

PTSD 101

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**COURSE TRANSCRIPT FOR:  
Iraq Never Leaves Us: PTSD & My Life  
Course Instructor: Mr. Bob Page**

**Slide 1: Iraq Never Leaves Us: PTSD and My Life**

My name is Bob Page and I'm an Operation Iraqi Freedom/Enduring Freedom veteran. I'm a Chief Petty Officer in the United States Navy Reserve, married to Laurie and a father of 2. I'm going to talk to you today about posttraumatic stress in my life. The name of my presentation is "Iraq Never Leaves Us: PTSD and My Life."

**Slide 2: (Slides 2 through 38 are photographs. There are no titles)**

I'd like to take you to Kuwait with this first slide here. I'm a religious programs specialist, which means, in the Navy, in layman terms, I'm the bodyguard for the Chaplain.

I spent 15 years as a United States Marine in the infantry, in the reserves and on active duty. I served in the Gulf War and I made the transition into the United States Navy in 2001; 20 days before 9/11, and had no idea that I was going to get the chance to do ministry like I ended up doing, but that's why I joined the Navy: to work in ministry.

When I got assigned to a Marine unit-I had avoided Camp Pendleton like the plague when I was a United States infantryman, so I joined the Navy and guess where they sent me? They sent me straight to Camp Pendleton. I was at the 1 MEF. The chaplain for the 1 MEF works at a three-star level and that's who I was assigned to.

As we were getting ready to punch forward to Kuwait, I was sent forward first, to set things up at Camp Commando, and I was also told that I would be assigned the Deputy and at the last minute they said he'd join...he'll follow-on a week after. So I got to Kuwait, and I went to greet the plane the following week with the Master Chief and the Chaplain, and when he got off it was Irving Elson who I connected with, and Commander Elson and I and the Maser Chief started setting things up for the 1 MEF.

With this first slide I just wanted to give you guys a little taste of what I do. This is the group...one of the groups of chaplains and RPs that served at the medical hospital, the field hospitals and the supply chains for the Marines going forward. We are kind of mixed in with them because we were up doing services. We drove a total of 600-800 miles a week all over

Kuwait to do services and every couple of weeks we hopped a helicopter and went out to all the ships and did services as well. So we traveled an awful lot.

Now there's one piece of information that I forgot to mention here: The chaplain that I was working with was a rabbi-the *only* rabbi in the entire theater. So my job was doubly tough and when we moved in convoy, we moved heavily armed. And it was an honor for me to serve with him because I'm a born again Christian and I considered it an honor to protect the Rabbi.

These young sailors-and old sailors-and chaplains here constituted the people who would greet the Marines as they came back, and I'll touch on a couple of them a little later.

### **Slide 3:**

And the next photo is the command gathering of all of us just before the war is getting ready to start. This was the farthest, most-northern most point of Marines in Kuwait, about 3 miles from the border. The Marines were the farthest north and in a few minutes I'll tell you about the northern-most unit.

Anyway, this was a meeting of the Army Command Chaplain from the C-FLC, which 1 MEF reported to, and then all of the chaplains and RPs. Minus the lady with her back to you there, who was the Master Chief visiting from Bahrain, the rest of us were involved in 1st Marine Division to go forward.

### **Slide 4:**

The next slide is just a slide about us. A slide of kind of what our life was like there. The Master Chief and the corpsman and myself and another RP at the table playing spades. It's educational; a game. I'm teaching them how to lose with grace.

### **Slide 5:**

The next slide is a slide of me packing our stuff, and I want to stop and fill some gaps in here for you. At the 1 MEF level, Chaplain Elson and I are...Rabbi, as I'll call him from here on out...and I were assigned to do Jewish religious services throughout the country, as I told you, and in the AOR; area of responsibility.

Five days before the war was getting ready to start, the rabbi and I were set to go north and do services. It was Friday morning and we were getting ready to, literally, get in the vehicles and we were called back in the tent and the MEF Force Chaplain was walking around wringing his hands and he had no idea what to do because they had shut off anybody coming in or any replacements or what-have-you. He had just received a call from the Command Chaplain for 1st Marine Division and the Commanding General for 1st Marine Division was screaming at him because one of his chaplains had just quit. He walked in and threw his railroad tracks down and said, "I'm done! I refuse to go forward!"

They needed a chaplain to replace them-replace him immediately. We looked around the room and of course we're all very senior in rank and I looked at Rabbi and I said, "You know, we could take care of this." And we turned back and looked at the Padre and said, "Well, we'll step forward if you want." And he said, "Fine. You're ordered to go forward."

So Rabbi and I packed our belongings quickly and got in the vehicles and headed to Camp Matilda, 1st Marine Division headquarters and were subsequently assigned to 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, which was an artillery unit that was the farthest north of any American unit in Kuwait; 1 mile from the border. So we literally could see the Iraqis riding the fence line or whatever they were doing, every now and again.

