



# OHF INTEL

2nd Quarter 2020

A Quarterly Report from Operation Healing Forces.



## Our Veterans Are Still Suffering.

*Dear Friends and Supporters of Operation Healing Forces,*

Despite increased awareness of the dangers of traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), our veterans are still suffering. According to the most recent data available from the US Department of Veterans Affairs, 17 US veterans die by suicide each day. This alarming figure does not include active duty service members or National Guard and Reserve members, who also experience an increased risk for suicide compared to the general public.

One group of military personnel who bear the brunt of the damage from warfare are “breachers,” or highly trained Special Operators who gain entry to locked buildings with explosives. Over many such missions, these skilled warriors experience repeated impact traumas that can result in TBI, PTSD, and other chronic health conditions that increase their risk for suicide.

This newsletter tells the story of one such Operator. His fight to save his life and his marriage is inspiring, but we believe this is a fight he should not take on alone. Operation Healing Forces helps support these deserving warriors and their spouses by offering them a rare, precious chance to heal.

As of last year, OHF also provides relief for sudden financial setbacks, family emergencies, and medical needs for SOF through our growing Immediate Needs Program. This newsletter features the story of one SOF family amongst many impacted by this new program.

This Memorial Day, OHF remains committed to showing SOF couples that their sacrifices are not forgotten. Your support is integral to our work creating bonds that cure. We look forward to continuing to offer retreats, help for Immediate Needs, and support for OHF alumni in 2020 and beyond. Thank you for your ongoing help in this important, increasingly vital work.

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

**Being a warrior is a calling. It is a cosmic purpose. Most of us lost that too soon, even if you retired from it. It is an identity. It is a mantra. It is a life. There are so many losses when we come home. The loss of all of that being the biggest. That loss is as big as the death of brothers in war.**

*Excerpted from:*  
*“Warriors: We Have Earned the Rest of Our Lives”*  
*by Joe DeCree on*  
*lifeafterwar.org*



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# ROAD TO RECOVERY

## Brian and Amanda Herbert Greenbrier, West Virginia

As a practicing Physician Assistant in Baker, Florida, Special Operator Brian Herbert helps his patients overcome health challenges. Navigating his own path to healing has been more complicated.

Over a 25-year Special Forces career and seven deployments with a Special Forces Group, Brian served as a platoon master breacher, using explosives to gain entry to closed or locked buildings. Close-range exposure to countless explosions left Brian with impact trauma that slowly eroded his mental and physical health.

Things really started to unravel after a particularly difficult explosive breach in 2004 that involved unexpected casualties, Brian says. “Traumatic Brain Injuries weren’t really on anybody’s radar, and this was still pretty early in the war, so there weren’t resources for things like that. The mentality was, just pick yourself up and dust yourself off.”

Back home, Brian experienced nightmares, flashbacks, and intense mood swings. He was shaky in public and irritable at home, and his wife, Amanda, asked him to get help. “I spoke to a counselor a few times, but I didn’t think I had an issue,” Brian says.

Left untreated, Brian’s depression spiraled into multiple suicide attempts, and his family relationships suffered. “It affected me in all aspects of my life, as a wife, mother, and as an individual,” says Amanda.

After Amanda and the couple’s children stopped the sixth suicide attempt in 2018, both Brian and Amanda knew something needed to change—fast. He sought treatment and was diagnosed with depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and TBI.

As Brian’s mind and body started to heal, the couple looked for opportunities to rebuild their relationship. “We actively worked on our marriage, but short getaways and date nights gave us just a couple of hours together. When we learned about Operation Healing Forces through the Care Coalition, that seemed like what we needed—a longer period of time to focus just on each other.”

The OHF retreat in Greenbrier, West Virginia in March 2020 gave the Herberts what they needed. Over nearly a week of outdoor adventures, spa treatments, delicious meals, and relaxation, the pair rediscovered joy in each other, Amanda says. “We rode ATVs as a group, got drenched in mud, laughed so hard, and just had a blast. We remembered how to have fun together and why we’re best friends. It was unforgettable, and we just can’t say thank you enough.”

The retreat rekindled their bond in a way that counseling, date nights, and other efforts couldn’t, Amanda says. “I hope OHF donors know that they are literally saving marriages that the war destroyed.”



