



OHF INTEL

4th Quarter 2019

A Quarterly Report from Operation Healing Forces.

18 Years in a State of Perpetual Combat

Dear Friends and Supporters of Operation Healing Forces,

This September 11, Patriot Day commemorated the 18th anniversary of the attacks in 2001. The date also marked 18 years in a state of perpetual combat for our nation's Special Operations Forces.

Because these warriors have the skills and training demanded by modern warfare, they increasingly carry the burden of repeated high-intensity combat deployments and training missions for years on end.

Special Operators and their families pay a high price for this relentless tempo. The warriors featured in this newsletter have experienced nearly every injury imaginable, from hearing loss to arthritis to post traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. Studies show that Special Operators experience PTSD at twice the rate of other military personnel. Veterans are not the only ones impacted by these injuries; [*this article*](#) by military spouse Andrea Carlile details how PTSD and secondary stress impact the veterans and their spouses.

With your generous support, Operation Healing Forces is proud to offer Special Operators and their spouses an opportunity to rest, renew, and restore their strength. The accounts on the following pages show how uniquely healing these experiences can be. On Giving Tuesday this December 3, and every day, we hope you'll consider continued support. Together, we can reach more couples in 2020.

Thank you, as always, for showing these deserving couples that you care.

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

IN THIS ISSUE

- p2** Unforgettable Surprise:
Mike and Jen Feola
- p3** Home Away from Home:
Duane and Laura Legg
- p4** A Change of Pace:
Marcus and Catherine Vasquez

- p5** Our Greatest Adventure:
Adam and Danielle Camidge
- p6** Supporter Spotlight:
Bob and Marlene Mizell
- p7** Connect with OHF



Life After War

You came back different. Changed. You can't really describe it, but you're not yourself. Not who you used to be. You're angry. Feel numb. Tired. Disinterested in stuff that used to be interesting. Tense. Sleepless. Can't focus. You miss your buddies. Miss the war. Miss the ones you lost. Miss feeling like you used to feel. Before.

• • •

He can't do the things you used to enjoy doing together. He panics in crowds. Hates being around your friends and family. You make excuses for him. People are starting to wonder. He keeps to himself. Overreacts. Blows up at the kids. You're walking on eggshells, trying to keep him calm, trying to keep the kids calm, trying not to fall apart from it all. Will you ever get relief from this pressure you're under?

• • •

Doesn't she know you miss "you" too? That no one ever prepared you for this. That all the training in the world never prepared you for this life now. That most of the time you are barely here. That you never wanted to be a burden to her. That you hate knowing she's carrying all of the load. That you never thought PTSD/TBI would mean this. Half alive. Half dead.

• • •

And so here you are. Run over by the energy of war. Fighting each other because there is no enemy to fight now, only fear and self-doubt and shame and uncertainty. Expecting life, expecting yourselves, to pick up where you left off and continue on. Only he's changed. Only she's changed. You're relating to each other based on the last version you knew of each other. And it doesn't work. He's changed. She's changed.

• • •

So where do you go from here?

Excerpted from PTSD, TBI, Sex & Relationships, lifeafterwar.org



Mike and Jen Feola

UNFORGETTABLE SURPRISE

Mike and Jen Feola Maple River Farm, Michigan

farm country. “As soon as we arrived on the farm, I felt an instant peace just being surrounded by nature,” says Mike.

Over their six-day retreat, the pair took in a mountain winery tour, a chartered fishing trip, ziplining, and a cocktail hour on a donor’s private yacht. On a day trip to nearby Mackinac Island, the group rented bikes and explored coastal bluffs, wooded trails, and limestone rock formations. “Everything we did was amazing, but I think that was my favorite. There are no cars allowed on the island, so it’s all bikes and horse-drawn carriages. It was so beautiful and relaxing,” says Jen.

Mike’s shoulder was injured in a vehicle rollover during a training exercise earlier this year, and his healing has impacted his daily life ever since. “I put my surgery on hold to be able to attend this retreat, and now I know that was absolutely the right decision,” he says. “What Operation Healing Forces is doing for our community is unprecedented, and worth more than any dollar amount you could put to it.”

The couples who attended the retreat have stayed in touch, even arranging to sign an American flag and send to the owner of the home they stayed in, says Jen. “We can’t say thank you enough. This was way more than a marriage retreat. I don’t think there’s anything that compares to what we got to experience.”

