



# OHF INTEL

Spring 2018

A Quarterly Report from Operation Healing Forces.

## OHF Retreats: Healing While Preserving Honor

Historically, the path warriors took home from the battlefield was a slow one, offering the opportunity to come together and share their experiences, to gain and share support among their comrades, validate their experiences, and fortify their bonds. But as the world has grown smaller, warriors can now leave the battlefield and be “home” within hours, and this chance for mutual healing is often lost. Operation Healing Forces (OHF) can help the warrior to recreate that experience of coming home in the company of one’s comrades, relying on and reinforcing that sense of camaraderie, of mutual reliance, to validate their experiences.

One of the best ways to help our returning warriors and their families heal is through providing a positive environment and message that they have the strength and resilience to heal. Our warriors and their families have a strong sense of purpose, the desire to be of service to their nation, their fellow citizens, and to each other.

How can the warrior redefine himself, transition back into family, into civilian life, while being true to who he is and has been? This rediscovery best begins within the tribe where there is shared experience and sacrifice, where the warrior and the family can learn that they are not alone, and find that they are still who they once were.

OHF provides a means for sharing the experiences on both the battlefield and home front, for learning new ways of relating, of healing while preserving honor. OHF provides a moment of respite for reintegration of the family. It reignites the sense of service to the benefit of others, to something larger than one’s self. It facilitates the use of well-learned tactics, techniques, and procedures to create new bonds and accomplish a new mission of service.

— *Former U.S. Army  
Noncommissioned Officer  
Dr. Jack Darkes, Ph.D., director  
of the Psychological Service Center,  
University of South Florida*

### ONE RETREAT, FOUR COUPLES

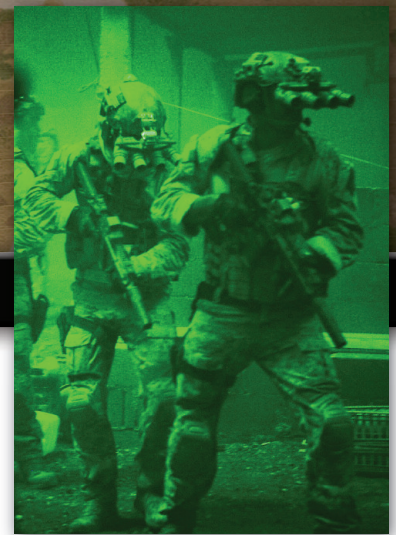
January’s mountain retreat in Cordillera, Colorado gave four couples the chance to reconnect and rebuild. Here, they share their experience in their own words.

Alex & Amy p2

Travis & Kelley p3

Jeremy & Missy p2

Cody & Stefanie p3



## Special Operations: Protecting Our Freedom Around The Clock

Per the Pentagon, in the last six months there were over 2,100 special operations missions completed in Afghanistan. In other words, nearly a dozen missions each night, or 1-2 each hour of darkness.

Each mission includes a special operations task force infiltrated deep behind enemy lines to attack a known or suspected enemy target. These are high risk and extremely dangerous missions as the special operations force continually re-consolidates, reloads and moves from target to target until all actionable intel has been executed or until daylight arrives.

Once special operators have returned to base and all personnel and equipment are accounted for, de-briefings take place and special operators immediately refit and prepare for that night’s mission. There is little rest, no time to mourn losses or celebrate victories, only time to prepare, fight again, recover, and repeat.



## Alex and Amy: A New Perspective

As a 24-year Special Forces veteran, I've had multiple combat deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq and operational deployments in Africa and across the Middle East. During my career, I experienced multiple and repetitive concussive events. In 2014 it became more and more apparent that I was not functioning at the same level, mentally or physically. This realization marked the beginning of a slow spiral of anxiety, insomnia, depression, loss of motivation and energy, social withdrawal and loss of self-confidence. Last year I was diagnosed with persistent post concussive syndrome (PCSS) and traumatic brain injury (TBI).