This unit had had 4 chaplains in the last 3-½ years, we being the 4th RMT, religious ministry team, to show up, and no RP. The RP that they had had been assigned from somewhere else and he'd been in the Navy about 3 months...4 months, maybe...5 months. He was very young and very green and had no idea what he was getting ready to go into, so I had him assigned back up to the regimental level and he stayed with the Regimental Chaplain.

Rabbi is an O-5, or Commander, which is the same rank as the battalion commander, which is a Lieutenant Colonel. And I am an RP-1 at the time, as this slide...doesn't show my rank, but that's what I am in this picture. And that's pretty high for an E-6 to be doing this job. It's usually assigned to an O-2 or an O-3 and an E-2 or an E-3, maybe an E-4.

So we were assigned to ride with the executive officer and his driver. And the 4 of us...we're going forward in a non-armored, you know, vinyl sided humvee. Having been a Marine, when you talk about artillery I can tell you that you don't generally think about being in the fight as much. You're reaching out and touching the enemy a good ways away, but I'll explain a little later how that worked out.

So, back to this slide: Here I am unpacking the humvee yet again to pack our gear because I needed to get something out of a bag. Four of us in a Hummer-we were pretty crowded.

#### **Slide 6:**

The next slide is...the date is in the bottom, right-hand corner. It's a little out of order, but I wanted to put that in to show you how beautiful the sunsets were there and how, even in moments of crisis, you can stop and take a look at it, but it lasted about 60 seconds and then it was gone.

#### **Slide 7:**

The next photo; the next slide, is us actually going through the breach. I wasn't very comfortable with going through with the sun up but you know, at 5:30 in the morning the sun just pops up in the sky. So off we go. This is us actually driving through the breach into Iraq; into the, well, no-man's land between the two countries and then on into Iraq.

There were 2 breaches cut. The breach, which would be to our left in this slide, is down the road a bit, collapsed and it was closed. So the entire United States military went through this breach-- that slowed things up-- at daylight.

**Slide 8:**

These are the Ramallah Oil Fields that were being set afire by the Iraqi Republican Guard. The 5th Marines punched through ahead of everybody else. The war started a shade early, and we went in to stop these oil fields from being burned completely. And the 5th Marines took some casualties and we had to travel through the oil fields to get north.

Right here, I'd like to bring you up to speed on one more thing. We were assigned to the 1st Regimental Combat Team which was the 1st Marines...3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, which are having some problems right now dealing with a shooting in Hadassah, and we also had the reserve battalion; 2nd Battalion, 23rd Marines, which were where I'm from in San Francisco, and then 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines who earned their stripes in World War I and, subsequently, in World War II and thereafter. So we were kind of mix-and-match of battalions assigned to this regimental combat team, but we were designed to go into the country as an arrow, the 5th Marines on our left, 7th Marines on our right coming from Basra and 1st Marines coming up the middle on highway 7 to back up the other 2 regimental combat teams.

Unfortunately, the Iraqis didn't read that memo and things changed for us drastically. So as we go through this oil field on this slide...

**Slide 9:**

The next slide shows you even more. The road literally wraps around this burning oil well. So I put this in to show you, not only did we have to drive right next to them and watch our windows melt a bit, we also had to deal with all this oil--this burning oil, so environmental hazards were there. And it makes quite an impression on you when you're constantly rubbing your eyes and trying to get oil out of your face. And we were in chemical suits obviously, so they were covered with it as well.

**Slide 10:**

The next slide shows us in the open and how much the oil had saturated the sky. That is the sun in the middle of the slide there, in the middle of the day. That's probably 2 o'clock, maybe...no, it's earlier than 2 o'clock anyway. And it shows 3 of our vehicles out setting up a firing pit.

**Slide 11:**

The next slide...I usually reserve Rabbi's religion until we get to this slide but I went ahead and let the cat out of the bag but...this is the pennant, or the flag, which we fly for his services. Every chaplain has the appropriate pennant for their service and this is Rabbi's. I usually ask people if they can guess what that is. But in Iraq or Kuwait, they know what that Star of David is. So we only took this pennant out right here.

This is on the day we're getting ready to do the first Shabbat, or Sabbath, service or Jewish services actually, because it is Friday, again here in Iraq...in southern Iraq. And we took it out just to have our picture taken with it and then Rabbi carried it in side his flak jacket for the rest of the time. I think he donated it to the Israeli Navy Headquarters.

### **Slide 12:**

As we went north...in the next slide you'll see one of the villages and one of the children standing outside. Our progression...natural progression was to first take highway 8 to highway 7, and then off highway 7 go north to Al Kut, link up with the Marine Regiment, and work our way into Baghdad.

We had a town to go through on the way named An Nasiriyah. Nasiriyah was the town at the end of the Gulf War, after much encouragement from our President, that did rise up against Saddam internally, and he sent his army down and crushed and killed a lot of people to get the rebellion down and that's what caused us to install no-fly zones in the north and the south...and Nasiriyah was under the no-fly zone.

