



OHF INTEL

4th Quarter 2018

A Quarterly Report from Operation Healing Forces.

Now More Than Ever— Creating Bonds that Cure

Dear Friends and Supporters of OHF,

November is a time to offer gratitude for the blessings in our lives. On Veterans Day, we also offer thanks for the sacrifices made by those who have served our country. We also think of those still serving, including the nearly 70,000 active duty and reserve personnel who comprise our nation's Special Operations Forces.

This year has been particularly hard on SOF and their families. In 2018, SOF carried out more missions than ever before in more than 90 countries across the globe. These missions included everything from secretive missions in Africa to the well-publicized rescue of 12 young soccer players and their coach trapped in a cave in Thailand. Their skills are in high demand, and the demands are endless.

Though our special operators are remarkably resilient, their bodies bear the often-invisible scars of their service (see page 2) with lifelong health consequences. Operation Healing Forces is proud to offer these heroes a chance to pause, reconnect, and heal.

For SOF to continue to serve to the best of their considerable abilities, they must keep themselves and their families strong. As we hear time and time again, OHF retreats offer tremendous benefits that don't end when the retreat concludes. Participants return to their lives with renewed strength, health, and focus.

As you celebrate Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, and Giving Tuesday this month, please consider a gift to the OHF campaign November 11 through 28. As always, thank you for your support. Your generosity has helped us offer a record 28 retreats in 2018, and we look forward to creating more bonds that cure in 2019.

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

**Did You
Know?**

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

2018 OHF Retreat Locations

Cordillera, CO:
Jan 6-13, 2018

Virgin Islands:
Jan 30 – Feb 5, 2018

Cordillera, CO:
Feb 19-26, 2018

Greenbrier, WV:
Mar 5-10, 2018

Head of the Harbor, NY:
May 4-11, 2018

Arrington, VA:
May 4-11, 2018

Key West, FL:
May 6-13, 2018

Palm Beach, FL:
Jun 2-9, 2018

Vail 1, CO:
Jun 9-16, 2018

Vail 2, CO:
Jun 9-16, 2018

Rancho Santa Fe, CA:
Jul 7-14, 2018

Marco Island, FL:
Jul 16-23, 2018

Naples 1, FL:
Jul 20-27, 2018

Naples 2, FL:
Jul 28 – Aug 3, 2018

Naples 3, FL:
Aug 5-12, 2018

Pellston, MI:
Sep 5-12, 2018

Montauk, NY:
Sep 5-12, 2018

Lake Charlevoix, MI:
Sep 13-19, 2018

Virginia Beach, VA:
Sep 21-28, 2018

Bethany Beach, DE:
Sep 24 – Oct 1, 2018

Virginia Beach, VA:
Sep 29 – Oct 6, 2018

Bethany Beach, DE:
Oct 3-9, 2018

Seattle, WA:
Oct 15-22, 2018

Bremerton Island, WA:
Oct 23-29, 2018

Hilton Head, SC:
Nov 2-8, 2018

Bahamas 1:
Dec 1-6, 2018

Virgin Islands:
Dec 6-12, 2018

Bahamas 2:
Dec 7-12, 2018

IN THIS ISSUE

p1 Founder's
Letter

p2 The Invisible
Wounds of War

p3 Surf's Up:
Jon and Teah

p4 Connect
with OHF



"I can't even begin to put into words what this retreat has meant to us. We were on the verge of ending our ten year marriage. I fully believe this retreat just saved my marriage. I am eternally grateful."

—Melissa, 1st Ranger Battalion Wife

"This experience was new, authentic, and very real. We were surprised that we were not the only married couple struggling in the SOF community. Being around SOF couples and hearing their stories gave us hope. This retreat was God's timing."

—Jonathan, US Army Special Forces

"Allowing service members to bring their spouses who truly bear the brunt of our service was genius. We are deeply grateful."

—Arthur, Special Forces & Special Mission Unit NCO

"Most people these days forget what these families go through and what has been taken. No one really truly understands. I am so thrilled to know that people still care. This retreat was so eye opening, and was truly something that we will never forget."

—Nick & Kendra, US Army Special Forces

"Thank you so much for honoring the sacrifices "the family" makes to protect this country. It's not just the Soldiers, and that means a lot."