Brian and Amanda Herbert

**“I hope OHF donors know that they are literally saving marriages that the war destroyed.”**







*Mike and Petra Beemer*

# SHIFTING GEARS

## Mike and Petra Beemer Cordillera, Colorado

Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group; primarily in Charlie Company,” he says. “In 2003 I was assigned to The College of William and Mary Senior ROTC program as the Training Officer. In December 2006, I was assigned to the Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance (JCISFA) a SECDEF Chartered, Chairman Controlled Activity...our task was enabling the Conventional Forces to better understand and work with Partner Nation Forces.”

Mike retired from the Army in 2011 and immediately began working with United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) as a Training Analyst and Special Forces Subject Matter Expert. After nearly nine years working as a government civilian, he began preparations to retire in 2020. The Operation Healing Forces retreat in Cordillera, Colorado in January 2020 played a vital role in that transition, Mike says.

In a picturesque alpine setting surrounded by mountain peaks, retreat attendees enjoyed activities that included downhill skiing, snowmobiling, and a sleigh ride. “It was an absolute honor and a pleasure working with Mike and Petra during the retreat,” OHF program manager Delio Cervera says. “They were very well versed on the topic of retiring and transitioning, which they all shared with the group.”

Mike and Petra’s next stage of life will include more time spent with the couple’s three children and two grandchildren, Mike says. “The retreat gave me the opportunity to transition to a new phase of life. This will aid my transition into retirement to forge a more relaxing and enjoyable life with my wife and family.”

Over a military career spanning decades, Mike Beemer deployed to Africa, Eastern Europe, Iraq, and Afghanistan. But the Special Operations tempo left little time for relaxation or personal travel. Mike and his wife of 30 years, Petra, had never taken a vacation or even spent a weekend away, he says. “In the past 20 plus years of service, as both uniformed and as a civilian, and in building a family, my wife and I have not taken a vacation or spent time away together for more than one or two days,” he says.

Mike entered the Army in 1983 as a communication specialist in the Field Artillery Unit and joined Special Forces six years later. “I served 14 years in Germany, 12 years with 1st

**“The retreat gave me the opportunity to transition to a new phase of life. This will aid my transition into retirement to forge a more relaxing and enjoyable life with my wife and family.”**



# HOPE AND HEALING

## Tyrone and Christina Ramsey Cordillera, Colorado

As a Special Forces Weapons Sergeant with nearly 17 years of military service, Tyrone Ramsey was accustomed to an aggressive operations tempo and frequent overseas missions. During the four years that he and his wife Christina were based at Torii station, a small United States Army facility located in Okinawa, Japan, Christina says Tyrone was gone two-thirds of the time. "I saw him for maybe 18 months of the four years that we were there," she says.

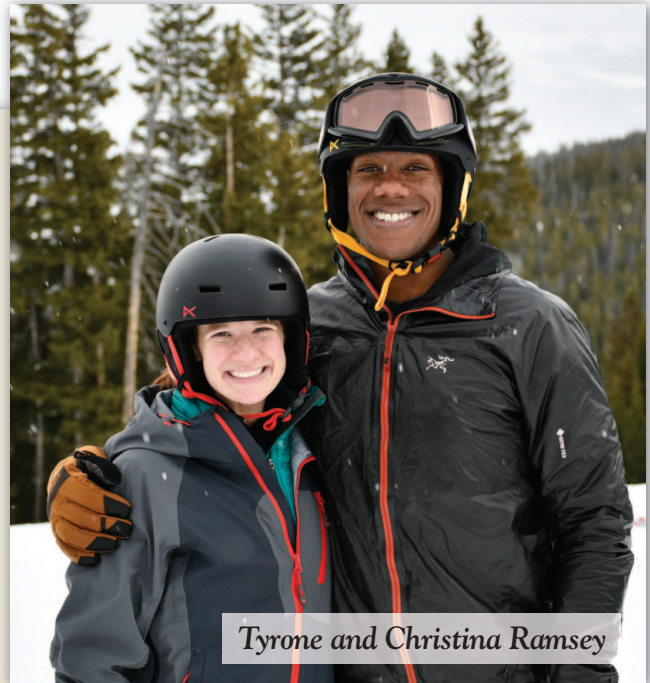
So when Tyrone began experiencing gastrointestinal pain and bleeding in 2018, he chalked up his symptoms to stress, diet, and an unrelenting professional pace. His May 2019 diagnosis with Crohn's disease, an inflammatory condition affecting the digestive tract, came as a shock, he says. "I was completely blindsided by it when I was initially diagnosed."