When we got there, or were on our way there, we anticipated it being a friendly town. As we got north, we noticed children...a lot of people were anxious to see us. We moved pretty quickly and we learned a lot of things along the way. For instance, to the right here, if you see the little flag pole with the green flag, people had different colored flags up signify tribe, or Shiite or Sunni, or loyal or white flag: Peace, don't shoot us-that kind of thing.

What we found later was these kids were lookouts a lot of places. They were watching out for Fedayeen, which would get into these houses and wait until we got by, or wait until the 1st Infantry Battalion passed and then jump the mid-section of the convoy. The Colonel that we were traveling with decided that he was going to keep us close to the fight so we always were the second battalion in the convoy in a regiment of 5 battalions. So, we were always up next to the front. First Battalion would start fighting and we'd be right behind them.

### **Slide 13:**

The next slide shows more-and a different colored flag. This one's black; usually sympathetic to Saddam. As you'll notice, no one's there; at least that we can see. We sent a recon team in later to sweep the place, and they found a lot of arms but there was no one home.

One of the things I'd like to point out to you here is that in Iraq, everybody thinks it's desert. In Ramadi and places out that way; to the west, it very much is. But this part of the country is called the "fertile crescent" for a reason and if you'll look at the bottom of the slide, in the middle of the slide there's a river, or I shouldn't say a river. In American terms, it's more like a creek and some back up water. As you can see, they've got a lot of stuff in it. But the sand is not there.

It's very fertile, reddish-brown dirt, and it grows good stuff-lots of good food. These people were...we expected to see starving, bulging tummies, bulging eyes, you know, people starving like I saw when we were in Africa, but this wasn't the case; well-fed, happily moving about their day and waving and, you know; "George Bush!" That kind of thing...and smart...very smart.

#### **Slide 14:**

As we moved towards Nasiriyah a sand storm began. The notion was, we were going to take a position on the river before crossing the bridge into An Nasiriyah, and Task Force Tarawa was going to link up with us. They were from the 2 MEF that had been assigned to us to hold the rivers...roads, rivers, and bridges of Nasiriyah while we went through. A regimental combat team was headed through. Our fight, as we knew it, was for Al Kut.

So in this slide, you see the sand starting to kick up, and I wanted to show you this compound--in this photo is where lots of Iraqi Republican Guard troops had been garrisoned. We're not sure if it's a jail or a school. They were using it as a jail and we did capture a lot of Fedayeen troops in here, but what had happened...or regulars...they were planning to cut us off from this compound. This was before we got to Nasiriyah and set up.

#### **Slide 15:**

The next slide is some of our armor. The last slide I was looking West. This slide I'm looking East, and we're about 2 miles away from where that other picture was taken. And as you can see in the bottom corner, the bottom right-hand corner, the cloud is starting to move in. That's the last little bit of sun we saw for three days, and these tanks were heavily involved in the fight.

#### **Slide 16:**

The next slide is our CP that we set up for Nasiriyah. We threw this thing up in 15 minutes everywhere we went. This little tent section went up and down and these antennas; the ant farm; went up and down...up and down. These young Marines constantly were on the move and constantly putting it up, taking it down, so that we'd have a place to control fires from.

By this time, we had been in country for a week and we were engaged and had been in firing missions the whole way up the road, but as we got to Nasiriyah, Task Force Tarawa started across the bridges and we were just set up and waiting. We had tied in with their artillery people just in case something happened. And it was a good thing we did.

#### **Slide 17:**

The next slide shows you one of the tanks, aptly named "Zion", if you can see it on the barrel there to the right of the screen. The tank commander had been an Annapolis mid-shipman that Rabbi had known. His last assignment before he came forward to us was at Annapolis, so this was one of his "Middies" as he called them.

Anyway, you can see the sandstorm and how it's kicking up, and the reason I took a picture of this tank was because they were engaging. What happened, I'd like to explain to you, from this time, for the next few slides...what transpired for us here.

Task Force Tarawa went across the bridge and into the city and met some resistance, but not as much as would slow down a convoy. And as they broke to two columns to go either way in the city, they were fully engaged. And one of the AMTRACs, which is an armored personnel carrier for the Marine Corps, was hit with RPGs; multiple RPGs at the bridge, and disabled; set afire and blocked the bridge for a moment or two...and Marines were inside burning.

I can tell you there are two things you don't usually hear when traveling with Marines. One is, "Retreat." The other is, "Chaplains and corpsmen up! Now!" We heard that on the regimental net. Everything stopped and they called, "All chaplains and RPs and corpsmen forward, now!" so we started running to the bridge, and they stopped us going that way and said, "No, stay here. The fight is too bad" So we had to stand and look across the river as these guys were pinned down and fighting

What we were told at that time was that Marines had gone to the hospital in Nasiriyah; which I'll get back to that in just a second, and they had encountered patients walking around with their bottles, you know, IV and everything else, and they were surrendering. The Marines dismounted the vehicles to start attending to these people, the Iraqis hiding in the hospital opened up on the Marines and killed 11 Marines and wounded 50, and that makes me very angry right this minute, because I was a Marine and my first instinct is to run forward and to help and we were being held back; a pretty tough spot to be in.

