

TSgt Tom Marcum, USAF (Ret.) and Mrs. April Marcum



Tom served over fourteen years active duty status in the US Air Force from Jan 1996 through May 2010 at which time Tom was medically retired after a medical evaluation board and put into TDRL (Temporary Duty Retirement List) status. His MOS was 3P0X1B or combat arms weapons expert and at the time of injury he was assigned to the 824th SFS of Moody AFB, GA.

In June of 2006 he was deployed as a part of the 723 ESFS/DET 7 as part of a specialized Air Force Squadron trained in combat patrols and missions that could assist the Iraqi police in Baghdad. He returned home in Dec 2006 and deployed to Ali Air Base Iraq in Jan of 2008 where he was NCOIC of the armory which involved weapons support for the base and all detached units, day to day operations and responsibility for all weapons stored in the armory.

In July of 2008 while getting a mobile armory ready for transition, he was working outside by himself when there was incoming mortar which landed 35 yards away. He sustained a traumatic brain injury with a blow-out fracture to the right orbital wall; he has vision, hearing and cognition deficits with short term memory loss and chronic migraines. He also sustained a right shoulder injury and has an otolith disorder.

The transition from active duty has had many hurdles, but we have had great success too. Because we were at a small Air Force base with a medical clinic, getting adequate medical care was difficult in the beginning. It was not until he was sent to VA Poly-trauma in Tampa, FL that diagnoses were made and medical problems were treated accordingly.

Unfortunately, we did not have a joint DoD/VA rating when he was retired and ended up waiting almost a year for the VA rating. Which meant that we were living on a 70% DoD rating and SSDI. I had to quit my job as a teacher in the meantime to take care of Tom and get him to all his appointments because he does not drive. Without a VA rating he could not apply for CRSC (Combat related special compensation) or apply for some non-profit groups grant because they required a VA rating. When his rating did come back it was not what we expected and after some research I found that the VA had the wrong patient records attached to our claim. It took another 2-3 months of intensive lobbying by the WWP to get the rating that Tom deserved. We have been married for eighteen years and have two boys, Jared (14) and Gabe (11), in the time that we were "retired" but had no VA rating, we went through our entire life savings to try to keep afloat financially. We must do a better job getting our service men and women through the disability rating process quicker, the C&P process is not working.

Transitioning in the VA medical program was easier. I am happy to report that we have had excellent medical care in the VA. All of my husband's therapists, care-managers, and doctors assigned to us are professional, caring people.

Currently, we are still in a holding pattern for the TDRL evaluation and hope to hear soon what the medical board determinations are for my husband. Tom and I traveled to San Antonio, Texas in June of this year for the TDRL re-evaluation. We have not yet heard any news as to if he will be permanently retired or placed back on TDRL status for another year. Our family has had to overcome some very difficult situations from traveling to the nearest VA hospital that is over two hours away for adequate medical care to having our youngest son diagnosed with secondary PTSD. Our whole life plan changed, we have accepted that and are moving forward to make life as normal as possible for our children. My hopes are that the families that are coming down the pipe from recent loved ones injured in the OIF/OEF have a little easier road to travel because we cared enough to make improvements where they need to be made.

Something that politicians, public-servants, and others involved in the lives of wounded warriors need to remember is that America is still at war, a decade is a long time to be at war.

