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Darrell WHITED A VETERAN WHO HELPS VETERANS

By BRITTNEY MANGUM

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De Oppresso Liber is the United States Army Special Forces motto meaning to liberate the oppressed. While Darrell WHITED retired from the military and doesn't live in Clarke County, he still holds true to that motto. He has been a huge asset to veterans in Clarke County and surrounding areas for years and has helped council them and get them and their families the benefits they deserve. He has a variety of Military Occupational Skills, including Fleet Management, Mental Health Specialist, Supply Specialist, Fuel Specialist,

Transportation Specialist, Ammo Specialist, Fire Direction Control Specialist, EOD, Total Army Instructor Trainer (TAITC) Senior Instructor (TRADOCC), and Small Goup Instructor (TRADOCC).



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He was already familiar with explosives before joining the special forces. “I was awarded an MOS in EOD because I was an explosive technician before I ever went into the special forces,” explained WHITED. “My parents and people in my family sale explosives wholesale. It’s in a good way, not a bad way. Up in the mountains where they bust rock for interstates and stuff, they would use

explosives. I taught Explosive Ordnance Disposal at Redstone Arsenal near Huntsville. It was live range on how to light and blow up and get rid of explosives. We would blow them in place and stuff like that without blowing yourself up. I watched my daddy blow stumps out since I was in diapers. Back then, we would blow ditches. Farms would hire us. We could set explosives, and it would blow a ditch five feet deep for half a mile.” It was when he got older that he chose to join the Army Special Forces as a Green Beret. “Army Special Operators are either the Rangers or Special Forces. We would train indigenous forces throughout the world so that our troops wouldn’t have to be placed there,” explained WHITED. “We continued to teach the School of the Americas. That’s where we set up training in a classified place here in the U.S., and people from South America and other places in

the world would come and train. They’d back up there with a C 130, throw the tailgate down, and out would come 200 people who didn’t even speak English. A week later, we’d put them back in there and send them to their own country to take care of things. That’s what Special Forces do.” He can clearly remember his first overseas trip. “My first operation out of the gate as a Green Beret

was the Contras,” WHITED reminisced. “Ronald Reagan was president, and the Cubans were still communist. The Sandinista government was becoming communist, and Cuba was shipping

weapons to the Sandinista government in Central America, which is on our back doorstep. We started training up Contra guerillas in Costa Rica and Honduras to go over and blow those weapons up and put down the Sandinista government. The Sandinista government decided they would rather be with the United States than with Cuba and have been a good country to go to ever since. The Iran Contra Affair happened then. Reagan was supposed to be shipping weapons to Iran at that time because they were a democracy and were good people then. There were weapons deferred to the Contras out of that. They call it the Iran Contra Affair, and that was my first overseas trip.” Although he has been to multiple places with different languages, language has never really been a barrier for

him. He is able to adapt quickly to a language and is multilingual. That made him a huge asset to the Army, and they held on to him for his abilities “I was in the Special Forces for 30 years as a Green Beret. I had to speak different languages,” informed Whited. “I could speak Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, and I know just enough Mandarin and Tagalog to get in trouble. In 30 days, I can be speaking anybody’s language after being in the country for 30 days. It’s called a four-dimensional mind. I know some of the Muslim people here in town. I sat at the bank one day, and a guy was banging

on the phone talking in Arabic. When he got off, I went up and greeted him in Arabic and went to talking to him in Arabic. We’ve been friends ever since. You lose it if you don’t speak it, but if I were to stay two weeks in an Arabic country it would all come back. When I got blown up in Iraq in 2007, they would not turn me loose because of my language skills. When you’re giving the Iraqi Army Humvees and all the books are in English, you have to put them in Arabic. Arabic reads from right to left. I had 18 people doing translating books.



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All of their books when we gave them Humvees, weapons and stuff were in Arabic. We borrowed vehicles from them, and we'd have to do it the other way. We'd put it in English."