One of the other things that I did not touch on, and I only want to touch on it briefly because I have some very personal feelings about this: One of the things we encountered on this road going in to Nasiriyah, the night before the...this ambush started, there was a convoy of vehicles; not a very big one but several tractor-trailers and hummers that came through with their headlights on in the middle of night-- during a war you just don't drive with your headlights on, so we knew they were in the Army. And we all shielded our faces and tried to save our night vision and as they drove by, you could here them yapping and talking and no tactical training whatsoever. And here sits an entire Marine regimental combat team armed to the teeth and ready to fight and they're driving through our perimeter with lights on, drawing all kinds of attention.

What we found out the next morning is, we sent our scouts forward and I was with the Executive Officer; the Rabbi and I were, so we were part of the scout forward team, was the crash scene for Jessica Lynch and her Army crew that was captured. The first Marines that had gotten there were these infantry guys from the battalion in front of us, and then us. And it was, at the time, a very horrendous because there was blood in the vehicles. It hadn't been long after it happened; some of the vehicles were still smoking. At the time, we did not know that her humvee; it was facing south towards us, so we weren't sure what had happened, had rear-ended one of the trucks and killed her driver. At the time, we didn't know, because no one was left. We just knew they were prisoners and there was one spot where we found some brass, but for the most part, we found no rounds. And these were Americans; that was very hard for us to swallow.

So as Task Force Tarawa moved through Nasiriyah and into this ambush, they were pinned down and we ended up spending 3 days blasting Nasiriyah with artillery in this sand storm, and that's what this tank was doing in this slide.

### **Slide 18:**

The next slide is on the north side of Nasiriyah; I'll get you there right now. On the third day what happened was we mounted up; Regimental Combat Team 1 was to push through and go through the northern side and head for Al Kut. As we finally crept across the bridge; we literally crept into the city at sunup, we encountered the 4,000 meter road that they named "The Gauntlet" or "Sniper Alley." We called it "The Gauntlet." They shot us up pretty hard; RPGs back and forth; Marine infantry back and forth, up and down the streets engaging people; kids running around buildings and shouting and all of a sudden RPGs flying through, across, and everywhere else, and we took incoming rounds into our hummer. And again let me remind you, we're in vinyl-sided hummers; none of these are armored. The only ones that are armored are the scout vehicles.

So as we proceeded through, we had to go to the end of highway 7 in Nasiriyah; make a left, go ...I can't remember if it's a couple hundred yards or ten feet, and then make a right back onto the four-lane road which had a median. And as we made the left we could see vehicles starting to flare and herring-bone off the road and we of course, were with the XO which was right up front, so we stopped and there was a bus full of civilians with the windows out. The bus was on fire; a giant hole in the front windshield, and people ganging out the windows; dead people in the bus, dead and screaming and Marines and sailors trying to get the people off the bus.

So naturally, out of the vehicle we came, and I looked down...I started to slip and I looked down and I was standing on somebody. I don't know who he was and we called him "pancake." And I hate to say that, but he was flat. He had gotten underneath the tracks of one of the vehicles, trying to fight a tank and it ran him over and he was squashed. And so I said, "AH!" and Rabbi came around the vehicle and I stopped him. I said, "You don't want to see this." but hands and feet; everything was smashed. It kind of looked like the cartoon drawing for "Beetle Bailey."

So, that was our first encounter with real death and as we rounded the vehicle to go do ministry, it wasn't just the bus. We got on the other side of the bus and there were several vehicles; there were people all over the street and corpsmen...a few corpsmen and an ambulance had pulled in there, trying to ministry-I'm sorry, trying to do triage. So we immediately went to the corpsmen and said, you know, "Where's our end of it?" because we start where they give up-- and they give up where we start. So, we're looking for the ones that are expectorant or dying.

He pointed over to this little burm and we went over to start and were expecting to see Marines. We don't know what we're going to see and step over the burm and there are Iraqi soldiers; one with his leg blown off, with a tracheotomy tube in his throat; the other one with bullet holes in his chest; several others that had already started expiring. And these two we found were alive and I looked at Rabbi and said, "Well, what do we do?" He said, "The only thing I can think we can do is pray."



So we did. We knelt and we prayed and I held the one's hand, whose leg had been blown off and looked him in the face and I mean I...I can only tell you that I watched the life go from his body. As his eyes turned green he took his last breath and...I see that guy often. In my mind...I...I don't guess you ever forget somebody who dies holding your hand looking at your face.

The interesting thing was, here's a rabbi and a born-again Christian holding, you know these Muslim people and praying for them. I think that epitomizes America. I mean, you know, we...even in the heat of battle-- we have compassion for people, and religion aside.

