



## **Introducing Our First Veteran Recipient of 2021: Navy Veteran Shannon Flynn of Oconto Falls, WI**

Since the sixth grade, Shannon Flynn, a lifelong Wisconsinite, has wanted to serve his Country. After retiring with 23 years in the Navy as a Construction Mechanic First Class, including three deployments to war zones and service within his community, he can truly say he's done just that. And, as a result, he lives every single day with the painful toll it took, still pushing forward without regrets.

Shannon joined the Navy as a sophomore at Suring High School and headed to bootcamp upon graduating in 1993. He chose a path as a Machinist and spent most of his four years stationed in Japan on the USS Dubuque. While he enjoyed the experience, he yearned for life back in his beloved hometown and returned after fulfilling his contract. He quickly reunited with friends, many of whom learned to ride while he was gone. On a bet he won, he bought his first bike--an '85 Sportster, learned to ride and discovered a passion that shaped his life. He rode all the time and, completely enthralled with the bike world, used his GI Bill to attend the Motorcycle Mechanics Institution (MMI) in Florida. Certification in hand, he landed his first H-D service job, moved back to Wisconsin and began building his mechanic's career.

Looking for extra "beer money" and missing the camaraderie of his military family, he joined the Navy Reserves in May, 2001 figuring one weekend a month and two weeks a year would be easily managed. Three months later, September 11 changed life as we knew it and turned Shannon's extra job into a lifetime commitment to our Country.

Given the skills amassed, he moved into the Navy's Construction Battalion, a longtime dream, and as a SeaBee would aid Marines on the ground. In 2003 he said his goodbyes, sold his bike "just in case", and deployed to Iraq. There, under the angst and demands of impending invasion, he built camps in Kuwait and ran convoys moving gear. He returned home exhausted, tense, and seemingly unscathed. Without transition time, he resumed work and planned for a future he didn't know he'd have. With money tight, he delayed buying a bike to marry his love, build a home for his young family, and change dealerships. And

while life was good, Shannon knew something was off and something was missing. He ached for the therapy his bike once provided; and borrowing bikes from friends just didn't do it anymore. They scraped and bought an 18 year-old Electra Glide for him to fix and ride, and he immediately found his release...just in time to deploy again.

In 2009, Shannon headed to Afghanistan during the most lethal year of the US-led war. There he spent two years in convoy security: sighting and clearing mines from the front seat of his Mine Resistant Ambush Protection (MRAP) lead vehicle, while safely moving troops and equipment. While placing tire chains on his MRAP to navigate the snowy mountainous area, Shannon fell 15 feet off his MRAP vehicle and landed flat on his back with chains atop him. His Kevlar vest likely minimized their impact and he painfully continued his mission until he could be evaluated. Though initial Xrays on base were surprisingly clear, they masked the underlying damage done. He pushed through his missions and completed another pain-filled year with grit and narcotics, then sought care upon returning stateside.

Through the VA he was diagnosed with significant neuromuscular damage to his back with three inwardly herniated lumbar discs that pinch his spinal cord, causing sciatic pain to ripple through his hips and legs. Through treatments and therapy, he continued to work and support his family...and jumped on his bike to sort through pain and inner turmoil. He rode until a deer totaled his bike, found another to fix, and started a course of repairing, rebuilding and selling old bikes. Finding comfort and pride in his technical efforts, in 2012 he opened a small shop in his garage, Shannon's Cycle Service, and slowly began servicing friend's bikes.

In 2014 he deployed a third time to Afghanistan's combat zone for another year in convoy security, again moving through unknown threats and trying life conditions. On top of this, he hurt most days; and yet, he pushed through his Reserve's commitment. After running convoys to build a water well 18 hours a day for 49 days straight, he knew his body and mind couldn't physically handle any more. He returned home to permanently settle into the comforts of family and work and retired in 2016.

He found joy in his family time and solace in work, riding and his deer stand. He coaches his children's sports and supports the needs of his community and Veteran's alike. Along the way he joined the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association (CVMA) and rekindled the brotherhood he had in service. Shannon

has his share of struggles and demons, and he's lined up family and friends to help him deal with his pains from war. Years of injections and nerve-burning procedures to help him function take their toll, yet, as a form of self-preservation, he pushes forward and through the pain every single day, staying active and involved to keep his struggles at bay.

After six years of realizing the unfortunate financial, time and stress a small business demands, Shannon closed his shop in 2018, sold his bike to support his family and began full time work as a Welder at Northport Marine to help get out of debt. Sitting in his garage is a box of parts and blown engine he hopes to transform into his next bike, but the pressures of money and time keep him from building it for himself. So when he wants to ride, or lead his charitable runs for others, he, again, asks friends to borrow a bike. And while he has amazing friends who do that for him, that's a hard ask...one that Hogs For Heroes thought he shouldn't have to make anymore. Choosing to connect this Veteran with his passion not only soothes his soul and changes his life, it keeps "Snowdog" surrounded by his supportive CVMA family, and it permanently keeps a bike in his life.

Finding bikes on a showroom floor is a little challenging right now. We took Shannon shopping to find the beauty that fits his needs and captured his heart. "I love it. I love it. I love it." were his exact words when he found the black 2017 Electra Glide Ultra Limited with custom blue pinstripes and only 10,000 miles. Our friends at Open Road Harley-Davidson stretched our dollars a little more to make this pairing happen, and we can't wait to return him to the road he loves. Unique to this bike, it has been generously paid for by the stunning 2020 fundraising efforts of the Wisconsin International Union of Operating Engineers Local 139! We couldn't be more honored by the beautiful support the IUOE Local 139 continues to lend our mission and our injured Veterans.

We will be bringing that bike back to Shannon's hometown where his Legion family jumped at the chance to host his gifting on **Saturday, May 8, 2021**. We will be hanging at the **American Legion Post #283 in Suring, Wisconsin from 11 am - 2 pm**. Come learn more about our unique mission, meet some of our prior recipients and welcome Shannon back to The Road! We will begin our **Presentation of Keys Ceremony at 12:00 pm** with a Color Guard from Post #283-- and trust us, you don't want to miss this emotional and special moment. The Legion will have their bar open and offer a lunch to benefit Hogs For Heroes...so ride on out, make a day of it and toast our Veterans with us!