When he was in Iraq, he and the other members of the Special Forces didn't live with the American soldiers. Instead, they had to live among the Iraqi people and had a certain way to get money and supplies to take care of the entire team. "We dealt with different people in the Iraqi economy that are civilians," explained Whited. "A team would fly down in a Black Hawk to an air base, go into a vault, and get \$15,000 to put in a duffel bag. That was our living expenses to buy our food, have our clothes laundered, and whatever we needed for the whole team each month. We were not with the Americans. Have you ever been in an Iraqi chow hall? There are no windows and flies or whatever flying around. We did not eat there. We cooked our own food and everything. We would go and stay and live on the economy. I had what we called a FOB runner car. It was a BMW with no windows in it. I kicked all the windows out because they were going to get knocked out anyways. Then, I had a truck. Everybody on our team had a FOB runner car. We took the insurgents down. We actually caught them burying explosives in the road. We commandeered it and took it back, so I had my own John Deere backhoe. We put it all in a big building until the process was done and the people were detained." Life in Iraq wasn't easy. He was there for 18 months and experienced being blown up 11 times. They were constantly in danger just making it from one place to another and had to pay close attention to the Iraqi soldiers they were working with. "I got blown up 11 times in Iraq. I went twice to the hospital and was in a wheelchair for three years when I came back. They would not let me go home because I had so many ties in Iraq and other places. I stayed in my wheelchair from 2007 and got out of my wheelchair about four months into 2010 and was medically discharged in 2010," remembered Whited. "We were embedded with the Iraqi Army the whole time I was there. We were not with the Americans. We were on the Iranian border. It was a very tough situation. We had no hospital and were trying to help the Iraqi Army set up a hospital. The day we went to the hospital to deliver a host of American supplies and stuff for the hospital, that particular day four Iraqi soldiers lost their lives because of a suicide bomber. It was a lady. We were in our vehicles. It was in such a hot area that we trained ourselves not to get out of our armored Humvees. That was a pretty rough day. Things like that went on either every other day or every day to the Iraqi Army or to us Americans. We were embedded in the Iraqi Army, and when we rolled out, we were having to take up cell phones from people that we were rolling around with in Eastern Iraq. Every time we would leave the gate, somebody would call ahead on a cell phone and say that there are so many people in the convoy with the Iraqi soldiers and give the number of the vehicle to blow up. People would work with the insurgents because they would pay them \$100 for the information, and \$100 was two weeks' worth of pay for Iraqi soldiers. A lot of them were on drugs. They got hooked on hash



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and opiates, and they were goners. You could tell them because they were real skinny, but they were in the Iraqi Army.” Two of the occasions he experienced being blown up were worse than the others. It hadn’t been long since he had recovered from one before he miraculously survived the other. “On Christmas day, we got hit so hard that when I went to the hospital my bell was rung,” continued WHITED. “I was the gunner in my vehicle. They wouldn’t let me go back outside the wire for two months. My eyes were just twitching all the time from the concussion. My bell was just rung. Then, the second time I went outside the wire, my vehicle got hit. I was put down that time. It was an IED blast to the front right tire. It knocked me down in the vehicle. I stood back up because you always stand back up and get in your terret and look for the trigger man if there is one. When I stood back up, a piece of asphalt that went in the air hit me on top of the head. It was lights out. That put me down. That IED was laced with chlorine gas and nitrogen oxide canisters. I was burned on my hands and other places and shrapnel in my nose. That’s my million-dollar wound. I also got shrapnel in my back. We wore gloves and none of my skin was exposed, but those gases went through the gloves. If I would’ve breathed it in I would’ve lived for maybe six minutes to six hours.”

