



**Introducing Veteran Recipient #60:  
Army National Guard Staff Sergeant Tiffany Gorges  
of Madison, Wisconsin**

Tiffany Gorges, a life-long Wisconsinite, was born in New London to young parents, which proved to be a less than traditional childhood. She attended schools in Waupaca and Omro; and spent most weekends and summers on her grandparent's massive farm in New London. She explored acres of woods and streams, building a love for animals and ecology; and she thrived with her grandparent's guidance and care. One of Tiffany's earliest memories involves riding on her father's '81 Kawasaki. The wind in her hair, and giggles with speed, cultivated an early interest in motor sports and thrill-seeking. It wasn't long after that she was riding three wheelers, then four, progressing to dirt bikes and then catching rides on a backseat with friends. Academics weren't important to her, but athletics were: and she excelled in basketball, volleyball and softball. Tiffany learned to roll up her sleeves on the farm and delved into motors, mechanics, and construction. She worked from an early age to avoid being home and to gain independence. Without much of a plan after graduation, Tiffany took a job in home construction, played ball in leagues and partied hard.

She was 19, running wild and drinking, with no real life direction, until one hungover morning her best friend convinced Tiffany to join her meeting with an Army National Guard (ANG) Recruiter. He quickly had her hook, line and sinker with talk of all she would learn, do and experience. She raised her right hand in May, 2001 and, six months later, headed to boot camp at Fort Leonard Wood, MO. She quickly took to the training, lifestyle and tight brotherhood; and not only loved it all, she excelled at it all. Tiffany pushed herself to the limits, maxing out in both female and male fitness tests, and earned her first promotion before graduating, as well as her first injury to her knee. Moving through challenges, adversity and injuries would become a common theme for her over her next 20 years in the ANG; along with hiding the many physical and mental injuries that would come because of it all.

After specializing as a Motor Transport Operator, Tiffany returned to New London where, attached to the ANG Regiment in Oshkosh, WI, she resumed work in home construction. Less than two months later her Unit was activated and sent to Fort Bragg, NC, for a year, filling positions of deployed personnel and supporting training exercises. She turned 21 while there; and she worked hard to prove she was just as good as her male counterparts, and she partied just as hard as she worked. With steady, full-time pay, Tiffany managed to save enough to get her first bike and bought a yellow Kawasaki Ninja off Ebay. It wasn't the Harley she dreamed of, but she gained release after long, stressful days and joy from riding with those she trusted with her life.

Tiffany thrived in service and her work ethic rewarded her with attendance at Army Airborne School at Fort Benning, GA. As one of two females successfully completing the course with half of those who started, she went on to jump 26 more times. A couple of rough landings started her degenerative back and disc disease, further damaged her knees and weakened her ankles. The respect she amassed secured another promotion; and the pride she gained from her accomplishments was worth the pain she carried...and it all served to embolden her persona.

Her year away complete, Tiffany returned to New London with a profound sense of trust and respect amongst those she lived with, worked with, and called family. In 2003, when a soldier she saw as a leader, mentor and friend reached out to her for help, then sexually assaulted her while traveling, that trust quickly eroded and left her devastated. She was young, confused and didn't yet know how to stand up for herself. Fearful of addressing him or, even worse, retaliation for reporting the incident, Tiffany instead spent years hiding the ugly, abusive truth and blaming herself. Although she wouldn't know it at the time, this would be the first of her three experiences with Military Sexual Trauma (MST) while deployed. In fact, its prevalence required females wear a whistle on their uniform while in Iraq should they need help. Military history at the time barely provided awareness training nor did it typically support reporting without disbelief, a skewed internal investigation, or repercussions for the victim. It would be almost 15 years before she could speak of the assault; but the illegal and unwanted actions of a "Brother" all those years ago provided the foundation from which her PTSD grew.