So as this scene unfolded before us, we had to start dealing with Marines and sailors who were dealing with this situation, and we had a lot of upset Marines, especially the ones who'd pulled the trigger on the 20 millimeter cannon that went through the bus. What had happened was the Iraqi soldiers were riding in the floor board and had put the civilians in the windows and were trying to reinforce the fight in Nasiriyah and the bus wouldn't stop, because an Iraqi soldier had a gun to the driver's head. And since the bus wouldn't stop, we engaged it, and these people got killed and so...all the other vehicles as well.

So...and we did ministry in triage and we started moving north again because the fight had to go on. And as we did, we encountered Iraqi vehicles along the road, this slide being one of them. This was a machinegun and an Iraqi soldier; a Republican Guard, who had decided to stay and engage us on the road and this is what Marine firepower, or you tax dollars, can do. ...what's left of him. They shot him up really bad. Of course we had to stop and try to do something because Muslims, like Jews, have to be buried within 24 hours. So we had to stop and try to make sure that someone got forward to bury him in a temporary grave until we could get someone there to deal with it.

#### **Slide 19:**

The next slide is our artillery cannons setting in, in the perimeter just above Al Kut. We were setting in to start the fight for it and these are the guys actually putting the guns in. And as you see, it's kind of sandy here; not real fertile in this one area because I think this probably was a dry lake bed at one time. In front of us is very green and behind us is very green and in the next slide...

#### **Slide 20:**

...You can see a T-62; Russian-made, Iraqi tank that we shot up just before we got there. The Iraqi soldiers were still in it and we had to go, of course, and deal with them as well.

This slide is much better to show you what the terrain looked like out just ahead of this area where we were setting in. And our advance party for A Battery had gone forward. When they went forward the radios lit up as we were setting in and they said, "We are cut off! We are cut off and we are taking incoming fire at this time!" And we could hear...we could hear it. They were only 200-300 yards out ahead of us. And as we mounted to go get them the east side of the road opened up on us.

As the east side of the road opened up we began to engage. Rabbi had to be moved and I grabbed him and drug him out of the vehicle because he had never been under fire before. And I drug him over to an artillery pit that we had made with artillery, as we were firing north, and I threw him in. And the sand storm was still happening to us and air couldn't get in to help us so we had to engage these guys and I had to cover him. That fire was intense enough that I literally laid on top of him to protect him.

As we engaged, all of a sudden from our rear, which would have been the west side of the road, which was where we were, the tree line opened up and we were getting caught in a crossfire. At that moment I had no choice but to move him again, so I picked him up, and we ran for another hole. And I got him down in even farther and I put my knee in his back and held him down until I could get an assessment on the situation. With me, was the executive officer's driver, who had An M16; I didn't. I had an M9 pistol because Marines don't trust anybody with a higher rank, I guess, with rifles.

Anyway, as we looked up forward, the Iraqis were in the field in the open in front of us and cutting us off so...Artillery is not used to having this kind of fight. They're used to, you know, Marines are Marines and they'll fight when they have to, which is what was happening.

And as the Iraqis got into the open, I looked over at the gun line and the guns were going straight up and then they came straight down level. And as an infantryman, I can tell you we always call for artillery, in this case we were firing it, and I have never seen a gun barrel go level on an artillery cannon. But when I saw that I thought, "We're in trouble!" And they started firing into the Iraqis in the open. That's how close they were to us.

We had to get help to the people who were cut off, and we needed help because we're not equipped to fight like the Infantry. So we were fighting as hard as we could on three sides, and finally an infantry battalion; the reserve battalion from my hometown, or from where I was up in San Francisco, came galloping in and engaged and fought them back.

We got one chopper on the ground; it ran out of gas...or almost out of gas fighting the sandstorm to try to help us spot snipers. So he set down in our perimeter. And that night, we dealt with the guys who had been cut off. As they came back in; the captain had lost his hand; an RPG went through the window and cut it off, hit the first sergeant in the chest, broke his ribs and his arm. The driver was injured and the corpsman that was traveling with them had performed tremendous triage under fire.

And we had to deal with all of them and their issues...their stress and trauma. And then the battalion...we had to start dealing with people there. So on top of having all the death that we had dealt with, now we had to deal with them dealing with their own being wounded. And one of the things I want to emphasize here is that we never got to deal with ours.

All right, so I'll move along fairly quickly now.

**Slide 21:**

Now the next slide is a tank. After we cleaned up that area, we were starting north again. This is the 26th and this tank is going to be leading the column in as we go. They engaged shortly thereafter.

**Slide 22:**

The next slide is the Huey the day after we had...basically come out of the sand storm. Here he is getting ready to take off with Captain Frye and the first sergeant, to get them MEDEVAC'd out back to the chaplains and RPs and the medical hospitals that I showed you...the people at in the beginning.

