



## **Introducing our 25th Veteran Recipient: Marine Sergeant Patrick Dunn, of Madison, Wisconsin**

After Patrick's parents divorced, his mother moved the family from Rota, Spain, to Wausau, Wisconsin, to be closer to his grandparents. Patrick struggled with the divorce most of his childhood; and that was, in turn, reflected in his schoolwork and drive. A high school student scraping by with grades, he had no aspirations for college let alone the line of work he was likely to qualify for. So when a friend talked of joining the Marines, Patrick offered to join with him. His parents were both Marines; and, he'd long considered the pride and opportunity before spontaneously making the decision. At just age 17, it was finally a plan his mother could get behind; and, she signed his papers that same week.

Patrick left for Basic Training in August 2001 and was a first phase recruit when the devastating events of September 11 played out. The harsh reality of his military commitment and the defense of our Country immediately solidified itself in his mind and he, in turn, began to excel and physically transform into the Marine his Country needed. As an Infantry Rifleman, he was sent to the 1st Battalion 5th Marines in Camp Pendleton, CA, was quickly promoted to Lance Corporal and made Fire Team Leader within his platoon. Morale, training, and preparations intensified as all readied for the upcoming invasion of Iraq and the unforeseen toll it would take. Patrick and his peers would deploy to Iraq three times in three consecutive years: the Invasion of Iraq in 2003, for security and stability operations in Fallujah in 2004, and again for security and stability operations in Ramadi in 2005. And although their Company had sustained casualties during these deployments, his platoon remained relatively unscathed. That was, until their third deployment to Ramadi.

In March of 2005, Ramadi was unlike anything they'd encountered before: the risks were much higher, IED blasts were bigger and more frequent, and the sheer number of enemy combatants and gunfire was far greater than their young and invincible Marine minds envisioned— despite experiencing two prior combat deployments. One month into the horrific new world he found himself living in, Patrick and his peers were engaged in a small-arms firefight against enemy forces when he sustained a bullet ricochet wound to his left knee. Back at base, the fragments were removed and the wound sutured; and, Patrick was sent back on patrol that same day. Though no rest for the injured, the wound at the hands of the enemy would earn him his first Purple Heart...and add to the post-traumatic stress that had unknowingly taken root two deployments ago.

Just two weeks after his ricochet wound, Patrick's squad was on a night mission: their convoy was returning to base after completing a successful sniper extraction. On a deserted road they'd just traversed less than an hour prior, a blinding light and thunderous boom arose from a hastily buried IED that was detonated immediately behind Patrick's humvee. It wasn't until Patrick made sure every crew member was alright that he realized he'd been the one hit. A piece of shrapnel managed to get through the steel doors of their truck and slice diagonally through his booted left foot, running toe to heel. The shrapnel shattered most of the bones in his foot and eventually required the amputation of two toes after surgical reconstruction was deemed unsuccessful. Additionally, the impact of the blast left him with a Traumatic Brain Injury that caused years of headaches, memory retention and photosensitivity...that wasn't diagnosed until 2017, and still affects him today.

Also to this day, Patrick wears the piece of shrapnel on a necklace he doesn't remove. And although April 19 would now be celebrated as Patrick's Alive Day and award him his second Purple Heart... April 20 would be the day he would forever grieve as he lost two of his best comrades to an IED— in the same vehicle in

which he was hit the day before, and in the seat where he would have been. The weight of the Survivor's Guilt, coupled with the physical and emotional pain endured, would provide additional fuel to the invisible demons that would attack his mind and his heart for the rest of his life.

Having fulfilled his contract, and with the injuries sustained, Patrick separated in August 2005 and was sent home to Wausau to figure out his next life moves with an open wound still on his left foot. Transition to civilian life was brutal: he struggled to find a new normal, people who understood him, and a way to move through his often paralyzing guilt and pain. Tormented and desperate for a new path, on a whim Patrick decided to become an underwater welder and moved back to California for training and job opportunities.

He arrived eager and motivated to excel in technical school and did well until receiving a \$50,000 lump sum payment from his Traumatic Injury Protection insurance plan. He was a 22 year-old lost soul who proceeded to recklessly spend his "free money" on things and people to help him feel better. Patrick drank excessively for the escape provided and the friends afforded; and, he turned to cocaine to numb and erase a mind full of horrific memories and emotions. Within four short months he had spent every cent he'd been given. School attendance and grades declined and his job performance suffered. He recognized his need for change and quickly devised a plan to move to Seattle. While he left behind the drug habit, alcohol continued to consume his life and affect his ability to balance work requirements. Again recognizing his spiraling decline and need for support, he moved back to his mother's home in Wausau, WI, and finally established a plan to address his mental health.

His mother made sure he understood life at home would not be easy and would come with expectations and responsibilities. Patrick worked several jobs and began classes at the UW-Marathon County. He added counseling to his medical care and connected with a Veterans Club on campus where he learned to share his struggles and tell his story. When he found himself excelling, he set his sights on a major in Microbiology and transferred to UW-Madison. Although college life proved harder at Madison, Patrick encountered immense support amongst his professors and determinedly worked through several probations and disappointments to academically succeed. He added more counseling and Exposure PTSD Therapy from the VA to help manage his struggles and develop better coping mechanisms. The combined efforts not only taught him to release his burdens, he earned his Bachelor's Degree and went on to achieve a Masters Degree in Entomology. Today Patrick works as a Chemist with the State Lab of Hygiene, screening newborn blood samples for in-born errors of metabolism. It's both a job and a purpose he finds highly satisfying.

