



# OHF INTEL

2nd Quarter 2019

A Quarterly Report from Operation Healing Forces.



## Creating Bonds that Cure

*Dear Friends and Supporters of OHF,*

Memorial Day prompts us to reflect on the sacrifices of fallen warriors and their families. Military personnel deployed for Special Operations missions continue to face extreme peril. January's suicide bombing that claimed the lives of three Special Operators in Syria—Jonathan R. Farmer, 37; Shannon M. Kent, 35, and Scott A. Wirtz, 42—reminds us of the relentless demands of SOF deployments.

Death by suicide is affecting more SOF families, as well. **The suicide rate for SOF tripled in 2018**, in a troubling spike that offers another reminder of the physical, psychological, and relational impacts of repeated high-intensity missions.

While some warriors carry battle scars that are visible to others, many harbor invisible wounds, from persistent PTSD to chronic health conditions that touch every aspect of life. The stories in this newsletter highlight how these invisible wounds create barriers that can isolate these elite, resilient warriors from their sources of support.

Operation Healing Forces bridges these barriers by strengthening human bonds. Time and again, we see our retreat model connect or reconnect Special Operators and their spouses to a wide network of strength, support, and solidarity. The stories here demonstrate the power of bonding with others who share their unique experiences.

Thanks to your support, we continue to expand our retreat offerings, providing more warriors and their spouses with an opportunity to heal invisible wounds. I look forward to continuing this work together.

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

## SOF Suicides Tripled In 2018

**"This isn't just alarming. It's a national emergency that requires immediate action.**

**We've spent the last decade trying to improve the transitioning process for our veterans, but we're clearly failing, and people are dying."**

*Joe Chenelly,  
Executive Director,  
Amvets*



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**Memorial Day is Monday, May 27**



# REUNITED IN PARADISE:

## Terry and Chas Wilson Bahamas, December 2018

Special Forces Green Beret Terry Wilson learned about OHF two years ago when he was invited to attend a retreat. But fitting a trip around the realities of geographic separation and raising four children with his wife Chas, a graduate nursing student, proved challenging. So Terry forwarded OHF retreat opportunities to other SOF personnel while he waited for one that might fit the family's schedule.

Eventually Terry realized that the “right” time was never going to appear. “You’d be surprised how hard it is for military personnel to make time for things like this,” he says. “We realized we needed to make it happen.”

Because the couple was geographically separated at the time of their retreat—Terry was working at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, while Chas and their children lived in Florida—the pair reunited en route to the Bahamas. Experiencing the retreat during a separation gave the trip added meaning, says Chas. “Right off the bat, just to be able to see each other for the first time in months, and then to be in the Bahamas together, gave the trip some extra excitement.”

Reconnecting away from the cares of home meant they could make the most of their time together. “Everything was planned for us, so we didn’t have to worry about a thing. The activities, the home we stayed in, the people we met, the home-cooked meals, made a huge impact,” Terry says.

Convincing busy SOF couples to carve out time for something like this is a challenge, Terry says. “Military personnel are going to put others before themselves. They’re not going to want to accept help.”

After finally experiencing a retreat firsthand, Terry wonders why they waited so long. Now that he and Chas have their own retreat memories to share, they’ll continue connecting couples with OHF to extend the opportunity for reconnection and renewal. “When people come back and talk about their retreat, that’s what gets others interested in going,” he says.

“We wish more people knew about this,” continues Chas. “We know that people gave time, money, even donated the use of their home, which is so generous and incredibly touching. They did it out of respect for the military community. I think that’s amazing.”



Terry and Chas Wilson

**“Our military culture tells us not ask for help and that we shouldn’t be a burden. That’s the biggest challenge in getting personnel to make time for this.”**

**– Terry Wilson,  
Special Forces  
Green Beret**







*Michael and Marci Ogden*

# HEALING INVISIBLE WOUNDS:

## Michael and Marci Ogden Cordillera, Colorado January 2019

planned, from the ski school, to the snowmobile trip, to the dining and shopping excursions in nearby Vail, says Marci. "I grew up skiing in Utah and hadn't had a chance to do it much since having kids. We were pleasantly surprised by every detail."

The retreat gave the couple a chance to focus on their marriage, but it also gave Michael the opportunity to reenter the Special Operations family, he says. "I was excited about this trip, but I was nervous. I hadn't had time to process everything I was dealing with emotionally and physically since leaving the service, and I wondered if this retreat would bring up too many memories."

Over a few days of shared stories and snowy adventures with the group's other members, those worries faded. "I feel as close to those couples as I do to anyone," he says. "It's very healing to know that other couples understand and experience the same things we've experienced during deployments. We all had so many similarities."

After separating from military service, veterans need to stay close to others with shared experiences, says Michael. "Breaking from the military community completely isn't productive. We need to stay close. I realized that it's OK to communicate about these things. The sooner we can recognize we're not alone, the better."

After 18 years of military service and two surgeries, medically retired Special Operations Civil Affairs Officer Michael Ogden had perfected the art of performing well, even though his injuries left him without strength in his dominant arm. He'd transitioned from the military to a fast-paced civilian job when he and his wife Marci were invited to attend an OHF retreat.