Looking back, Christina says, there may have been signs of the illness months earlier, but they were missed in the blur of military life. "His schedule was so hectic, he didn't have the time to rest or get the medical appointments he needed," she says. "He really didn't have an opportunity to take care of himself."

They'd soon get more bad news: Tyrone learned that his medical condition disqualified him from career advancement and could mean early retirement from the military. "I was still undergoing treatment and learned that I might have to change my job and I might be retired early from the military. It was a pretty rough time and that put a lot of stress on our marriage."

In 2019, the couple relocated to Washington state near Joint Base Lewis-McChord, and the Care Coalition helped Tyrone find the medical care he needed. The Coalition also referred Tyrone and Christina to Operation Healing Forces, and they attended the February 2020 retreat in Cordillera, Colorado.

"The amount of thought and planning that went into the retreat just blew us away. We had three days with a private ski instructor and they



*Tyrone and Christina Ramsey*

even paired us with a ski instructor who matched our personality," says Christina.

Learning how to ski together was just one highlight, Tyrone says. Another was getting snowed in and bonding with the rest of the group. "One of the final nights of the retreat, we got snowed in, so that changed our schedule. We were able to just hang out and share in a way that wasn't planned," says Tyrone.

**"Coming together with these guys in the SOF community with different backgrounds was so much fun, and we learned so much from one another."**

After a stressful year of medical appointments, an international move, and professional uncertainty, the retreat was blissful, says Tyrone. "Just seeing that there are good people in the world who have the resources and the drive to give back in whatever way they can...we're just truly humbled to be able to participate in something like that. We're incredibly grateful. Thank you doesn't even begin to touch it."



# MEETING IMMEDIATE NEEDS: The McAlister Family

Air Force Combat Controller George McAlister and his family were still getting to know their new hometown near Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington when life took an unexpected turn. In 2019, George's wife Katie suffered an unexpected seizure caused by an abnormal cluster of blood vessels in her brain called a cerebral cavernoma.

After a series of medical appointments and tests, Katie's neurologist recommended brain surgery to remove the cavernoma. The surgery took place in October and necessitated several days of hotel accommodations for family members along with meals for the family while they supported Katie before, during, and after the complex medical procedure. The sudden, unexpected spending put a strain on the family's finances as they headed into the holiday season with two school-age children, George says.

When the hotel and restaurant bills came rolling in, George, asked his chaplain if there were any military resources available to relieve the sudden financial burden. He was directed to Operation Healing Forces Immediate Needs Program, and they got in touch with OHF SOAR program manager, Stephanie DeZern.

"Stephanie was truly great to work with and I want to give her a lot of credit. She put a check in the mail immediately to cover our hotel and meal expenses, and on top of that, she arranged for us to have prime seating and an amazing experience with all the bells and whistles at the Nutcracker Ballet in Seattle," says George.

The program's swift support brightened the family's holiday season and rekindled their hope, George says.



*The McAlister family at the Nutcracker Ballet*

**"My wife cried when she found out what they were doing for us. For OHF to say 'we've got your back, don't worry, we're going to cover this,' was something we never expected. It's amazing to know that this kind of support is out there for those of us living paycheck to paycheck."**



## **Help Represent & Support your Special Operations Community!**

Backed by popular demand, the all new OHF Merchandise Shop is open! Choose from a wide variety of styles and colors to represent and support your favorite nonprofit to directly support our wounded, ill, and injured special operations forces and their families. Aside from material and production costs, all proceeds will go to support OHF programs to aid America's special operators and their families.

**To celebrate the new OHF shop and our appreciation, there will be 15% OFF all orders from now until May 22, 2020! Please share with family and friends!**

**Please click here to access the OHF merchandise shop: [www.xxxxxxxx.xxx](http://www.xxxxxxxx.xxx)**



# Please Consider Supporting 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. The notion alone we've heard from so many SOF families, "I didn't think anyone cared," and then to hear them say, "I am overwhelmed that someone who doesn't even know me took the time to make a positive difference in our lives, there are good Americans still out there who do care."

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.

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.

## 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 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)



- 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.

## 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:

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