

PTSD/SUICIDAL

'TWITCH'S' STORY



WARNING: this story mentions the topic of suicide

From serving in the RAF in Basra to winning a silver medal for Team UK in Sydney, 'Twitch', 46, tells his inspirational story of how he has coped with post traumatic stress disorder.

I was a Sergeant in the Royal Air Force until very recently, after serving 23 years as a Weapons Technician. I spent the majority of my career carrying out bomb disposal duties with 5131 (BD) Squadron. This saw me deployed to Iraq on operations in 2003, 2004 and 2007.

Due to attending countless traumatic tasks rescuing military and local personnel from mine field incidents, combat contacts, shooting incidents, rocket and mortar attacks etc, I started to recognise my problems early. I was (and still am) followed around daily by the image of a British soldier who died at my feet as we tried to save him. I was too afraid to tell anyone of my hallucinations for fear of being thrown out of the service for being 'mad'; so, I self-medicated with alcohol as a coping mechanism.

This took its toll on my marriage, health and friendships until eventually, in 2017, I attempted to take my own life. Thankfully, I opened up to my wife who dragged me to the medical centre, where a fantastic group of people gave me the medical support I needed.

I was quickly diagnosed with complex post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), was prescribed medication and began cognitive behavioural therapy. My recovery has been a long process and I now have progressed to Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) treatment which is having a fantastic effect. I was also introduced to the Invictus Games programme and began benefiting from the power of sport recovery. Following a year's worth of training and trials, I was selected to represent Team UK in Sydney 2018 and was fortunate to win a silver medal which hangs proudly in my house.

Unfortunately, I was medically discharged from the RAF as I was no longer operationally effective due to my diagnosis; but I have found a new career as a college tutor working with youngsters living with special educational needs and disabilities.

I also now deliver my speech, From Basra to Sydney, at mental health awareness events and am proud to say that I have made many friends by joining them on their recovery journey.

Further to this, I have created Shropshire's first 'Sitting Volleyball' team, Telford Eagles. I coach the team weekly which is fully inclusive. My team comprises of people who are disabled, fully able-bodied and dealing with mental health and Special Educational Needs and Disabled (SEND) issues. We compete in the National Grand Prix against the UK's other 14 teams and have become a part of a large and supportive community.

If you have been affected by this story, you can call the Samaritans 24-hour helpline on 116 123, email jo@samaritans.org or visit www.samaritans.org

TOP TIPS:

- I use a 'grounding' technique when I have a flashback or anxiety attack. This can be done anywhere. I stop whatever I'm doing, close my eyes, take deep breath then ask myself these three questions: **1. Where am I? 2. Am I safe? 3. What am I going to do next?**