At first, Michael was hesitant to accept the offer. "Because my injuries aren't visible to the naked eye, I felt that I wasn't as injured as other people, and I certainly didn't qualify for this incredible experience. But Jeff Hudson talked me through that piece of my concern, and helped me understand that Operation Healing Forces recognizes the hidden wounds that don't necessarily show."

Then came the next challenge—finding a time when Michael and Marci could travel together without their six children, ages 1 to 14. Finding family members to care for their children allowed the couple to attend the OHF retreat in Cordillera, Colorado this January.

Every aspect of the retreat was thoughtfully

**"Thank you to everyone involved for letting us share this experience to build our unity and strength. It's amazing how much was accomplished."**

**— Michael Ogden, US Army Captain,  
Medically Retired Civil Affairs Officer**



# Words from Warriors: You're Not Alone.

My husband fulfilled seven years of his NSW (Naval Special Warfare) career as a Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewman (SWCC) before he was medically boarded for traumatic brain injuries (TBI), various orthopedic issues, chronic pain, and PTSD. As for myself, as a wife-turned-caregiver at age 25, managing his pain, anger outbursts, and sleepless nights became my day-to-day life.

The world weighing on him, and carrying that weight on my shoulders, began to take its toll. We have always been that couple who had a solid foundation, just filled with undeniable love. Yet we began talking about divorce without even flinching. We needed something to pull us out of this rut. That's when we heard from Jeff Hudson that we were offered a retreat to Colorado, as a donation from Operation Healing Forces.

Stepping off the plane in Colorado, optimistically heading into a new adventure with my husband by my side, was a breath of fresh air. We had the privilege of meeting other couples that, as we came to find out, were going through or had gone through exactly

what we were dealing with. In any normal conversation, you couldn't pay my husband to tell stories about himself or his experiences on deployments. Yet, there he was, like an open book to these other men sharing the knowledge and swapping stories that made him the unique (and badass) individual he is—in a way that would prep the other unique (badass) individuals to share their own experiences.

The physical appeal of this retreat is what brought us to Colorado...Waking up every morning to a personal chef cooking us breakfast, partaking in the "White Carpet Club" to make our skiing experience "top notch," and every night a different dinner that would never leave us hungry. The feeling of escaping our mundane routine and being present each day in each new adventure. Learning how to ski and now having a shared hobby to build a deeper relationship with my husband. Seeing his face light up flying down the mountain on a ski bike—feeling the thrill of simply being alive.

You can put a monetary value on the beautiful house we stayed in, the lift tickets, steak dinners, and snowmobile tours...but what you can never put a price on is the peace of mind and the unexpected feeling of "you're not alone."

We can't thank Operation Healing Forces, and all those involved with this wonderful foundation, enough for all their hard work and generous donations given to families like ours—just out of the goodness of your hearts.

*With all our gratitude,  
Jenna Martinese*



*Jenna and Chris Martinese at the  
January 2019 retreat in Cordillera, Colorado*



# Connect with Us

Operation Healing Forces has achieved the GuideStar Platinum Seal of Transparency Rating. GuideStar is the world's largest source of information on non-profit organizations. This rating places OHF in the top 0.1% of the nation's non-profit organizations in terms of transparency.

## GROWING THE TEAM



### **Stephanie DeZern, Special Operations Additional Resources (SOAR) Program Manager**

As OHF's new SOAR Program Manager, Stephanie is responsible for creating, building, and managing programs for Operations Healing Forces to serve OHF alumni and the SOF community. She is a Special Operations spouse and Purple Heart Wife over six SOF combat deployments spanning 15 years while raising two young children. As a

US Navy Spouse, Stephanie dedicated countless hours of service work with the Command Operational Department Ombudsman and served as Head Coach of four separate command teams in the Department of Defense Official Spouses Kickball League. Stephanie is also a Registered Yoga Teacher with a focus on serving those experiencing PTSD.

### **Delio Cervera, US Army Master Sergeant (R), OHF Program Manager**

MSG Delio Cervera comes to OHF through the United States Special Operations Command Warrior Care Program, a fellowship for transitioning service members. He joined the Army in 1992 and attended the Army Special Forces assessment and selection in 2000, graduating the qualification course as an engineer in 2003. During his 26 years of service, he deployed to Saudi Arabia, Kosovo, Colombia, Paraguay, Ecuador, Bolivia, El Salvador, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Afghanistan, and Qatar. Delio and his wife Diana, parents of five children, attended an OHF retreat in December 2018 before Delio joined OHF as a retreat leader in January 2019.





## 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.

**OUR NEED:** 5-bedroom, 5-bathroom destination locales throughout North America.

**TIMING:** Retreats take place over 7 days. We have immediate needs for retreat locations in 2020 and beyond.

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

## 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](mailto:desiree.holley@ophf.org)



- 4** **Donate through Amazon Smile**  
Search for Operation Healing Forces at [smile.amazon.com](https://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:

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**Creating bonds that cure.**

[www.operationhealingforces.org](http://www.operationhealingforces.org)