

# The ‘One Bright Spot’ in 2020

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Veteran Jason Kennedy lives near Breckenridge, Colorado, with his wife, Gillian. The self-described “Army brat” grew up in Clarksville, Tennessee.

He enlisted shortly after 9/11 and was first deployed to Wiesbaden, Germany. Kennedy then served in Kuwait and eventually Iraq.

There, he performed quick reaction force and security duties, provided route clearance and patrolled the Sunni Triangle. In 2004, Kennedy and his fellow soldiers were recognized with the Valorous Unit Award.

After Iraq, he was reclassified as a 91W Medic and stationed at Fort Stewart in Georgia. He became a certified paramedic and worked in the emergency room of Winn Army Hospital.

Following his service, Kennedy has suffered lingering effects and struggles to find normalcy.

“Aside from the usual bodily destruction the Army inflicts, I also was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress,” he said.

In July 2020, he visited UCLA’s Operation Mend program for three weeks. While there, Kennedy could not work. At the same time, COVID-19 was impacting his family, and he became concerned about mounting bills.

Kennedy was told about the VFW’s Unmet Needs program and applied. He said the process was straightforward, and the assistance helped cover rent after his return from Operation Mend.

“It was a lifeline,” Kennedy said. “It reduced my stress and let me figure out next steps to heal instead of having to frantically move back into survival mode.”

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Kennedy appreciates those who made the assistance possible.

“I can’t thank the donors and workers enough,” he said. “With everything going on in 2020, this has been the one bright spot I’ll remember.”

Kennedy encourages other veterans to reach out for support offered by the VFW, as well as programs like Operation Mend. His long road to recovery following service has been difficult. He hopes others take action sooner.

“You can be like me and fight to survive for 17 years or you can get the help you need from the start,” he shared. “It’s not a weakness to ask for assistance. This isn’t a fight you can win by yourself, and you don’t have to go it alone.”