



**Introducing our First Air Force Veteran and 43rd Recipient:
Major Scott Williams of Three Lakes, Wisconsin**

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Scott Williams grew up in the small town of Eudora, Kansas, with hard working parents trying to make ends meet. He struggled to fit in “normal” high school traditions, always seeking to be different, smarter, better. A bit of a loner, his challenges ironically lit a fire in him to out-achieve others. Scott was inquisitive and bright, quiet by nature, athletic and resourceful; but he was a deeply unhappy teenager. Like many, he felt stuck; and all he wanted was to get out. Scott explored options in high school, considered the Army, and then dared to consider the United States Air Force Academy. Laughed at and discouraged, he and his mom worked even harder to polish his application for the rare honor that would become his. The small town kid shocked everyone. Scott eagerly accepted the offer and left town in June, 1995, on his very first airplane ride, for four years at the USAF Academy in Colorado. Told to keep his head down and not stand out to survive, Scott chose the opposite path and stepped forward a completely different person. He would be confident and strong; no longer quiet and depressed. He would amass acceptance and earn respect; and he would use his voice to advocate and advance through leadership positions, trainings and missions to become his best version. Scott never looked back; and instead, embraced his new identify in the call sign given him: “LB” for “Little Bastard”, and plowed through every challenge put in front of him.

LB lived a larger-than-life story and he developed the character to go with it. His was a fast paced lifestyle, unpredictable and up-ending. Airborne. Jumpmaster Instructor. Air Assault. Pilot. Advocate. Diplomat. LB was a combat-flying, Special Operations force: thriving on high-risk, high-reward missions and feeding off the adrenaline created. He was intense, competitive and achievement-oriented in approach to all things. LB was spirited, feisty and self-assured with a healthy dose of conscience. Cool in aviators and a flight jacket, LB even rode a motorcycle. He much preferred the flight suit to the dress uniform that boasted 30 medals; and yes, he also got the girl—meeting Greta in a dog park while still in training and marrying three years later.

Between his four years in the USAF Academy, his 7 1/2 in active duty as a Rescue Pilot, and his 6 1/2 years in the New York Air National Guard, and his time following separation, we can't cover all he did. But we can tell you that in his years of service, LB racked up over 2,000 flight hours with half of them in night vision. He estimates at least 500,000 miles under his belt and has circumnavigated the globe, covering roughly 300 special operations and combat command missions. LB was deployed at least 12 times to combat zones, as well as in covert operations he can't acknowledge. LB stepped foot in countless countries including both our Northern and Southern caps. But perhaps his career pinnacle, he helped develop the Sexual Assault Training for the USAF Academy, saw it spread through the Air Force, personally taught over 75 classes and served as a Victim's Advocate.

Time and accomplishments like this don't come without a steep personal price tag. In 1998, still in training, LB survived two major accidents: the first a mid-air collision with another jumper in a free fall. He was lucky to walk away with dislocated ribs and a back injury. Six months later on a night jump, another's equipment mixed in air with LB's: his chute collapsed and he fell 150 feet to the

ground. Determined not to lose his medical rating, he walked away with a severe concussion and physical injuries to his back and elbow that wouldn't fully make themselves known until several months later. LB rebuilt physically and fought to maintain eligibility status, then moved into Pilot Training and was eventually stationed at over eight different bases over the next seven years. It would be 22 years later that he would realize the long-term impact of his traumatic brain injury and structural damage to his back, knees and elbow...let alone the highly invasive PTSD that would begin to build. LB had no time for injuries or weakness to derail his plans; and so, he began an arduous career of hiding his pain—physical and mental.

Truth be told, being a pilot was not his passion; but it was a job, a stressful and demanding job at that, and LB excelled. Specialized as a Search & Rescue Pilot, LB flew the plane that supported helicopter refueling midair following critical operations. They worked clandestine missions, combat deployments, rescues and disasters. His HC-130 Rescue Aircraft carried 15,000 gallons of fuel and was without weapons, but frequently took artillery rounds as it “stalled” mid-air for refueling. In between flights and trainings, LB volunteered for every extra assignment and opportunity to learn he could. From 2002 to 2012, LB regularly flew into geographic areas now deemed toxic zones and was repeatedly exposed to the area's environmental and chemical toxins. After a severe sinusitis in Turkey required nasal surgery and his soft palate removal, he's been plagued by sleep apnea since. Fast forward to the present, and he struggles with exposure-related facial nerve neuropathy and neurological challenges that haunt, and limit, his abilities and comfort today.

In the midst of job demands and movements across the world, life offered its own rollercoaster of experiences for LB and his family. In 2004, while living in New York, and expecting their first child, he and Greta went through a catastrophic home fire and lost everything except their three lives. LB estimates that he was away from home roughly 75% of the time; and after realizing he wasn't supposed to be home that fateful night, his mind spiraled with concern and turmoil, leaving him vulnerable and depressed. There was no room for weakness in his work; and so LB pushed down the surfacing emotions by throwing himself into work. Working as many hours possible allowed him to both excel and escape his own thoughts. In 2006 they welcomed their second child; and mixed with great joy and love came more signs of PTSD breaking through the cracks of his strong, collected facade. For years LB had successfully crafted several work-arounds to hide his physical ailments and keep his flight status. As he found himself falling deeper into depression, his mind filled with thoughts of suicide; and the more pain and sleeplessness he endured, the more prevalent those thoughts became. LB was worn down, despondent and angry his depressive family genes had found their way to him. It would only be with the benefit of hindsight years later that he would realize his own drive both masked and exacerbated his mental health struggle. Panic seeped in: and rather than seek help and risk eligibility, LB locked it all down, transitioned to Gabreski Air National Guard in Westhampton Beach, New York and did his best simply to survive.