In February, 2004, Tiffany took a job with Oshkosh Defense in Oshkosh, WI, where she worked as a painter for the next 14 years. Trying to refocus her swirling mind, she volunteered for a 17 month deployment to fill a spot with a different Heavy Equipment Transport Company and landed in Iraq that October. She held many different roles in the Company: Convoy Commander, Truck Commander, 50-cal Gunner, and Combat Lifesaver. Their mission was to

move large equipment across the volatile country, protect personnel within their convoy, and care for them when violence struck. Which it did, often...for 17 months. It was a nomadic life, often living in their trucks, eating MRE's and occasionally enjoying the luxury of a base cot and hot meal. Tiffany loved driving their beast of a truck that hauled a trailer loaded with Abrams tanks. She appreciated time in the turret with that massive gun; and after reinforcing her own gun truck with scrapyard metal and sandbags for safety, she more comfortably tackled the IED-pocked roads. Physical strains began to affect her back and knees; and the daily near-misses and harrowing maneuvers around craters that could swallow her truck created exhaustive and tense days on end. The harsh visuals and high death toll, along with the horrible injuries she treated, quietly filed themselves away as the Sergeant stayed focused on her job and squad. Tiffany joked and laughed through the struggles endured, put on the stoic, strong face she needed others to believe and tamped down every memory and emotion she could to safely move through her time there. Only when she finally came home, after 17 long months in war, did she allow herself the chance to fall apart, far out of view from those she served with and those she came home to.

In January, 2006, Tiffany returned home to a life so surreal from the one that tried to kill her every day. She held everything in; and struggled to reconnect and relate. She turned to her bike for release, but it wasn't enough. She began drinking heavily, no longer for fun, but to numb the damage inflicted on her mind and body, and often to the point of blacking out. She struggled with hypervigilance in public, depression in private and sleeplessness at night as nightmares invaded her dreams. The combination of it all was like the perfect storm, and Tiffany spiraled in a sea of anger for reasons she only knew, reasons she couldn't understand and reasons she couldn't acknowledge. She took her anger out in arguments and fights. One morning she woke with bloody hands and no idea how she got home; and while it scared her, it didn't stop her. Another night's binge drinking led to a DUI and belligerent arrest after driving the wrong direction. It would be the first of many rock-bottom moments to come; and both embarrassed and mortified by actions that could have harmed another, or worse, she vowed to show others she was better than that.

Believing she'd learned her lesson, Tiffany rejected any underlying issues, put on her strong, public mask and moved forward without saying a word. She worked and completed her Guard drills, fell in love and, in 2008, bought a home in Oshkosh with him. She even stopped drinking for a while, then slowly reintroduced alcohol not believing she had a problem. Life was seemingly better for her, until 2011 when she learned she would deploy to Afghanistan for a year. She began the process of physically preparing for war, sold her Ninja for the chance to nab a military deal from Harley on Base, and pushed any lingering demons far out of her Company's sight.

In February, 2012, Tiffany landed at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, to run gun trucks in convoys across northern territory. Her favorite part of this deployment was the all-female team that led them, including herself. Jumping in and out of trucks wearing 40 pounds of protective plates and gear quickly aggravated her damaged back and lower extremities; but the Staff Sergeant's facade didn't let on. While they drove hours on end, IED's remained a constant threat: but Afghanistan's destructive efforts seemed more focused on base attacks. Mortars frequently landed on bases; and staff grew used to the threat. One day brought multiple mortars in succession; and numb to the constant threats and tolls taken, Tiffany sat with her roommate simply awaiting their fate, indifferent to life or death. As a leader to many, she kept her invincible persona front-facing, but deep down the increased responsibility for personnel and equipment weighed heavy with little outlet. While in Afghanistan, improved technology allowed more communications home, but keeping a foot in two different worlds wasn't always a good or easy thing to manage. In an email from her partner of six years, Tiffany learned he was leaving her for another; and 20 minutes later, she shut down her mind and left on another mission. She now added heartbreak and betrayal to the list of things she would need to hide; and once again, refocused her mind on the job and keeping others safe. Her multiplying PTSD demons would patiently wait for her homecoming to again show themselves.

Tiffany returned stateside in February, 2013, to live with her ex for three months until she could buy his half of the house; and she depleted her savings, Harley fund included, to do so. Her body, heart and mind hurt; and unable to seek care for fear the Army would force separation, she again turned to alcohol to temper the pain and dilute the past. Tiffany was angrier than ever, as evidenced by the drywall holes and fights in her wake. She didn't care if she lived or died; and in a long line of bad relationships and decisions that followed, her apathy translated into lost friends and alienated family. Attending her Guard drills and being in leadership roles became harder for Tiffany to handle; and in 2015 she changed Units for the fresh start becoming a Transportation Instructor at Fort McCoy offered. She enjoyed training others, and would eventually grow her resume over the next six years by adding Small Unmanned Aircraft System Master Trainer and Unit Movement Operations to her offerings. And to help with her release, she'd jump on the backseat of anyone willing to give her a ride...but it just wasn't the same as controlling her own destination.

