

## **U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Committee On Veterans' Affairs . One Hundred And Thirteenth Congress  
House Subcommittee On Veteran Affairs . Subcommittee On Oversight And Investigations

### **OVERSIGHT FIELD HEARING**

"Access To Mental Health Care And Traumatic Brain Injury Services"  
Addressing The Challenges And Barriers For Veterans

**Thursday . April 24<sup>th</sup> . 2014 . 1:00 Pm**

R.E. Lindsey Jr. Auditorium  
Southern Arizona VA Health Care System  
3601 South Sixth Avenue . Building 4 . Room 109  
Tucson, Arizona 85723

### **TESTIMONY OF JOHN D. DAVISON**

Honorable Chairman Mike Coffman and Distinguished House Members;

It is a privilege to testify today and I respectfully Thank You for the invitation to do so. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to address the Subcommittee regarding the hardships of Veterans and the difficulties which confront them regarding their treatment and care in VA systems.

The past several weeks have been very difficult for our Family following the passing of our beloved Son Lance C. Davison on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The hardest things I have ever done in my life were having to tell his Mother, Sister and Brother, writing an Obituary for him and laying him to rest, but from the beginning we have all been committed to our Duty in Honoring and Respecting this incredible Man.

Good memories of a simpler time have often occupied our thoughts in thinking of Lance.

Friday, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 1998 was a day of joy and proud reflections as we joined our son during his graduation at "Marine Corps Recruit Depot" in San Diego, California. The ceremony, moved into an auditorium because of rain, was so inspiring for parents and families as we all witnessed the transformation that had taken place in our young men... now Marines.

The early morning ocean layer had dissipated by the time we could go outside and finally see our son. So very proud we were of him, we met his DI's, Company Officers, his fellow Marines and their families. The sun was shining and it was an exciting, cheerful and fulfilling time together - much sadder and more difficult times were ahead.

Lance excelled in the U.S Marine Corps and cherished being a Marine. He was completely dedicated to the regimes of the infantry becoming an accomplished marksman and scout sniper.

In November 2000 he completed "USMC Amphibious Reconnaissance School" on Coronado Island (Naval Expeditionary Warfare Training Group) and cleared screening for assignment with the 1<sup>st</sup> Force Reconnaissance Company at Camp Las Flores (Camp Pendleton).

With Force Recon he earned his "jump wings" and "scuba bubble" and engaged in extensive, specialized and elite training worldwide. The June 2001 edition of "Leatherneck" (Magazine of the Marines) presented Lance on the front cover, with the feature article; "Recon-Independent Operators: Exceptional Men, Exceptional Training".

As for many - Tuesday, September 11th, 2001 changed our world. The tragedies in New York, Washington DC and Pennsylvania are forever etched within us but for families with men and women in the military it meant one thing. These cowardly acts of terror had far reaching ramifications worldwide, effecting all Americans and reaching into our very households... changing our lives forever.

Lance had seen war before during operations on the island of East Timor, but it would be much different now.

Lance was an elite MARSOC Operative. Immediately following 9-11, he was sent on missions in Afghanistan in support of "Operation Noble Eagle", "Operation Enduring Freedom" and any such operations associated with the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks.

As the "War on Terror" escalated, Lance was assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion 23<sup>rd</sup> Marines 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division during "Operation Iraqi Freedom" where he was awarded a Bronze Star and a Navy Commendation Medal for separate combat actions, valor and bravery in 2003.

He returned to Iraq again in 2005 (Presidential Orders) and 2006. I recently learned that he was a lone survivor of an IED explosion which killed four other Recon Marines. He engaged in close quarter combat, endured numerous injuries from gunshot wounds, shrapnel, RPG attacks and suffered post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injuries.

SGT. Lance C. Davison was an "American Hero", he had a top secret clearance and through his leadership and courage he saved many young Marines during OEF/OIF combat operations and assisted civilian casualties under fire without concern for his own safety and well-being.

*Lance's integrity, honor, fortitude, self-will, determination, motivation to overcome all adversity and obstacles, and his character is unquestionable.*

Through all these experiences Lance maintained "presence of mind". He told me once that one's greatest weapon is "calm" when encountering any difficult situation and "observe don't admire" - keep all things focused and in perspective.