The retreat in Cordillera was nothing short of life-altering. We've gained a whole new perspective, had the opportunity to reconnect as a couple and also connect with other Special Operations couples. What a tremendous experience and blessing to hear similar stories and shared hardships and discuss different treatment options and resources. We've made wonderful friendships and gained renewed confidence and hope. Thank you so much for your hospitality and generosity.

— Alex and Amy Wallace

**"My greatest hope for this retreat is just that—hope. Hope to reconnect with my loving wife who has been my greatest ally and supporter throughout these last 23 years and hope for a brighter future as we look to transition in the coming year. A new and fresh start on life, together."**

**— Alex Wallace, 24-year Special Operations veteran**



Alex and Amy Wallace, Operation Healing Forces retreat participants



Cordillera retreat participants Jeremy Garcia and Missy Rice at a drop zone at Fort Bragg

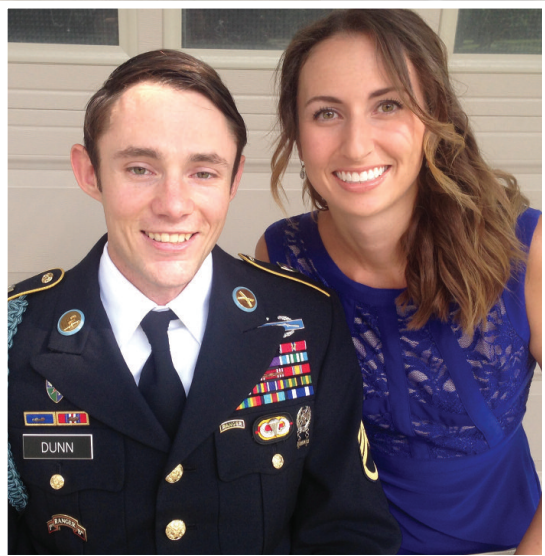
## Jeremy and Missy: Unplug and Reconnect

Jeremy and I cannot thank you enough for the experience provided last week. We are truly grateful to the families who donated their private residence, as well as the sponsors who provided funding for travel, transportation, activities and meals. It has been an extremely long time since I have been able to cast my cares and feel at peace, if only for a few minutes. Although many of us have left the war zone years ago, the battle continues to rage within. While some physical injuries are obvious, the internal battlefield of the mind, will, and emotions is not. It is here, within my soul, that I struggle on a daily basis and have trouble connecting with the world around me. The week, tucked away in a spacious home in the mountains of Colorado,

provided a comfortable and safe atmosphere to work through some of our underlying issues around fear, insecurity, and avoidance. All distractions were removed through the excellent coordination of meals, activities, and transportation to and from all scheduled events. Jeremy and I will continue to work on ourselves and strengthen our marriage. I am very fortunate to have married my best friend and fellow combat Veteran. He is extremely understanding and patient, having served on multiple deployments, one of which is where we met. We firmly believe that this opportunity has helped to provide a firm foundation for us to start our newlywed life together. It was a wonderful experience to receive some temporary relief but more important was the ability to share it with other wounded Veterans and their spouses.

— Missy Rice, Army First Sergeant





*Cordillera retreat participants  
Travis and Kelley Dunn*

## Travis and Kelley: Hope and Healing

I was a part of 1st Ranger Battalion for nine years and on my 7th deployment to Afghanistan, I was shot in the side of the torso between my body armor during a mission. The bullet severed my spinal cord, resulting in complete paralysis from the mid abdomen and below. Experiencing a traumatic

event and adjusting to a completely new life in a wheelchair, as a new life as a couple, is definitely straining on a marriage. The retreat was unbelievably therapeutic.

Being able to do so many different activities from skiing, snowmobiling, sleigh rides, and even going out to eat without having to worry about accessibility takes a huge stressor out of the equation and allowed us to focus on purely enjoying our time together as a couple. It's not often we are able to experience such an amazing time and be able to forget about the daily struggles that come with such an injury. Removing that aspect for the week and having everything be truly adaptive to our needs allowed us to really focus on each other.