One random morning in 2016, Tiffany woke with the realization that if she didn't do something to change her life, her self-sabotaging ways would likely take her life. For the first time in a long time, she cared what happened... and she reached out to the Appleton VA for help. She tore through five different therapists before she finally believed she had PTSD; and to her, it was the scariest, most threatening diagnosis she'd ever heard. She started four long years of intense weekly therapy, learned to manage her drinking and, in 2017, was awarded a 100% VA Disability rating for her PTSD alone. She continued working and teaching for the financial support she needed. She started on medications, then struggled with weight gain. She tried becoming more active, but the physical injuries to her back, knees and ankles held her back. When ANG leadership finally learned of her struggles, Tiffany's world came crashing down. After 17 ½ years of dedicated service, the Army no longer believed her capable and she moved into a Medical Board Review in 2019. After recognizing her leadership and skills, the Army allowed her to medically retire in 2021 fully reaching her 20 years of service.

In 2019, after years of counseling and programming, Tiffany found the courage to make a bigger, healthier change and she relocated to Madison, WI, to pursue a college education. She has a huge love for animals; and she obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Wildlife Ecology. She next focused on improving her physical health and has since endured two surgeries to her knee, one to her ankle, and quarterly injection therapy for her two herniated discs and radiculopathy caused. While she's learned to talk about her struggles, she keeps her circle close; and there isn't a day where PTSD doesn't hold her back or threaten the progress made. Insomnia and night terrors still affect her sleep and some days require great effort to simply get out of bed.

Unable to do many of the physical sports she's previously enjoyed, Tiffany now focuses on low-impact activities. She loves being outdoors, hiking and kayaking and refers to herself as a "wildlife nerd". Her rescue dog, Fin, is a great source of comfort; and as an accomplished ATV rider, she's already training with goggles. Tiffany has begun working again, taking a warehouse position at Frank's Beverage where she appreciates the quiet, focused routine it provides her. And while she's done much to help herself move forward, there's a hole in her heart that yearns to regain the adrenaline and joy found in riding and misses the easy camaraderie it brings. Unfortunately, with living on her single income, along with rent and car payments, adding a motorcycle payment, let alone the trike she needs for stability, is simply not possible.

Our Advisory Board admired the vulnerability and years of hard work Tiffany has put into redirecting her life; and we believed that riding could support the good path she's created for herself. When we realized Tiffany, our 60th selection, had joined her friend on our June Operating Engineers Poker Run, and would be sitting in the audience after we gifted Bikes #56 and 57...we seized our opportunity. After telling the crowd that Recipient #60 was unknowingly sitting amongst us, we surprised Tiffany with our decision and, through multiple tears and great applause, brought her to the stage where her new Hogs For Heroes Family wrapped her in a giant embrace.

Although convinced she would not be selected, Tiffany had been dreaming of trikes and the chance to ride again for several years. She liked the look of the Road Glide 3, and she loved the Sharkskin color. And wouldn't you know we found that very bike, a 2024 model with less than 3,400 miles, sitting on the showroom floor of Harley-Davidson of Madison just waiting to make her dream come true. She fell hard, instantly, and named him Bruce before we even wrote the check.

Tiffany is our 60th Wisconsin Veteran Recipient in ten years and the tenth to return to The Road this season alone. Unique to her bike, it has been fully sponsored by the fundraising efforts of Dane County's Fire Fighters Local 311 and the Professional Fire Fighters of Wisconsin after two golf outings for us. Tiffany's Presentation of Keys Ceremony will be on Saturday, August 2, 2025 at 11:00 am at Harley-Davidson of Madison. We'll be hanging out from 9:30 -12:00 in the parking lot, and serving up complimentary Dunkin' Donuts & Coffee, for the chance to chat and welcome another injured WI Veteran Rider back to The Road with you at our sides.