



## INTRODUCING OUT NEXT VETERAN TO RECEIVE A HARLEY-DAVIDSON:

*“I’ve seen, smelled and lived in complete HELL. I’ve endured a lot most would never want to live through, let alone imagine. I was lucky enough to return home but am now dealing with the repercussions of war— which only have been getting worse. Every day is now a battle that must be won. And yes, I’d do it again.”*

**— — Meet Army Veteran Jason Sokel, age 35, of Menasha, Wisconsin**

A life-long Wisconsinite, Jason grew up in Menasha with a strong love of Country. As a senior in high school, he enlisted in the Army to honor and defend the values and people that he, to this day, still holds dear. Watching the 9/11 terrorist attacks unfold in his classroom solidified his decision to serve. He left for boot camp after graduation, trained as a Combat Infantryman and deployed 8 months later. His assignment: “Destroy the enemy”. That’s an order less than 1% of our nation can personally understand, and he accepted. He knew it unlikely he’d return home alive, and was settled with that; but he never imagined the life he’d live returning home 3 years later 100% disabled with PTSD.

In 2003, Jason deployed first as security detail on a Merchant Marine ship filled with Division gear. He was headed to Kuwait and it was his job to protect it from pirates. Early in his stay at Camp Pennsylvania his base was attacked by one of it’s own, leaving leadership dead and Jason unnerved by the treachery. He spent the next year in Iraq, posted in combat amongst unknown threats. He lived in a foxhole for four months, survived foot patrol ambushes, and endured frequent explosions and missile attacks. The resulting anxiety and hypervigilance still dominate his waking hours. While guarding an oil refinery route, combatants tried to blow up the bridge he was standing on, leaving him with a traumatic brain injury and frequent migraines. Hazardous exposures to sulphur dioxide from burn pits left him asthmatic and plagued by sleep apnea. Horrifying images, sounds and smells settled deeper within to take their destructive hold and terrorize his dreams. There would be no escaping the tolls of combat, yet he was young enough to think he could. Jason left service after his 3 year commitment: at age 21 he was a changed man, an unrecognizable son, and a lost citizen. He left a kid in high school and returned to live in a world he was unprepared for. He rolled through jobs unable to keep his anger, anxiety and attendance in check. He met with a rough crowd and made bad choices affecting his character and credit. He didn’t fit anymore; and in a society that didn’t understand, he stopped caring too. He further isolated himself and depression settled deeper. He hurt everywhere, physically and emotionally, and didn’t know why. He turned to alcohol to numb his pain and found more trouble...losing friends, shelter, and purpose.

Along the way he became a father and realized his need to change course and become a better man. He found support within the law enforcement community, sought help from the VA and reconnected with his love of 10 years, Ashleigh, all of whom have helped him stay focused on self-healing and family responsibility. Although he has a strong desire to push forward, there are still times where he can’t get out of bed, cries unexplainably and angers easily. While he is grateful for the support he has and proud of the distance he has come, the judgement and disbelief from others “because I look normal or can’t get over it” compound his struggle. He is committed to counseling and best manages his struggles by staying active. The severity of his disability limits employability; still, he helps a local restaurant occasionally to be a part of something larger and support his family. He credits his family for his strength and lights up when speaking of his children, and mother, often a source of comfort for him. Jason loves being outdoors, particularly hunting and fishing with friends and family. It was the liberating rush of snowmobiling that led him to motorcycling. He bought a Sportster and quickly discovered the healing power behind the bars and the support amongst riders. He loved that bike and what it did for him; unfortunately, rough financial times for his family forced him to sell. Not a day goes by that he doesn’t long for that bike, and not a day goes by where he still doesn’t believe his family’s needs come first.

Giftng a bike is about changing the direction of a struggling life. In support of his daily battle to overcome, Hogs For Heroes felt Jason needed his “someday” dream to come true now. We took him by surprise and then visited Appleton Harley-Davidson whose amazing team recognized us and fully embraced our mission! Still in shock, Jason’s eyes and heart immediately found a two-tone red 2019 Road King. The AHD team knocked it out of the park—making that sweet ride fit our budget and offering to host the gifting celebration! **Please join us** as we celebrate Jason’s return to the road on **Saturday, June 1, 2019 from 11-1 at Appleton H-D. The Presentation of Keys Ceremony will be at 11:30 a.m.**

