4 Donate through Amazon Smile

Search for Operation Healing Forces at smile.amazon.com, and Amazon will donate a portion of sales to OHF.

A major reason OHF retreats, Immediate Needs, and other programs OHF offers to support the Special Operations community mean so much and are so healing is because they are offered at no cost to the participants. This provides deserving elite warriors and their families much needed respite to fully relax, focus on one another, alleviate financial stress and burden, and greatly aids in their healing process.

Offering these restorative, life-changing programs takes the support of dedicated donors like you. Please consider making a tax deductible donation to OHF to support the special operations community. Please note, all donations go 100% to program costs to support our special operators and their families as Gary & Tony Markel personally cover 100% of OHF's overhead expenses. *Every dollar you give will go directly towards benefiting Special Operators and their families.*



OHF has achieved Charity Navigator's top ranking of Four Stars. Described as "Exceptional" - Exceeds industry standards and outperforms most charities in its cause.



OHF has achieved the GuideStar Platinum Seal of Transparency Rating, the top 0.1% of the nation's non-profit organizations in terms of transparency.



OHF received the "Top Rated" rating by Great Nonprofits. Rated highly by people who experience their work first hand - clients served, volunteers and donors.

Thank you for your support of Operation Healing Forces

Comments? Questions?

Please tell us what you think about our quarterly newsletter. Direct questions, comments, or to unsubscribe, e-mail us at: info@ophf.org or by mail to:

Operation Healing Forces

380 Park Place Blvd, Suite 175, Clearwater, FL 33759
(727) 221-5071



Creating bonds that cure.

www.operationhealingforces.org