Over the years his foot injury has led to other issues with his leg, hips and back as his body mechanics compensated for his stability. And while the years of wearing gear and combat have further affected his back strain, it is his constant struggle to manage the depression, guilt and questions of self-worth that still affect him most today. And yet, he pushes through, determined to enjoy a quiet, purposeful life. Amongst his unbelievable development, he found love and support with his partner, Rachel, who has patiently guided his growth. Together they share a professional and personal joy in searching for bugs, attending live music events, and enhancing their home. An intimidating presence, perhaps, Patrick is a gentle giant. He is an introvert and a humble man who loves golf and softball, his job and, still shocked himself, the pair of free-range rabbits that inhabit their home. He lives his life grateful for the many experiences that have brought him to this point— the good, the bad and the ugly— and strives to live his best life for the Brothers who can not. And in an effort to further enhance his own healing and support, Patrick added another achievement to his life: motorcycling.

Patrick grew up riding dirt bikes and, as a child, some of his fondest memories were of his uncle bringing the bikes over and carving out trails in their woods for days of adrenaline-fueled fun. After separating from service, Patrick knew enough about himself, his maturity and mindset that made him intuitively put off riding. As he redirected his life and rebuilt his academic and personal life, he didn't have the money to take on riding. But as he found success and later settled onto a stable life path, he wanted something more for

himself and something more to connect again with other Veterans. He learned about Hogs For Heroes in 2019 after speaking with Veteran riders and listening to the freedom, focus and brotherhood riding provided them. Deciding that was what he, too, needed, Patrick chose to apply in 2020. Unfortunately, he didn't have his motorcycle endorsement at the time; and since that is a foundational requirement, his packet was returned with a note encouraging him to both get his license, and miles in, to see if riding was, in fact, for him. Motivated even more by our rejection, he took the class in 2021, bought a used 750cc H-D Street to learn on and applied again. His impressive valor, sacrifice and struggles were never in question; but our Advisory Board felt he needed more time to experience what riding could be for him. So Patrick rode everywhere he could, whenever he had a chance, and commuted daily to work simply to build his experience and find his love...on this very uncomfortable and undersized fit. He found it all right; and now he both wanted, and needed, the long day drives on winding rural roads and the weekend excursions a bigger bike would provide. Unfortunately, he didn't have the money that kind of dream would require and taking out another loan for another bike didn't seem responsible. With great hesitation and effort, he applied in 2022 for his third time; and with a year of riding now under his belt, our Advisory Board could hear the rider he was becoming in his written voice. We admired his determination and tenacity in pursuing his goal and in developing his passion. And Hogs For Heroes felt that this 6'6" man needed to be on a bike not only fitting his physical frame, but on one that would truly introduce him to the benefits of wind therapy he was desperately seeking, and certainly in need of.

We met Patrick and his partner, Rachel, for pizza and drinks and shared a night laughing and swapping stories. Every 15 minutes or so he would shake his head in disbelief that this was, in fact, happening to him. And when we hugged good night, the strength of his embrace spoke volumes to both the gratitude and character of this deserving man. Patrick had a little homework to do as he'd not been on larger touring bikes before. After test riding and searching, he found "The One" that made his heart flip on the showroom floor of Wisconsin Harley-Davidson in Oconomowoc, WI. This 2021 Harley-Davidson Road Glide in Gauntlet Gray is a beauty: it offered him the sleek, understated look he wanted; and with less than 2,500 miles on it, years of peace-filled, healing miles to come. And leave it to our friends at WIHD who wrapped their arms around us and took that price down to meet our budget!

Unique to this bike, it has been fully paid for by the amazing fundraising efforts of longtime supporters at Sloppy Joes in Hubertus, WI and their sister restaurant, Smoke on The Water in Lake Okauchee. Their annual spring ride made us the beneficiary in 2021...and over 300 riders showed up, and another 300 joined us at their Hogs For Heroes Festival later that day for music, food and fun. That one day event raised enough to sponsor a bike gifting... and so we're going to roll this one out, #25, with their compliments at their 2022 **Hogs For Heroes Benefit Ride and Festival** for us again this year. Join any part or all of the amazing event on **Sunday, June 5!** The Ride leaves Sloppy Joes at 11 a.m. and pulls into The Festival at Smoke on The Water at 3:30 pm just in time for HUGE musical talent, Bobby Friss, to take the stage at 4:00 p.m. Can't make the ride? Come to the Festival for the music, raffles and the chance to welcome another Veteran to the healing road. We will take the Festival stage at **5:00 p.m. for our Presentation of Keys Ceremony** to honor the gratitude we have for all Veterans by supporting this specific one. Please note, The Festival is a fundraising event and there will be a \$10 donation cover charge to get in. Ride with us that day and your ticket is included.