



# OHF INTEL

3rd Quarter 2018

A Quarterly Report from Operation Healing Forces.



## Our Nation's Special Operators: Suicide, Secrecy, and The Need for Support

In June 2018, the US Department of Veterans Affairs released a report containing a decade's worth of data on veteran suicide trends. The report showed that veteran suicides have continued to increase since 2005 (the year the study was initiated), and that both male and female veterans are twice as likely to die by suicide as civilian adults.

These tragic suicides are, of course, not the only types of fatalities faced by military personnel and their families. Our nation's Special Operators bear the highest number of combat casualties of any group in the military: In the December 2017 TIME magazine cover story "The New American Way of War," W.J. Hennigan reports that Special Operation Forces make up nearly all of US combat fatalities, despite comprising just 5 percent of our total military population.

This likely comes as no surprise to those familiar with the increasingly heavy burden placed on our elite forces. Unfortunately, too few people know about the sacrifices made by these warriors, in part because of the secrecy their classified missions require. These men and women are continually required to

draw on personal reserves of physical and emotional strength that exceed what most Americans can imagine.

Yet these heroes are remarkably resilient. When given the time and space to heal, they can renew their own support system and build vital relationships that enable them to remain physically, mentally, and emotionally strong.

With burnout rampant and suicide on the rise, we cannot afford to ignore the needs of those who have sacrificed so much already. Operation Healing Forces is well on its way to hosting 30 retreats in this calendar year, which represents a six-fold increase in retreats since 2015.

In this newsletter, you'll meet a few of the heroes OHF served this year. With your continued help, we look forward to making these healing experiences available to many more. These heroes serve our nation with honor, and it is an honor to serve them.

*Very Respectfully,  
Jeff Hudson,  
Lieutenant Colonel (R),  
U.S. Army,  
OHF Executive Director*

### The New American Way of War

The nonstop deployments are taking a heavy toll on the nation's toughest warriors, raising high-level concerns that Special Operations Forces are being stretched too thin. The 11 special operators killed in action this year, for instance, died on missions in four countries. It's the first time commandos have died in that many countries in one year since Special Operations Command was established in 1987. Ceaseless deployment cycles have caused problems at home, driving the Pentagon to create a task force to address drug and alcohol abuse, family crises, and suicide among the ranks. The ops tempo also raises the chances of battlefield mistakes, or worse.

— From "The New American Way of War" by W.J. Hennigan, TIME, December 11, 2017

**Special Operation Forces make up nearly all of US combat fatalities, despite comprising just 5 percent of our total military population.**

### IN THIS ISSUE

- p1** Director's Letter
- p2** Heroism in Vail
- p3** Heartfelt Thanks
- p4** Connect with OHF





*Dash and Amanda Wong in Vail*

# Heroism in Vail: OHF Guests Rescue Two Local Children

On a crisp June day in Vail, Colorado, Operation Healing Forces guests Dash and Amanda Wong were enjoying the last few moments of a mountain bike ride. Refreshed and relaxed, they took in the sights and sounds of the mountain town as they headed toward the rental shop to return their cycles. But their happy

excursion came to a halt when they noticed a young boy, around 12 years old, collapsed on the sidewalk next to his fallen bike.

Rushing to the boy's side, Dash immediately recognized signs of hypoxia, or oxygen deficiency, a possible result of Vail's high altitude. "His lips were blue and he'd been sick on the sidewalk. He spoke, but he wasn't making sense." Dash used the boy's fingertip to unlock his phone and contacted the boy's mother, while Amanda called 911. They stayed with the boy until emergency responders arrived, talking to him to help keep him awake.

Within minutes, emergency responders whisked the boy to the nearest hospital, followed closely by the boy's mother. Dash and Amanda

later learned that the boy had just arrived in Vail and wasn't yet acclimated to the high altitude. After the rescue, he spent a week in the hospital recovering from hypoxia and severe dehydration, Dash says. "His mother got our contact information and texted us later with her thanks."

Dash's experience and training during his 14-year Special Operations career enabled him to recognize the boy's illness and offer appropriate help, he says. "We have extensive medical training, and we often train in high altitudes. We also know how to treat unconscious victims."