**Slide 23:**

As we moved north to Al Shatrah, this was an Iraqi...I want to say "machinegun vehicle" for lack of a better word, but basically it had anti armor missiles mounted on it, so we took care of that in short order. Things like this got Marines motivated to keep going north. What I found out later in life is that this comes back to haunt them

All right, let me stop here on this slide very briefly. On the 26th we went through a little town called Al Shatrah. We pulled off the side of the road to wait on B Battery to come through and B battery was fully engaged as they came through. The radios lit up and said, "Two-thousand Fedayeen regulars...or 2,000 Fedayeen and Iraqi regulars have engaged the artillery guys' So they gunned it to leave, and as they got into our perimeter and stopped on the hardball-- the road, we ran up to the vehicles to start talking to these guys. Bullet holes are in everything and these guys are really jacked-up.

We get up there and we start talking to them and these guys are 60 seconds into their explanation and we start taking rounds, and we started an intense firefight. The tree line just lit up on us. And I had to grab Rabbi, throw him over my shoulder and flip him over the burm, almost like we were in wrestling, you know, WWE-style. And then I had to run back up under fire, grab the shovel, go back down and dig a hole because the fire got more intense...dig a hole to get him in and then step back up to throw the shovel in and started...I engaged with my pistol because the fire was intense. And then I grabbed some Marines and got them in front of us and started engaging the enemy in the fight.

Having been a Marine, it just kind of came natural to me but I realized that at that moment my job was to make sure that this man got home alive, like I promised him he would. Again, I covered him with my body and we didn't take any casualties but we really had a fight on our hands.

As we moved north we encountered several places and positions where the Iraqis had set up to fight us.

**Slide 24:**

This is the home of a Baathe party regular officer. I only put this picture in to show you that everyone wasn't living in squalor. He was living in a fairly nice house here with hand-carved doors, and he had a little mosque in his living room here. And in his yard he had these:

**Slide 25:**

German-made, big artillery guns that he was firing on us with, so we took C4 and blew these in place. And the guy eventually came back while we were in his compound. Of course we were not allowed to go in the house because we weren't there to take their houses; we were just there to move into Baghdad.

We were just outside Baghdad here and we encountered this guy, who of course went and saw his house and what had happened was the locals had looted it. I wanted to show you that house because right next to the fence, which you can't see, but in this slide with the artillery you can see, just in front of the humvee to the right, the mud huts, again, the people live in-- with the hand-made windows.

Well, that mud hut that's right there, if you take that and move it over to your right about 175 feet, it butted up against the fence, which was around that house. And the people who worked for him lived in that house. So that's how Saddam treated his people.

**Slide 26:**

These are some of the captured weapons; some of the mortars that they were using to shoot at us with on the way down. And these are our Marines. That's our commanding officer holding the water bottle in the center there.

**Slide 27:**

This is the guy's kitchen as taken through the window. Not exactly American standards but I just wanted you to see that...how they lived: Stainless steel sinks and lots of refrigerators and things like that.

**Slide 28:**

One more piece of anti-aircraft artillery here. This was up by the Daniyawah River on the outskirts of Baghdad. We encountered a lot of this the farther north we got.

**Slide 29:**

And this picture is the only picture in my slide presentation that I can't remember if I took it or if someone else took it and gave it to me, so I wanted to say that for the record. But these were people leaving Baghdad. This truck was filled with Iraqi troops. We knew every single one of them was an Iraqi soldier running and...see them? They're getting up; more are trying to get on. And they would change their clothes and we met them, after we engaged them we would meet

them coming the other way in shorts and t-shirts and flip-flops. Look at them. That's what we encountered. But our orders were not to engage them so we had to let them go.

**Slide 30:**

This mosque was on the banks of the river. Our last place before we went into Baghdad was this field, the artillery we had set up back about 3 miles where we had gotten into an intense firefight and the Iraqis were killed in their fighting holes and of course, we had to go in and perform ministry there: Get the bodies out and do things to prepare them for burial.

And then this mosque is right on the Daniyiwah-I never can remember the name of it, but the Yalawah or the Daniyiwah River. Anyway, this was the last mosque we saw before we crossed the river into Baghdad at the bridges.

We did take some fire here. We knew Iraqi soldiers were hiding inside the compound but we never engaged them here.

**Slide 31:**

I took this next slide to show you a couple of my Marines and what Marine aircraft and helicopters can do. That is an armored personnel carrier full of Iraqi troops that are scorched and dead and these 2 Marines wanted me to snap their picture outside it; at a little strip mall.

**Slide 32:**

Here is one of our friends from the Iraqi military, who is on his way out with his towel and he's wiping his sweaty face, at one of the little suburbs of Baghdad, giving us the "thumbs-up" and "welcome Americans"--- and probably an hour before we'd been fighting him

**Slide 33:**

Again, on this next slide: another tank we encountered. The tank commander, you can't see very well, but he's slumped over the top of the turret; killed.

**Slide 34:**

This vehicle; next slide; is on fire. This was a refueling truck that was trying to run from us. We engaged it. I actually was in the vehicle as we engaged it...with rounds...I engaged it myself. The .50 cal hit it in the rear and blew it up...two in the front of that we had to deal with.