Lance was "Honorably Discharged" from the U.S. Marine Corps in 2006 and continued his vigilance during civilian life. He graduated from the Arizona Law Enforcement Academy, third in his class, with a 97.7% score for physical condition. As a Flagstaff Police Officer he received two "Commendations for Valor" Citations, where in one instance he again was faced with losing his life.

He always kept himself in top shape, playing football and running in ultra-marathons while always eating and living healthy.

He served his community and was active in "MCL Toy's For Tot's", assisting wounded warriors and supported the "Wounded Warrior" and "Lone Survivor Foundations".

As a "Chief Sniper Instructor" he certified high-level military personnel and SOCOM Operatives, training law enforcement officers at local, county, state and federal levels at the GPS Sniper School in Phoenix, Arizona.

Lance was working on a Bachelor's Degree in Business, had an AA Degree in Criminal Technology and earned an Administration of Justice transfer Degree.

Lance conceived "Raven 2 O.D.G." (Operator Development Group) a long range tactical marksmanship school and was the Owner/Operator of this disabled veteran owned business. It was his passion and he was greatly respected and came highly recommended within the special ops community.

While accomplishing all this and even more Lance continued suffering from the "invisible wounds" caused by combat related "Post Traumatic Stress" (PTSD) and "Traumatic Brain Injury" (TBI).

He also had significant visual perceptual deficits, difficulty with comprehension and needed cognitive-linguistic therapy.

*During the early morning of Sunday, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014 near sunrise, Lance succumbed to his combat wounds received during two wars in the Middle East and took his life.*

*We had Lance with us for ten years after Iraq 2004, for which we are very thankful.*

*It was a blessing for us, one that many parents and families did not have. Eric Lindstrom, a close friend and a fellow Flagstaff Police Officer with Lance was previously killed in action while in Afghanistan.*

### **HELPING VETERANS WITH PTSD AND TBI**

When we are talking about our men and women of the military who like Lance, have given all they have for their country, protecting all that they love, we are treading on sacred and hallowed ground.

We must carefully approach this subject, always honoring them and respecting their sacrifices, their infirmities and their privacy.

Lance endured significant agony and suffered greatly from the uncertainties and harsh realities of post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injuries. He sought help from the U.S. Military, the Veterans Administration and several professional sources.

I have been involved for many years in Veterans' issues within our community. Since Lance's passing, I have been even more determined to piece it all together, I have connected some of the dots, but there are many unanswered questions.

Much of the information necessary to better understand what really happened to Lance (during the course of his medical and clinical care) is compiled within the records of the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Veterans Administration (VA).

*It is not my intent or desire to blame or accuse these organizations or anyone without full knowledge and a complete understanding of how Lance's situation was handled.*

#### **It is very important to our family that we all work together to:**

- Determine facts and advance truth
- Encourage DoD policies to provide updated, enhanced and mandatory PTSD/TBI training for all military personnel and their families before and after deployments
- Resolve to improve overall healthcare conditions for all Veterans within the VA system
- Resolve to fully investigate, review, evaluate and update the VA approach to treatment of Veterans with PTSD, TBI and mental health concerns
- Encourage VA and Community Initiatives to provide updated, enhanced educational opportunities for the families of Veterans diagnosed with PTSD and or TBI
- Engage national "Veteran Service Organizations" (VSO) in a comprehensive partnership with the DoD and VA to change the status quo relating to PTSD and TBI tragedies

- Resolve to fully fund (public/private) and implement advanced scientific, technological, medical and clinical research for the treatment of PTSD and TBI

*We must as a Nation move to solve the critical issues associated with PTSD/TBI and prevent the tragedy of increased suicides of military personnel and veterans.*

### **EVERY DAY THERE ARE OVER TWENTY SUICIDES BY US MILITARY VETERANS**

PTSD and TBI has become the “signature” medical concern for OEF and OIF Veterans.

We cannot shamefully be apathetic or ignore the cries for help (or the silence) by those who should be most esteemed.