With an impressive resume and ethic, the Guardsman quickly earned the respect and trust of those around him and rose to the rank of Major. It was LB's nature to immerse himself in work; and the busier he was, the more he avoided the dark places in his mind. In 2009, LB sustained a critical injury to his dominant hand severing one finger completely, and nearly another, leaving both with extensive, permanent nerve and tendon damage. Although surgery restored good function, the injury abruptly ended his flying career. Life as a pilot was all LB had known for the past 13 years; and desperate to stay employed within the Guard, he became their Mission Support and Security Forces Commander. LB pivoted hard to reinvent himself this time and take on life behind a desk.

LB never flew another plane after that far-reaching day: the injury severed more than just his fingers...it slowly separated LB's identity as well.

In 2010, LB was selected for a two-year deployment to South Africa, a highly coveted position within the NYANG, working at the U.S. Embassy as the US Military Diplomat to the Ambassador. As the family moved over, their shipping container of material goods and furnishings was hijacked by local thieves; and losing everything once again, they rebuilt again. In acclimating to their new home, the family grew interested in wildlife and began volunteering in anti-poaching efforts. As his contract neared completion, the NYANG struggled to find him a job; and he wasn't eager to return to New York. After 17 dedicated years, he separated from service frustrated with how he was treated; and believing they could make a better impact on the world if they stayed, he and Greta created, and self-funded, an anti-poaching nonprofit. Although they didn't amass funds, their efforts gained sponsorships, media offers and productive traction...and eventually, the attention of illicit traffickers who began threatening his family. After six years of hard work they'd exhausted their personal savings and shut down their nonprofit in 2018. Deflated and now a mere shadow of who he once was....Scott Williams re-emerged. Vulnerable and exhausted, yet fiercely protective, he realized the need to provide differently for his family. They packed the few items they wanted and moved to Three Lakes, Wisconsin to settle near Greta's family. Amongst the many things they left behind was "LB", a painfully conscious choice Scott made to bury his military persona.

Scott returned to the States a shattered person; and he sadly started, yet again, to rebuild their life and his identity. They found a home, work and public high school for the kids, but readjustment was hard on them all. Scott took the first job he could find, then found better, but struggled every step with civilian interactions, wanting to push and expecting better of others. He moved through jobs, obtained a Masters degree and even created his own drone business; but amongst it all, Scott was miserable. He hurt physically, struggled with suicide ideation and became consumed with a deep anger and frustration that fed his overwhelming depression. Memories and nightmares began flooding in, reminding him of the loss he felt and the resentment he held. After years of resisting help, it wasn't until 2020 that Scott finally decided to pursue his VA benefits and get treatment for his PTSD and physical ailments. It's been a long haul with a quick demise these last few years and Scott eventually found himself fully disabled and unemployable.

After the toll of a high-impact life, Scott courageously acknowledges that he is an at-risk Veteran; and every day is a challenge and battle that must be won. Humbled by life's changes, he welcomes counseling, has modified his life, and adheres to a complex schedule of medications and appointments as they search for answers to neurological challenges believed to be a result of physical injuries and exposures throughout his career. Scott's self-esteem has fallen many rungs from days gone by; and his current lifestyle is a far cry from his past. It is still, however, Scott's courage, his tenacity and his constant drive for improvement that summons the strength he needs to push forward and the courage it takes to help others. Scott and Greta have been married for 21 years, and what a rock of support she has been as together they've navigated an unbelievable life. Their two children are their world's focus and pride and joy. Scott has been teaching his son to ride and has spent time coaching his daughters track team; but the best thing they've been doing is talking about life. They talk openly in their family about his mental health struggles, just as they do his physical, hoping to reduce its stigma and proactively address a healthy response. As Scott has explored his needs and future in depth, what he realized was missing was his ability to ride.

Scott grew up riding dirt bikes. His grandfather collected vintage motorcycles and Scott spent hours admiring them, listening to his stories and learning to wrench. As a USAF graduation present to himself, he bought a new 1999 H-D Road King, loaded it up and put on 11,000 miles in the nine months before it was stolen. Scott had lost and rebuilt so much during the years, that purchasing a new model was never a responsible option. After settling in Wisconsin he found a 1968 H-D Sprint 250 to wrench on and ride locally, but it wasn't the bike to provide the miles he longed for, nor the comfort that he needed. And while he'd borrow bikes throughout the years and participated in rides when he could, it wasn't the consistent answer he needed to settle his mind, release his pain and return some joy to his life. Hogs For Heroes believed our gift could be the tool that not only supports his healing, it could be the one that changes, if not saves, his life.

After sharing our news, we sent Scott out to test ride models and find his perfect fit. On his way home from visiting their son, they swung into Milwaukee H-D just to throw a leg over a few bikes to hone in his search closer to home. And wouldn't you know this Northwoods guy found his love on the first bike he rode. This Reef Blue and Vivid Black Heritage Softail Classic is a beauty with its blacked out frame and wheels; and it is a new, 2022 holdover model with only 12 miles. It immediately captured Scott's heart; and once he rode it said, "...it was like coming home". Nothing else even compared after that. This bike was listed within our budget, and our friends at Milwaukee H-D not only took that price down to support our efforts, they paid the freight cost to move it up north for us.

Scott will be our 43rd Recipient and he will receive his keys during a double-gifting ceremony with Recipient #42. Join us on **Saturday, May 11, 2024 at The Schoolhouse Bar in Mountain, WI.** **Our Presentation of Keys Ceremony will start at 12:00 pm**, but well start hanging out at 11:00. Come on over and help us welcome two more injured Veteran riders back to the healing road. The Schoolhouse Bar will be offering a donation lunch and sharing the proceeds with us!