**Slide 35:**

The next slide shows Baghdad. I wanted to take this picture and send it to you for...show it to you for a number of reasons. Number one: on the right here you see one of the buildings and what a Tomahawk missile can do for destruction. That is Tomahawk precision-bombing. Everything around it's fine but look at that building. It just completely obliterated everything

inside of it but left the structure. The big blue halves of the shell here are the Iraqi Gulf War veterans' memorial. This is Baghdad, very green, very metropolitan for the Middle East, I think.

### **Slide 36:**

The next slide is the Palestine Hotel and the hotels the journalists are staying in are to the right. That's where CNN and everyone else are. And right in front of it, you can't see, there's a little-a building just a shade taller that shows the blue-domed mosque you see in every live shot coming from the Middle East. This is taken from the top of the Ministry of Information's compound, which is one of the compounds that we took.

### **Slide 37:**

These are my Marines. This is what my job was; ministry. The rabbi's job was to minister to these young fighters here. The tube hanging between the two of these guys' heads in this slide, on this humvee, that's a washing machine. That's an artillery canister and what we would do is put water and a scoop of detergent and our clothes in there and then tie it to our vehicle and as we moved forward it would agitate and wash and then we would rinse our clothes. Somewhere, that you'll never see, is a picture of me at 3 o'clock in the morning out behind my vehicle taking a bath with baby wipes because we were getting close enough to Baghdad that I felt like we could do that. So...I didn't include it here.

### **Slide 38:**

This is Rabbi performing a service. Just in front of Rabbi is me, with glasses on, the last one over to the left in the crowd there, performing a non-denominational service here. Most of us...well all of us were Christians in this group and the old saying, "There are no atheists in the foxhole" is true, but I can tell you that these guys were all in church before and that made it easy for us. And this was the last service we did before we took the compound.

### **Slide 39: Bob Recounts a memory**

The driver of my vehicle was an 18-year-old kid who turned 19 the day we went through the breach. I came up to him one night as he was sitting on the hood of the humvee--"What are you doing Dave?" (name changed to respect privacy)

"Oh, just sitting here." I got up on the vehicle and started talking to him about the future, tried to be kind of a big brother to him and encourage him to make the best of his Marine Corps career because now he's a combat veteran and it would mean a lot in the Marine Corps. He wanted to be a pilot, so I was encouraging him.

The war ended; we went home. We, Rabbi and I, went back to the MEF and rotated home to our families and these guys went back to Los Palmas and I was demobilized several months later, only to be remobilized after 90 days for round 2: Fallujah OIF II. Anyway, I had not talked to Dave, and when I remobilized, before we left, I called to find him and was told he was not available.

About 2 weeks later, I got an email from him telling me that he's sorry he hadn't gotten back to me but he had been in...I don't want to say lock-up, but he'd been institutionalized for a brief period of time as he had tried to commit suicide. My first real acceptance of posttraumatic stress was right here. He said, "I just wanted to tell you, RP1, you stopped me from committing suicide several times."

#### **Slide 40: Bob Recounts a Memory (cont.)**

I said, "I did?"

And he said, "Yeah. One in particular was I was sitting on the hood of the humvee that night at that compound when you walked up and I was putting the barrel in my mouth when you said 'Hey what are you doing?' I was going to pull the trigger then."

And that's a pretty heavy burden to carry; knowing that this young kid's life was that out of control. What I had no conscious awareness of at this point was what I was dealing with because as a chaplain; an RP; in the rear, you deal with people first. There is no care for the caregiver.

Until just a couple of weeks ago I had not heard from Dave again. I know that the Marine Corps kicked him out and they sent him home, but I had not heard from him again. I do know that he was still suicidal.

I got an email from military.com several weeks ago telling me that I had an email message from him. And I got an email from him and his life is better now and he's doing much better and he had not killed himself. And I wanted to encourage him to come visit, so that was a good story.

#### **Slide 41: Bob Tells his Own Story**

Let me tell you a little about mine. I demobilized again in August/September of...August of 2004 and started...got out of active duty on Friday and started a brand new job on Monday in San Diego. My wife was up in Northern California with the children. I took them home on Friday and I started here Monday. So I took the uniform off after almost 2 full years of this and went right back into the industry I'm in now; into a brand new job in a brand new place and still spun tight from the war.

And I got my family moved down here (Southern California) by October and we moved into an apartment until we could find a house. We had all our stuff in and it was a very nice apartment, but my son was having a hard time staying in his bed. He would come down the hall crying every night. Of course, I finally began to recognize that I was sleeping a couple of hours a night and that's it. Every noise, I was up-- looking around. I was always checking the door locks. I was always checking my kids to make sure that they were breathing, and then my wife; that she was okay. I was always out checking the cars. I couldn't sleep

So my son, finally one night, I was so tired and I couldn't sleep and I was so frustrated; he came down the hallway crying and screaming--November. So I went down the hall and I grabbed him by his arms and I picked him up, and he's, you know, 2 years old and I'm...I've got him over my head and I'm giving him a little shake and I'm yelling, "Shut up! Shut up!" and I'm screaming at my son.