Despite his injuries, he wasn’t allowed to leave. Instead, they had him fully medicated so that he could stay the remainder of his deployment. “I got lucky. The Lord kept me alive. They would not let me come home because of how many fingers I had in the pie working on that top secret stuff. I’d get a lot of things they needed back in five minutes to know what was being said and cell phone traffic and stuff like that. I could go right to and put a finger on the guy that had a cell phone that actually set us up,” expressed WHITED. “When I got blown up, I had 52 days left to stay in Iraq before another team would replace us. The medical facility gave me a big jar of 850 milligram Motrin, another big jar of Lortab 10s, and another big jar of Neurontin. They told me to take 2300 milligrams of Neurontin per day and Lortabs and Motrin as needed. I stayed 52 more days. They also had me on Effexor and Paxil.” After his 52 days were over and they returned to the

States, he was sent to a facility to assist in detoxing him from all of the medication they had placed him on to make it through the rest of his tour. It was while he was there that he first started assisting other soldiers get what they needed as well. “When I came back, I went to Darnell Hospital in Fort Hood, Texas,” stated WHITED. “That’s where they sent me because it was their drug recovery for the military. They had to get me off the drugs to see what was wrong with me. I was high stepping. I was a smiling heathen, but I still functioned. They sent me to Fort Benning and started my recovery while still doing other things. Then, I got into helping other soldiers. A lot of soldiers in my predicament were not getting the right kind of benefits and discharges and stuff. I saw that. I knew that I was going to be there and was sitting there going nuts. The Lord has kept me alive, and when I got out of the military in 2010, I was already doing what I do now. I was doing it every day—taking care of soldiers and their dependents and stuff. After I came back home, from 2011-2012 I was strictly still in physical therapy and going to counseling every day to make sure I didn’t slip back on the medicine I was taking. I kept getting better.” He was given various awards for his service. Some of the awards he received include the Purple Heart, Bronze Star, Multiple Army Achievement Awards, Multiple Army Accommodation Awards, Combat Action Badge, and the Army Physical Fitness Award. “I saved 12



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first cav soldiers,” proclaimed WHITED. “That’s why they sent me to Fort Hood. That’s where first cav was. I was attached to first cav and saved about 12 other soldiers lives while in Iraq this last time. They awarded me a Stetson. This Stetson, when they found out that I was at Darnell Hospital at Fort Hood, they came and awarded me the Gold Combat Spurs, which is a ritual they do with first cav and brought me my Stetson and all my get up. I was very proud of that. Some of the guys that I saved the lives of were in tears when they saw me laying up there. It was a moving moment.” By 2013, he was approached from two different organizations about providing veteran assistance. He decided which organization he would work with based on how well they matched his beliefs. “In 2013, Disabled American Veterans approached me about becoming a certified Veteran Service Officer (VSO) through them. I was already doing that except in the military,” declared WHITED. “Even Veteran Affairs approached me and offered me triple digits to go to work doing what I was doing. I accepted the Disabled American Veterans, which is all through the world. I turned down Veteran Affairs because at that time we could not alter a spiritual alternative to counseling. We couldn’t even bring it up. They call it proselytizing. If you’re a Baptist and want to get help and volunteers from people in the Baptist church for you and your family, I would set that up. I was not allowed to do that, and as a Christian that doesn’t set well with me. Even books weren’t allowed. The Gideons were allowed to put their Bibles in there, but proselytization or pamphlets or anything wasn’t allowed until about three years ago. They changed it.” What he does for veterans is simple. He helps them get the benefits they need and is able to counsel them and help them work through PTSD and other effects of being in a war zone. He assists people from all over, and Clarke County has benefited from him as well. “My official title is a coach, a counselor, a director, and an instructor,” described WHITED. “I work with the whole southeast. I have one case in Guam and one in California that are done virtually. They have to sign an agreement that they’re willing to spend at least four appointments with me, and those appointments are about two to three hours long where we talk about whatever they need to talk about. I call it counseling and coaching; I don’t call it assisting or advising. They just need to talk to somebody. At the same time, I’m getting them to reap the benefits they deserve. A lot of these people don’t have their benefits. The goal is to get them as high as they can on the totem pole, and it has to be worked at a little bit. Most people get out of the military, and they should have been taken care of and those switches cut on before they get out of the military.” He does everything he can to help veterans receive the assistance they need and get the benefits they deserve. His experience allows him to be empathetic to their needs, and he is able to work with them through the different trauma they face. He intends to continue being a blessing to other veterans who need him