September’s Operation Healing Forces retreat at Michigan’s Maple River Farm was a leap into the unknown for Mike and Jen Feola. The Destin, Florida-based couple had never been to this part of the country, and Jen didn’t know much about what the retreat had in store for them. “I didn’t tell Jen much about it in the planning phase, because I wanted it to be a surprise for her,” says Mike.

Fortunately, uncertainty is the norm for the couple of 12 years. Mike’s service with the Army Special Forces as a Detachment Operations Sergeant has included five deployments, multiple concussions, and traumatic brain injury (TBI).

Ready to embrace a new adventure, they traded Florida’s late-summer heat for Michigan’s

“Operation Healing Forces knows the lives we’ve lived and the sacrifices we’ve made—they know how to tailor these experiences for us and make them something that we’ll always remember.”

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Duane and Laura Legg Red Horse Mountain Ranch, Idaho

Returning to Idaho was a dream come true for native Idahoan Duane Legg and his wife Laura. Although the Leggs love their community in Fayetteville, North Carolina, they dream of living in Idaho one day. The opportunity to attend an Operation Healing Forces retreat at the Red Horse Mountain Ranch in Harrison, Idaho felt like fate, Duane says. "We'd already fallen in love with that part of the country, so the opportunity seemed perfect for us."

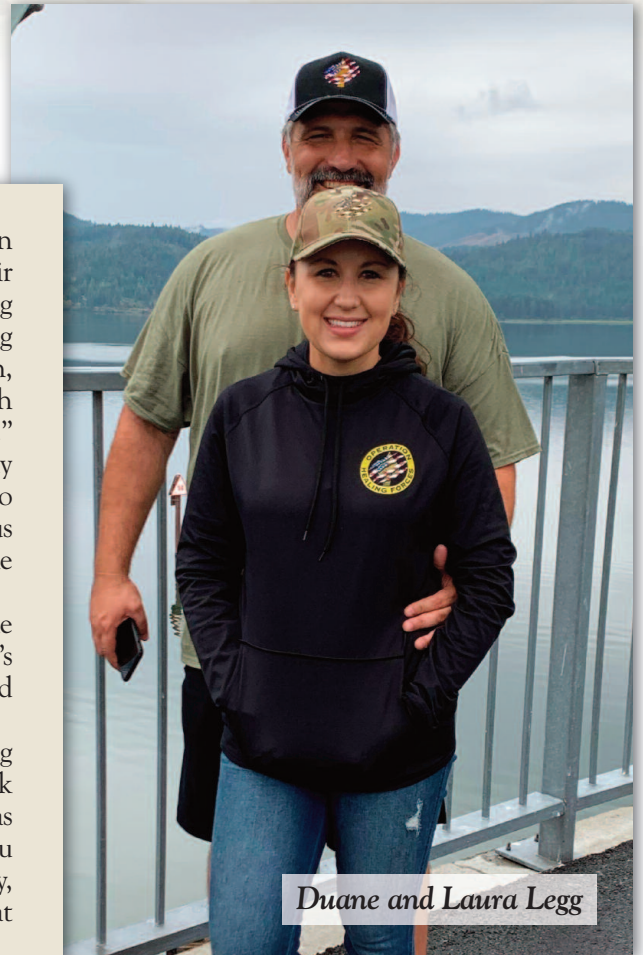
A recently retired Special Forces medic, Duane's long Army career included six combat tours and overseas deployments to Afghanistan and Africa. His service left him with numerous injuries, including hearing loss, concussions, and recurring migraine headaches. "Basically, my body just wore out," he says.

Known for their tireless energy, the couple co-owns The Fayetteville Guard youth football team and maintains Josalyn's Legacy Foundation, Inc, a charitable organization they started after their 1-year-old daughter passed away suddenly.

The active couple enjoyed the week's itinerary of morning hikes, rock climbing, a challenge course, and daily horseback rides. "It's hard to pick a favorite activity, but I'd have to say it was connecting with the horse I had for the week," Laura says. "You get to know your own horse and spend time with them every day, so there's a trust there when you're riding. It was a really neat experience."