**Slide 42: Bob Tells His Own Story (cont.)**

And I just said, "Oh my god!" And I took him back into his room and of course he's screaming and my wife's yelling, "Bob! Bob! Take it easy!" And I hadn't shaken him more than just a quick little shudder; sat him down on his bed and I sat down next to him, which was an infant bed-I shouldn't say an infant-a toddler bed, which promptly broke because I'm too big for it. And that made him even more upset but I began crying and I couldn't believe that...I said, "Something's wrong with me. This is my son. My son! What am I doing?"

So the next morning I got up, came to work, I sat down at the computer and I went to the VA website and I sent an email to them saying, "Can somebody help me with posttraumatic stress? What is it and how do I recognize the signs, because I think I have it." I got an email back within an hour from someone here in San Diego, who invited me to come into the Vet Center ricky-tick, which I did.

I started counseling at that time and began to realize that the problems I was dealing with, and as we got deeper into counseling, I started looking back over the symptoms and realized when I started having them was before I left Kuwait to come home the first time. I was having problems getting along with people, abusive to authority, couldn't rest, couldn't sleep, very anxious, nervous all the time-all the things that I wasn't aware of.

**Slide 43: Bob Tells His Own Story (cont.)**

They tried to get me to do medication and I fought them for a while. I finally agreed to it November of 2005. I want to take you to that point. I was very involved in the Iraq War Veterans' Organization, I still am, VFW, veterans' issues and here at work. I have a beautiful family that I try very hard to put my life into, and I'm also a Chief Petty Officer, like I said, a religious program specialist, Chief in the Navy Reserve. I'm senior enlisted leader for the 1 MEF Reserve Component and the 4th Marine Aircraft Wing.

So I've got a lot of jobs going on; a lot of stress and I was going to counseling, but November of 2005 was the first time I'd ever contemplated killing myself. I was having trouble just getting along with people and the stress was too much and it's only been recently that I've been able to admit that; and even to my wife because I just thought they deserved better. And I have to tell you that the counseling from the VA helped me tremendously because I was able to replay the words of my counselor over-and-over in my head and I said, "What am I doing? I can't do this to my family." And I was able to get myself out of that funk and get going. Like I said, I was very involved.



#### Slide 44: No title

This is me and my family at Christmas. This is what I live for. These give me reasons to go on and do everything I can everyday. I serve veterans because they served us. I also serve veterans because I feel like I'm in a position, in the world, in a job, where I can help. And I can get our story out, and I can see to it that people do take care of they guys coming home because my dad was a Vietnam vet and I can tell you what it was like being raised on an Army base. As a kid at the end of the war....though...well at the beginning, middle, and end, because I was raised my first 10 years of life were the beginning, middle, and end of Vietnam, so I saw the whole thing.

And I can tell you that this is what I live for. This was the reason I didn't kill myself. These are the ones I love and live for and that's why I'm getting help. That's why I go to counseling. That's why I do take my medication.

And that is why I'm reaching out every time I get a chance to speak to people, to encourage them to get help. These young kids come home and they go through a rough time at the end of the military time. They go to the VA once for a visit, if they go to a hospital and they run into somebody that they don't want to deal with, well that's their experience.

Regardless, the Navy, in their infinite wisdom, has decided that they're going to put me in front of a medical board to decide if I'm fit to stay in the Navy now because I took a physical last year and told them that I was taking Zoloft because they said prescription medicines and I didn't want to be caught lying, you know, on the medical exam. What I didn't know then, and I know now, is that it would never have shown up on the tests and I didn't have to tell them anyway. But I did, and the Navy flagged me as, you know, a problem, and I had to go through lots of examinations and stuff for them to say, "Yep, it's a line-of-duty injury. You do have chronic posttraumatic stress and, oh by the way, now we're going to decide if you're fit to stay in the Navy."

So they're medical boarding me here in the next few months and they're really not giving me much to say in it. So, instead of taking a bad turn and a bad attitude, I'm going to keep a positive attitude on this; keep going to counseling, keep taking my medicine, and keep sowing into these three lives right here, and reach out and help every veteran I can.

One of the things I always say to people from the Veterans' Administration that I speak to is this: Please don't ever stop reaching out. These young kids today that didn't grow up knowing war like I did have no idea about death and they're thrown into these situations and realize this isn't playstation 2. There's very real events happening with IEDs, ambushes, foot patrols where people are getting killed, children throwing grenades, I mean this is happening.

And the...Now Afghanistan is firing up again so I ask people to please keep reaching out. We need you. We need your help and we need veterans. We need people who are getting out to come forward and say, "Let me at least get checked out. Let me at least talk with someone to make sure that I'm okay." And if you don't want to now, if you see you've got problems, please go get help. I hear people saying that the VA never helps, they never this, they never that. I can tell you the VA's helped me, and they've reached out to me.

That pretty much wraps it up. I just wanted to thank you for letting me talk to you today. The end all of this story will be when everybody's home and we all can sit down and talk about this, but that's how posttraumatic stress affects me, and that's how I carry Iraq with me every day.

Thanks.