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# My life in service

## By Scott Slik

I joined the Navy in the summer of 1996. After almost two years of training I found myself in Iceland as freshly minted E-3 Engineering Aide in the Seabees. Over the years that followed I found myself injured, rebuilt, married with children and widowed until my children landed here in Panama City to continue serving as civilians. I will also say that I had been offered Lasik surgery by the military many times by the Navy.

My first duty station was in Iceland. I was attached to a communications station which required military personnel to provide facility maintenance and engineering support due to security issues.

It was there which I first broke my leg. When I did, the Navy physician misdiagnosed my injury because I walked into the base hospital on my own. He decided it was a sprain. I ran and biked on my own time. I also participated in command PT, (Physical Training), and performed my work for a month and a half before it was realized by medical that I had shattered my knee.

The Navy shipped me off and used part of my right hip to rebuild it. I was offered the chance to walk away from The Navy but I knew that I was not finished with my journey.

I finished my tour in Iceland and after some more training found my way to NMCB 40, (Naval Mobile Construction Battalion). My battalion was currently in Rota Spain. Before I could join them I had to go through several refresher training courses in Port Hueneme, Ca.

I arrived in Spain, joined my battalion and went right to work. Three weeks before we were scheduled to begin shipping home, I was forced to go to medical by my Chief when he saw me limping off a construction site. I was informed the next day that I had approximately two weeks before my leg would have required amputation.

Once again I was shipped off. This time, I was shipped to Port Hueneme, Ca. I was attached to the 31st Regiment and waited there for many doctor visits and minor surgeries which ended in my left knee being replaced with an organ donors’, (bone, cartilage, and meniscus, all of it from a donor).

The Navy Doctor which saw me in Spain was also the surgeon who ran The Navy’s Orthopedic Center in Balboa Hospital. He decided that I was in the shape I was not only due to my own stubbornness but also because of mistakes made by Navy Medicine. He found a civilian who was willing to try new things. This was the year 2000.

A year later I was married, expecting twins and preparing to transfer to a new battalion. Just a week before I was due to ship out and three months before the birth of my children I found out my wife was dying of skin cancer.

My commanding officer called my new battalion canceled my orders and I stayed with my family to watch the birth of my children three months early and the death of my wife nine months later.

In the spring of 2003 I returned to my battalion NMCB 40. My children came back to Florida to spend that first deployment with my family.

My family had been increased by three and greatly diminished by the loss of one. My wife had passed, but I had twin infants to raise on my own and my stepdaughter who was 15 years old, (she had only known me for two of those years at this point), who I also raised after the death of her mother.

I came and went many times over the next four and a half years. My final deployment was to Iraq. I volunteered for that duty to prevent a much younger troop whom I felt was not adequately prepared from going.

When I returned I realized I could no longer allow my children to live in that life. They were four years old wearing the clothes of 24 old infants. They were speech delayed to the point that I was basically the only one who could understand them when they spoke.

I was quietly informed by the wife of a battalion buddy who had moved into my house during our deployment that no one wanted to tell me what had been happening in all my absences. My children stopped talking for months every time I left, they became listless and depressed, their appetites and participation dwindled to nothing.

It was time for me to leave. It took me two months to convince my chain of command that I was not signing the reenlistment papers they greeted me with when I returned from Iraq. When I did they shook my hand, and I quietly walked away and returned home to Florida.

It is worth noting that during all that time I had been scheduled for Lasik surgery several times. However, every time my appointment for the surgery finally came up I got sent somewhere new. When I returned home I would be offered another date for the surgery and true to form I would be sent somewhere else away from my three children and obviously the doctor who would fix my eyes.

I eventually found work here on NSA Panama City. I have been building a life for my children and I and a home. My step daughter lives and works in Monticello surrounded by my family. My parents, nieces and nephews, Sister and all the people I grew up with live there.

My son and daughter live here with me.

I have spent the last six years here working on NSA Panama City to still support the military. My job is one which is essential as is this base and in some way I work to keep it running. However, I now do that without leaving my children in the care of strangers, (Nannies and Caregivers hired for those absences), for months on end and vanishing in the night.

The kids have friends and social lives and have caught up to the delays caused by their earliest years. We still deal with the epilepsy caused by their premature births. However, it is more apparent every day that leaving the military to go back to work for the military has absolutely been the right decision for all of us.

I often think of getting the surgery to fix my eyes so that I could get up in the morning and see the world. Amusingly enough, so that I would get to stop grabbing my kids to help me find my glasses when I put them on the wrong nightstand or just two feet away from where I normally do.

It is just the three of us. The idea that I could indulge myself in this way will likely never happen when my kids have come first for so long and my job and so many other things that I find it hard to break that habit at this point in my life. I continue to move forward. This is the lesson I try to teach my children by example. I work. I play. I have put myself back in school. I have lived in screaming physical pain for almost two decades because of my injuries and my unwillingness to give in to them. I have dealt with spiritual and emotional pain from the things in my own personal life and the things I have seen during my time in uniform. I keep going.

The offer made here for this surgery I don’t know why you offer it or what you base your decision on. What I wrote is a very small portion of who I am and where I have been. Thank you for at least considering.

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