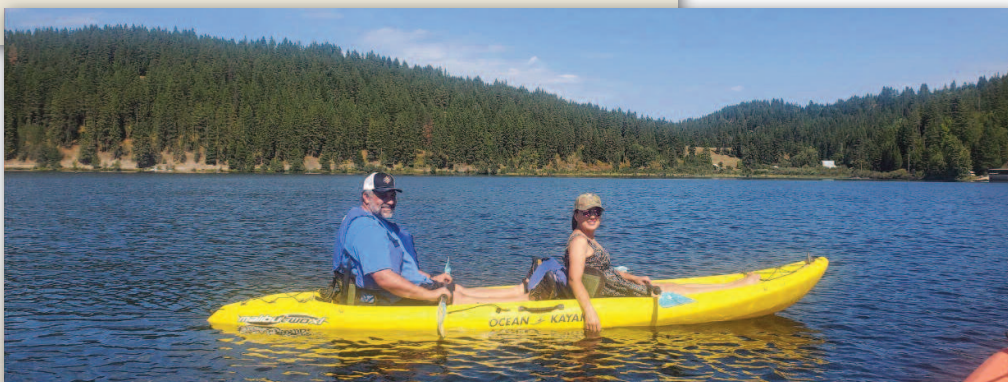
"Delio did an incredible job as our retreat leader," says Duane. "He was like a ringmaster orchestrating everything. But my favorite part of the retreat was getting to experience time with my wife outside of our day-to-day lives. We're both such driven, type-A personalities that we sometimes forget to prioritize each other. It's good to take a step back and remember why we fell in love."

"We get so busy with the day-to-day, we needed this reminder to make time just for us, and to have conversations and connections that are just about us," says Laura. "This trip really reinforced that, and that will stay with us."



Duane and Laura Legg

"We want to say a huge thank-you to Operation Healing Forces for this once-in-a-lifetime incredible experience. In a word, it was a blessing."





A CHANGE OF PACE

Marcus and Catherine Vasquez Jupiter, Florida

At the Operations Healing Force retreat in Jupiter, Florida, Marcus and Catherine Vasquez got a change of scenery and a change of pace. Currently stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in the cool, cloudy Northwest, the pair welcomed Florida's bright sunshine and brilliant beaches. Just as welcome was the temporary respite from Special Forces' relentless operations tempo, Marcus says.

A Special Forces engineer, Marcus has deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. More often, he's sent on joint training missions involving long stretches away from home. "There was one year where I saw him a total of 50 days," says Catherine.

The retreat kicked off with an evening spent talking and swapping stories, a rare chance to connect with other SOF couples, says Catherine. The days that followed were filled with kayaking, snorkeling, parasailing, tubing, paddle boarding, and a yacht excursion on sparkling aquamarine waters. After a few days of activity, the group spent a day relaxing poolside, reliving their shared adventures.

"Every day was great, but that day by the pool was probably my most memorable day, because downtime is so rare and difficult to come by when we're home," says Catherine.

The OHF staff who plan and lead the retreats understand the unique demands of

Special Forces life and design the experiences around them, says Catherine. "The people who run OHF know how busy our lives are. At the retreats, there are no PowerPoints, no workbooks or demands on us. We simply get to be together. They took care of everything, and we appreciated it so much."

The right type of retreat can help couples return to their lives re-energized and ready to cope with the hectic pace, says Marcus. "Within the Special Forces community, our Ops Tempo is faster than most. We're always busy, so any time we can take a breath and relax for a moment does wonders for our longevity."

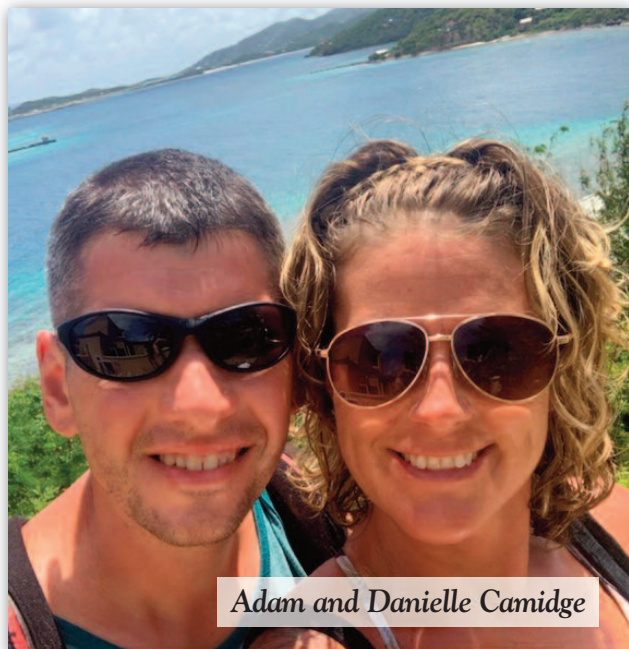


Marcus and Catherine Vasquez

"Thank you for understanding and realizing how important this type of retreat is for our family."