While, I do not have the all the answers, the current situation is a national tragedy... it is an epidemic of huge proportions with tragic ramifications for our Military and Nation.

*I do however know my son... his accomplishments, his achievements and successes, his challenges, his hardships, his mistakes, his set-backs, his improvements, his legacy...*

The story of Lance Davison and his struggle with combat inflicted post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injuries is well documented. Many newspaper articles (in Flagstaff) have been written about him and they carry a message of concern, despair and hope.

As we look back over the years and reflect... PTSD and TBI was a critical health problem for Lance, his family and friends... We all shared his suffering... Solutions, Answers and Understanding did not come easy for any one of us.

Lance Davison, in essence, has become the face of PTSD and TBI for all of us.

*As his Father, I respect my Son now even more for what he did for all of us during his amazing life. I was not his best friend or his buddy... I was his Dad and taught him self-reliance and responsibility; he took it and became the most courageous man I know.*

### **I would like to close with these recommendations and observations:**

- We cannot do enough for the U.S. Military and the American Veteran
- Our Leaders and Government Officials have a moral obligation to fulfill the promises made to every Veteran
- The Veterans Administration must be fully funded to provide exceptional health care and services
- VA Hospitals and Clinic’s must be professionally managed, adequately and professionally staffed with experienced medical personnel

- Many Veterans, who reside in rural and remote areas cannot easily access VA facilities they must be provided with increased services especially in impoverished regions, native communities and tribal lands, special attention needs to be given to this so Veterans have equal access and same services as metropolitan areas
- Following discharge from the military, as any Veteran will tell you, transition back into civilian life is extremely difficult, this is compounded greatly if they have PTSD/TBI
- The situation has improved somewhat in the military, but standing on the streets in a war zone one day and then back in hometown America soon after; is inherently dangerous... they need more time to decompress, perhaps even up to a year
- DoD and the U.S. Military must develop essential criteria and improve the documentation and recording of combat conditions and what was and is occurring during operations, Veterans are returning and are expected to somehow prove to the VA they were wounded or injured during their time in service, the current status quo leaves it wide open for fraud and deserving Veterans do not receive the care and service they require
- Combat Veterans generally avoid talking about their experiences with family, they have no desire to share these memories or the horrors they have seen with those whom they love
- Combat Veterans relate with each other, it is very difficult, counter-productive and even insulting to them when “analyzed” by staff psychologists at the VA who do not have these experiences, this was a huge concern with Lance (and most Veterans diagnosed with PTSD/TBI) during critical evaluations and therapy sessions
- PTSD/TBI patients often have no reliable safety net, with no consistent health care provider (constant personnel transfers etc.)
- The VA tool box for assisting PTSD/TBI victims seems very limited, there is an inappropriate and troubling over-reliance on the administering of drugs for treatment, many have psychotropic properties, at times Lance was on several prescribed “cocktails” (containing sleep aids, anti-depressants etc. - which he found he was sensitive to) by the time he was “pulled off them” he was on 32 different cocktails, 32 different combinations of drugs... causing many problems for Lance
- We never received a call from VA regarding Lance’s condition or treatments
- I believe that there is also a disconnect in treatment of PTSD and TBI, too much emphasis is placed on the psychological aspects and mental health, when in reality it is the physiological aspects that need to be focused on, actual wounds to the brain (affecting the mind) subsequently causing our Veterans so many problems, extreme physical trauma has occurred and we need to realize and understand this relationship

During the oral portion of the hearing I will read a statement by Lance addressing his condition... it will sum up what has occurred to him in a shocking manner...

*The Best Way We Can Honor Lance And The Many In The U.S. Military And Our Veterans Who Struggle Everyday With PTSD & TBI Is By Resolving That They Receive The Finest Healthcare Possible With A Guarantee To Those Who Are Suffering Be Encouraged And Have Hope You Are Not Forgotten And We Will Not Rest Until Your Plight Is Improved And Your Condition Mitigated.*

**Thank You So Very Much For Your Time And Consideration...**

**Please Respond To These Admonishments & Act Decisively!**

Sincerely,



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