These same quick reflexes enabled Matt Smith, another Vail retreat participant, to act

fast when he saw a different child in need of help. "I was at the pool with Matt and behind him I noticed this young boy struggling in water over his head," recalls Roger Meek, who attended the Vail retreat with his wife Lynn. "I yelled at Matt to 'turn around and grab that boy' and without hesitation he whirled around, grabbed the boy and lifted him out of the pool, where the mother quickly came over and thanked Matt."

In addition to these heart-pounding rescues, the Vail retreat offered other opportunities for adrenaline. Participants enjoyed a mountain horseback riding expedition, hiking, and ziplining, along with several late nights sharing stories and laughing together. "We laughed, we played, and it felt like we were kids again," says Dash.

Taking a few moments to help someone in need is something he'd do again in a heartbeat, Dash says—it's simply what Special Operators do. "I'm just glad we were there at the right time."

**"The retreat was unforgettable. We bonded really closely as a group, and have had one of the other couples over to visit since the retreat. Forming these close bonds was healing and helped show me a path forward."**

**– Dash Wong, 2018 Vail retreat participant**



*Matt Smith and Julie Richardson in Vail*



# Heartfelt Thanks for OHF



## Scott & Liz

I'd like to express how much this retreat meant to me and how I know it helped my husband, Scott. At first I could see his apprehension, but...

**suddenly, something clicked and this heavy burden was lifted.**

All the things he never felt he could tell me directly, he told these seemingly total strangers who shared similar feelings. I learned more about my husband than I had in over 16 years of marriage, as he was in his element with guys who were no longer strangers, but lifelong friends. I'm in awe at the generosity of everyone who helped make this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity happen for us. No amount of thanks could ever be enough. What you all are doing is helping!

*—Liz and Scott Humbert,  
2018 Palm Beach retreat participants*



*Scott and Liz Humbert in Palm Beach, Florida*

## Hamilton & Jennifer

Words cannot express our gratitude for the opportunity you've given us. We have been together for 11 years and this was the very first time we were able to take a trip, just the two of us. My husband has served 16 years, and was recently wounded in combat, so for him to meet other men in the same position was a great step towards his healing and recovery.

**Connecting and talking about their stories is very powerful, and I'm astounded by his change and demeanor.**

This week he was carefree and happy and for that I am forever grateful. Words are not enough. Thank you for all you do—it is amazing!

P.S. Nick is one of your best, he did an outstanding job with us!

*—Jennifer and Hamilton Koch, 2018 Palm Beach retreat participants*

# Connect with OHF

*Dear Friends and Supporters of OHF,*

In 2018, Operation Healing Forces will host 30 therapeutic retreats led by Special Operations Veterans across the United States in efforts to create bonds and healing between couples and the service members themselves. OHF works directly with the United States Special Operations Command's Warrior Care Program to ensure the service members, veterans, and spouses most in need of these retreats are able to attend.

Every dollar we raise goes directly to support program expenses for our Nation's most elite warriors, and we have served 572 people since our inception. In the coming year, we are planning to expand our services to this small and deserving Special Operations Community in hopes of reaching more families. Please consider supporting these elite warriors with a gift to Operation Healing Forces this fall, on Giving Tuesday, or at any time, and please contact me to learn more about ways you can help OHF create more bonds that cure.

Sincerely,  
Jim Zuba  
Lieutenant Colonel (ret) U.S. Army  
OHF Director of Development  
C: 509-432-6422  
jim.zuba@ophf.org

**Consider Supporting OHF  
on Giving Tuesday,  
November 27, 2018.**

## Four Ways You Can Help!



- 1** **Cash Contributions**  
(100% to program costs)



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



- 3** **Donate your Airline Miles**  
It's easy. Call or email Desiree Holley  
to find out how. 813-480-6078  
desiree.holley@ophf.org



- 4** **Donate through Amazon Smile**  
Search for Operation Healing Forces at  
smile.amazon.com, and Amazon will  
donate a portion of sales to OHF.

**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](mailto: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](http://www.operationhealingforces.org)