OUR GREATEST ADVENTURE

Adam and Danielle Camidge British Virgin Islands



Adam and Danielle Camidge

Adam and Danielle Camidge of Hope Mills, North Carolina survived five overseas deployments, lengthy separations, and nine moves over Adam's long military career with Special Forces. "We thought we'd made it through the hardest time in our lives!" says Danielle. "That was until Adam started getting sick."

Over the last four years, Adam has weathered four prostate surgeries and an invasive throat surgery that impacted his ability to eat and drink. After Adam's last surgery, he lost 70 pounds and had to relearn how to take in enough nutrition, says Danielle. "It was heartbreaking to see someone who's been such a strong provider for our family have to relearn these basic things."

Adam is currently in the process of medical retirement from his role as Command Religious Affairs NCO with Special Forces. The 2019 Operation Healing Forces retreat in the British

Virgin Islands came at just the right time for couple. "Our time on Scrub Island was absolutely magical," says Danielle. "The amazing room with the breathtaking views and all the fabulous adventures were exactly what we needed. The calming atmosphere literally melted all our worries and concerns away."

Adam and Danielle enjoyed kayaking, swimming, snorkeling, and exploring the picturesque island with the other couples on the retreat. "Adam's favorite part of the trip was seeing the fish swimming under our glass bottom kayaks," says Danielle. "For me, it's hard to pinpoint a favorite part, other than spending meaningful, memorable time with my husband and best friend."

Along with the sun-soaked memories and newly formed friendships, the couple's biggest takeaway is their surprise at the generosity of OHF's donors, staff, and retreat leaders. "The one thing that really surprised us about this experience on the retreat was that there's people out there that have such big hearts and care about people that they don't even know," says Danielle.

"We're so entirely grateful for this experience," she says. "This retreat was the biggest adventure of our lives."

"Finding out that there still are kind and gracious people out there is a Godsend. We will be forever grateful!"





Bob and Marlene Mizell

OHF SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT

Bob and Marlene Mizell

As some of the earliest supporters of Operation Healing Forces, Bob and Marlene Mizell know its story better than most. When their longtime friends Gary and Tony Markel founded OHF in 2011, the Mizells donated the use of a vacation home, gifted spa packages, and opened a stock account to benefit the organization.

Even after eight years of ongoing involvement with OHF, the Mizells continue to be surprised at the sacrifices made by our nation's Special Operators and their spouses. "I'm especially impressed with what Special Forces have been asked to do over the last 20 years," Bob says. "They are really bearing the brunt of all of our overseas activities. They go through a lot, and they need all the support we can give."

The son of a career Army officer who fought in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, Bob has always had an affinity and appreciation military

life. Over video chats with OHF retreat attendees, Bob and Marlene have learned about the realities of modern military for today's Special Operators and their families.

"The conversations with the Special Operator and the spouse have been very impactful and very powerful," says Marlene. "They've shared how meaningful the retreats are to them. In some instances, they've said how it helped save their marriage, their family structure, and in some cases, possibly even their lives."

A longtime financial advisor, Bob was recently elected to the OHF Board of Directors. He says investing in OHF is as important now as it was back in 2011. "Operation Healing Forces is one of the few charities I'm aware of where all of the administrative costs are funded by the founders. That's phenomenal," he says. "Gary and Tony's enthusiasm for the cause is infectious. Anyone who meets them ends up wanting to be involved."



To learn more about making a tax-deductible stock gift to OHF, visit operationhealingforces.org/donation.

Please Consider Supporting OHF on Giving Tuesday, December 3, 2019



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 OHF on Giving Tuesday: December 3, 2019. Your gifts enable OHF to continue making these transformative retreats available to more couples.

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:

Operation Healing Forces

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



Creating bonds that cure.

www.operationhealingforces.org