

BrainLine Interviews Staff Sergeant Roy Bell

Produced by: Victoria McDonough and Brian King

Video Link: <http://www.brainline.org/content/multimedia.php?id=1477>

Roy Bell: My name's Staff Sergeant Roy Bell I'm in the United States Army, been in the Army for 12 years and I'm from Charleston, South Carolina. Well I suffered a traumatic brain injury incurred through multiple IED blasts and rocket blasts attack on our live in areas. I wasn't immediately evacuated because there was no loss of consciousness nor was I aware of the possible brain injuries that occur from blasts and I didn't start getting treatment until I returned back home my last time, and I started incurring treatment through the symptoms that I was showing that for me was completely blocked. I didn't notice any of my symptoms I didn't know what they were I thought it was just, you know, being me.

Well I was having problems remembering things and putting things together, sentences, words, trying to figure things out, what I wanted to do. I would have chronic migraines like all the time, almost every day. It would be so bad but I just had to push through. My balance is messed up, like I could just be walking and all of a sudden I go off to the left. And one time it was -- that can happen at any time. You know, you get up out of the bed at night to use the bathroom and all of a sudden you run into a wall because you can't control where you're going. And the migraines I could just wake up with migraines, light sensitivity, bright lights will hurt my eyes and, you know, cause a headache.

Through some of the therapy I've been going through I've noticed improvements in concentration and remembering things. I'm not like I used to be I don't know if I ever will be but the therapy helps. I do speech pathology here at Walter Reed I do physical therapy, I've done occupational therapy, I've done balance therapy through the Karen Unit. And between the physical therapy and the Karen therapy it really helps me with my balance, trying to help my brain retrain to what's right with my injuries because there is not a way you can fix your balance except just to retrain your brain. It also helps my back 'cause I have a tear in one of my disks. The speech therapy and occupational therapy helps me with my concentration, teaches me ways how to think again and, you know, try to concentrate, really focus on doing what I got to do.

My opinion I feel it's hard to determine the emotional side of things with the TBI 'cause what my experience is I have been diagnosed with PTSD and TBI and PTSD have some of the similar psychological symptoms, but, you know, it's different for everybody. I do some therapy with my psychologist and he teaches me ways to try to deal with things but I've learned that a lot of the ways that I have adapted into are ways that my brain just kind of threw into a survival technique; this is how I live now there's not really a way you can change that. So I've been dealing with it for so long I've just learned to control it a lot better than other people.

The biggest thing that really helps me try to keep on track and remember things is I got a PDA that there's a company that really cares about TBI patients and if they qualify they help them and give them some of this stuff. The biggest thing I could tell other TBI patients that are recently injured are just not to give up hope and try to stay calm and not get frustrated about everything. It's tough, it's real tough but there's light at the end of the tunnel. You know, just don't give up stay focused, be patient and you'll get better, you'll get better than what you are now.