

Lt. Col. Tim Maxwell's Story

The Importance of Team Support on the Road to Recovery

They train together. They fight together. So if wounded, why shouldn't they go through recovery together? This was the question that Lt. Col. Tim Maxwell asked about his fellow marines being discharged from the hospital and left alone to recover from injuries of war.

"When you're in the hospital, you are with other wounded warriors. But once you are out of the hospital, it's tough," explains Maxwell.




Approximately 5.3 million Americans are living with a TBI-related disability, and the consequences of severe TBI can affect all aspects of an individual's life. This can include relationships with family and friends, as well as the ability to work or be employed, do household tasks, drive, and/or participate in other activities of daily living.

He should know. While on his sixth combat deployment, Maxwell sustained a severe traumatic brain injury (TBI) during a mortar attack in Iraq. When he awoke a month later at the Bethesda Naval Medical Center, doctors didn't think he would survive. The shrapnel that penetrated his skull inflicted severe damage to his brain, impairing his vision and leaving him unable to talk or walk.

Unfortunately, Maxwell is not alone. Each year, TBIs contribute to a substantial number of deaths and cases of permanent disability. For individuals hospitalized after a TBI, almost half (43%) have a related disability one year after the injury. In fact, a TBI may lead to a wide range of short- or long-term issues affecting: attention and memory; coordination and balance; hearing; vision; perception and touch. A TBI may also lead to personality changes; aggressive behavior; poor impulse control; and mood disorders, such as depression and anxiety.

Maxwell recalls his own feelings of isolation, depression, and anger, even after being back home with family. During his recovery, one of his doctors suggested he talk with other wounded service members. So while still in a wheel chair with a large visible scar on the left side of his shaved head, Maxwell set off to visit other wounded soldiers in the hospital. He later counseled Marines convalescing back at his old unit at Camp LeJeune, where he saw first-hand the difficulties young service members with serious injuries faced, living alone without any support.



Maxwell fully understood the critical need for ongoing support during recovery from a life-changing injury. So he began a new mission: to find a place where Marines could stay together on their journey to recovery. He convinced his leadership of the need to have housing that would allow injured marines and sailors to recuperate in a supportive environment.

Almost one year after his devastating combat injury, Maxwell's vision for a special home where service members could heal together was realized. Maxwell Hall, the first barracks for wounded warriors on the East Coast, was opened in 2005. The following year, the Marines opened a similar unit on the West Coast at Camp Pendleton. Maxwell's accomplishments became a catalyst for reform of other wounded-warrior programs throughout the U.S. Department of Defense.

Now retired from the Marines, Maxwell serves as president of SemperMax Support Fund, where he continues his mission to prevent feelings of isolation and disenfranchisement among wounded service members.

"My strength and mission in life is that I give people hope," Maxwell said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC), National Center for Injury Prevention and Control salutes Maxwell for his service to the nation, his drive to help other wounded warriors while overcoming his own challenges of living with a TBI, and his success in helping others realize the importance of continuous support during the entire recovery process.

To learn more about CDC's efforts to meet the challenge of severe TBI, go to: www.cdc.gov/TraumaticBrainInjury