— **Travis Dunn**, recently retired Army Ranger with seven deployments to Afghanistan.

## Cody and Stephanie: Facing Fears

I've been a United States Marine for almost 15 years now, with 11 of them in Special Operations. Of my eight deployments, seven have been combat related. I returned from my last combat deployment in January 2017. Since then, my depression, cognitive and speech problems, and worst of all, the loss of my confidence, have done nothing but bring my wife down. I've received numerous personal decorations for valor and heroism, but along the way I somehow managed to lose what has kept me alive this long. That changed on the retreat in January. Stefanie and I were teamed up with ski instructor Yarek Skiba, who took us under his wing.

On our third day of skiing, we decided on one more run, one that was more challenging. The slopes were steeper, lanes were narrower, and the visibility was diminishing. At one point, I found myself on a steep incline in a blind spot of a drop, and I started shaking frantically, not because I wasn't prepared, but because I was scared and didn't believe I could make it. Yarek said numerous times to relax and take it slow, and I realized I was absolutely scared for my life. I wanted to just quit.

Mentally, I'd turned the situation into a war zone.

Once I identified that I was terribly scared for my life, I had work through the situation within myself, face my fear, and get down the mountain. It wasn't until we returned from the retreat that it hit me: Thanks to the "fight or flight" challenge of that moment, and my response, I realized I had my confidence back. I was so overwhelmed—after struggling for a year, with just three days of skiing and instruction from Yarek, I saw my first positive sign of hope. There isn't one cure-all method out there for myself or others, but these small blocks of success aid in our hope and recovery.

— **Cody Alford**



*Cody and Stefanie Alford,  
Operation Healing Forces  
retreat participants*

**"Looking at my wife now, and finally having a small part of the old me back, has been so refreshing and amazing. I am so grateful. We are so grateful."**

— **Cody Alford**, Critical Skills Operator with Marine Special Operations Command



## Director's Report



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

This newsletter features four couples who attended a special retreat at a picturesque ski resort in Cordillera, Colorado. These four couples, all with different backgrounds and different challenges, shared a unique experience surrounded by snow-capped mountains. Together, they began the path toward healing, and recaptured their sense of play as they took in expert ski instruction in an alpine setting. I hope you enjoyed their accounts of the retreat and what it meant to them, in their own words. But I don't want the smiling images of this wonderful retreat and the uplifting memories shared to shift focus from the immense demands these operators and

their spouses face in their everyday lives. Their daily sacrifices protect our American way of life, and their resilience is remarkable. Most will never know or experience the hardships these heroes navigate with grace and honor. Now that you've read the accounts of this amazing retreat, made possible by generous OHF donors and homeowners Todd and Cindy Alley and Jack and Nancy Suarez, please remember the "other side" of these heroes' experiences: their professional and personal lives of sacrifice. We owe them, and other heroes we have yet to reach, a great debt of gratitude. Thank you for supporting their healing and renewing their hope.

### A Home for Healing: OHF retreats are made possible by donors who open their home to heroes.

We are the owners of a mountain home in Cordillera, Colorado. We do not rent our home, but have opened it to OHF on several occasions. Many of us have beautiful homes, but I can tell you without hesitation, we have never been more rewarded than by the truly heartfelt thanks of sharing our home with the warriors selected by OHF.

I would encourage anyone with a home that meets the needs of OHF to consider sharing. Our home was well-respected by the warriors and we will not hesitate to open it again to provide these couples well-deserved opportunity to heal and move forward.

— *Todd and Cindy Alley, Jack and Nancy Suarez,*  
*Homeowners*



## 3-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**

## 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@operationhealingforces.org](mailto:info@operationhealingforces.org) or by mail to:

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**Creating bonds that cure.**

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