—Christopher, 1st Ranger Battalion Medic

The Invisible Wounds of War

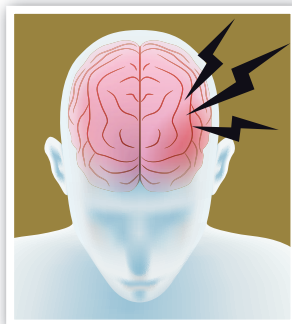
Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has been called the "signature injury" of our country's war on terror. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD reports that between 11 and 20 percent of post 9/11 veterans experience PTSD.

But PTSD is not the only "invisible" danger facing veterans. Disorders like low-testosterone (low-t), chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), and traumatic brain injury (TBI) are increasingly recognized as invisible disorders affecting heroes who serve our nation.

Hormone Havoc: Low Testosterone

What is low-testosterone (low-t)? When the body remains in a highly stressed state for too long, the body can't regulate hormone levels properly. Over time, the body's systems break down, and chronically low testosterone can result. One-quarter of men over 30 have low-t, putting them at increased risk for heart disease, weight gain, sexual dysfunction, hair loss, and mood problems.

But the number is much higher for special operators, says certified physician's assistant and former Navy SEAL Kevin Lacz. With a rapid deployment cycle, limited time for rest, and highly charged, fast-paced missions, our nation's special operators are among the men most affected by this depletion of the body's resources.



Negative Impact: CTE

Chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) is a degenerative brain disease thought to result from hundreds or thousands of brain traumas, generally sustained over years. Over time, the disease kills brain cells and causes irreversible brain damage.

While CTE is most associated with tackle football, new findings show that veterans are also at risk. Since 9/11, over three hundred thousand service men and women have returned home with brain injuries. In a recent study of the brains of veterans, nearly 60 percent had signs of CTE.

Symptoms of CTE, which can sometimes resemble those of dementia, include aggression, impaired memory, emotional instability, and slowed thinking. Emotional and behavioral symptoms like depression and impulse control tend to appear in the 20s and 30s, while cognitive decline appears later, in the 40s and 50s.

Waves of Change: Jon and Teah



"Our battle rhythm is so stringent. We deploy so rapidly and so often. It was incredible to see that the staff and donors of OHF are willing to give back to people who have sacrificed a lot."

**— Virginia Beach retreat participant Jon,
17-year special operator**

Despite living in coastal California, Jon and Teah had never tried surfing together. Jon's 17-year career in Special Operations Forces didn't leave time for play. In the decade they'd been married, the couple had moved 11 times. Raising three young children while Jon's break from consistent deployments was studying at the Naval Post Graduate School meant life was hectic with no signs of slowing down. Recreational pursuits would have to wait.

So when Jon heard about Operation Healing Forces and its retreats, he wondered if the pair might have a rare chance for some downtime. The chance to reconnect with Teah outside the pressures of their daily life seemed almost too good to be true. "For the past 10 years I've been on the go and it's put a strain on the family. We needed to reconnect. My wife is very strong, determined, and resilient, and she handled most of our moves without me there," Jon says. "She has a lot of pressure on her shoulders when I'm gone."

At the Virginia Beach retreat in September, they found the reconnection they'd wanted. "The retreat exceeded our expectations in every way. Knowing that there are people willing to create this experience for us, and people like Jeff Hudson who plan every detail, was more than we could have asked for."

Jon's top memory came when the group tried surfing. "I've never taken my wife surfing, and at first, she didn't want to try it. She even brought a chair, just planning to watch."

But soon, the retreat's spirit of adventure took hold, and Teah grabbed a surfboard. They'd developed camaraderie and trust with their group, so everyone felt more secure taking risks together, Jon says. "Seeing others in our group trying it gave her confidence, and she decided to try for herself. She stood up, and ended up being the last one to come in. That was an amazing thing for me to see her surf—and just have fun."

Connect: Campaign OHF

One reason OHF retreats are so healing is that they are offered at no cost to the participating couples. This gives deserving warriors and their spouses a rare chance to fully relax and focus on one another. Offering these restorative, life-changing experiences takes the support of dedicated donors like you. **Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to Operation Healing Forces during the OHF Campaign November 11 through 28.** Your gifts enable OHF to continue making these transformative retreats available to more couples.

**Please Support OHF
on Giving Tuesday,
November 27, 2018.**

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 2019 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:

Operation Healing Forces

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



Creating bonds that cure.

www.operationhealingforces.org