



*Ever wonder what our Recipients tell us in their applications?*

*Each is a unique effort in their own right and not as tidy as what you read from us. We write their announcements, using a combination of their submissions and information gleaned upon meeting them, to convey their story in support their healing release. Reaching 50 is a milestone achievement for us, much like filling out an application for some. This announcement is admittedly longer, folks, because, for the first time, we are sharing much of #50's specific, narrative responses noted in bold.*

### **Introducing our 50th Veteran Recipient: Sergeant Major Anthony Glugla of Oakfield, Wisconsin**

**“I come from humble beginnings and, like many, I remember the taste of government cheese and using food stamps. What I didn’t have I learned to borrow.”** mused Tony Glugla of his childhood in West Bend, Wisconsin. They were a family of six until divorce left him his single mom to raise the four children. Tony rode dirt bikes and amassed a few tickets for taking it to the streets, he played basketball and wrestled and, along with his brothers, secretly partied and drank while his mom took nursing classes and worked evening shifts. He enjoyed school and did well, but didn’t bother himself with future options. While at the local fair, the 15 year-old was introduced to the Little Britches Rodeo and subsequently took riding clinics. Tony immediately connected with the thrill of it and knew he needed an adrenaline-filled life. With his father currently in the Army, and his older brother recently enlisting, following suit seemed a natural route for Tony. **“Being a bit of a ‘wild child’, I was lucky to make it to my junior year. I’d like to say it was my decision to join the Army, but my parents were a little too excited when it came time to sign the consent form.”**

At age 16 ½, Tony committed to active duty, with a split training option, and left his rodeo dreams behind. He went to Basic Training the summer after Junior year, drilled monthly at the Pewaukee Reserves Unit his Senior year and then, having met his academic requirements, skipped his graduation to attend specialized training at Fort Dix in 1987. Tony became a Heavy Wheeled Vehicle Operator; it gave him a foundation from which to build on and a second family. It would be that family that would consume his next 31 years and support him well beyond retirement. And it would be those 31 years that would leave his body riddled with injuries that would compromise his abilities today, impart traumatic memories and create a psychological strain he’d spend the rest of his life avoiding and, subsequently, fighting to stay alive.

In 1988, before his first duty station, Tony mobilized with his Reserves Unit, **“some of the closest friends I’d ever come to know”**, for a humanitarian mission in Honduras building farm-to-market roads to enhance economic development for the impoverished country. **“We lived in tents, in the middle of nowhere, clearing our way through the jungle, meeting locals and eating dehydrated beef patties for two months.”** It was an indoctrination to a world he was eager to see; and Tony loved every minute of the action and camaraderie. He then transitioned to Active Duty and stationed at Kaiserslautern Army Base, Germany, to drive trucks and trailers across Europe. Just months after arriving, Tony was ordered to Ramstein Air Field to assist in a tragic airshow incident involving military planes. **“Myself and six other drivers took refrigerated trailers in preparation for the worst case scenario transporting bodies. We arrived on scene to find 70 dead and another 500 injured. That afternoon we put more tourniquets on than I can remember. Men, ladies, and kids...burnt...limbs scattered...it took us two days to gather the remains.”** He’d been trained for casualty management, but it wasn’t until debriefing weeks later that Tony thought much about its personal impact. He simply pushed away the horrifying images and moved

on, beginning a life-long career of avoiding hard memories and the many tolls his job would take. To this day, he still hasn't googled the event's dreadful images.

Life at "K-Town" was good— training, driving across Europe, and hanging out; and when Tony learned there was a rodeo team in town, life got even better. He spent nights learning to ride a bull on a hanging barrel he and some friends built on the American Legion's porch. He got good at it, really good; and Tony spent his free time riding rough stock with the European Rodeo Cowboy Association and winning awards. He rode bull plenty but, being too tall, found his passion with horses—riding saddle bronc and excelling at bare back. **"There's nothing like climbing on a 2,000 pound animal that's pissed. It's pure adrenaline."** It was exactly the kind of rush Tony needed at the time, and would need in the future to push him forward through life.

Tony met his first wife while working together on base and with whom he shares his first two children. They married quickly for the privacy barracks-living didn't allow for; and almost as quickly, realized the strains of incompatibility and a military marriage. In late 1990, Tony was deployed to Saudi Arabia for Operation Desert Shield for six months as a Transport Operator. Three days in-country, his mission's focus changed to POW Security Movement. **"We literally loaded open box semi trailers with surrendering Iraqi troops. Our convoys took us through enemy convoys that were bombed. The mangled mess of vehicles had torn, dismembered and burnt bodies that could be smelled from a mile away. It took everything in my power not to puke. That is just one of the many memories I will never forget."** Tony's time took him into the Gulf War's second, combat phase, Operation Desert Storm, moving supplies to the front line and living amidst the enemy-lit, burning oil fields. **"Just when things started looking up, the sun seemingly set and didn't come back out for months. It looked like dusk all day and smelled like a blown engine. Nauseated and tired, we spent days on end cleaning oil off of everything. Transport missions continued as normal and then we were tasked with clearing supply routes, which meant moving week-old blown up convoys off the roads, some still smoldering. Never did I think I would see and smell the things I did."**

His deployment complete, Tony returned to Germany for the end of his contract, only to receive an involuntary extension. He was sent, without his wife, to Fort Riley, Kansas, for another four months to support their base needs after the war's toll. While there, he began out-processing into the Reserves again; and in November, 1992, the young family, of now three, moved back to West Bend, WI. Almost immediately Tony noticed the difficulty in fitting into an unfamiliar civilian life and interacting with others. He ignored the demons he brought home and looked for work, eventually landing a truck driving job where he would deliver beer for years to come. Looking to release his frustrations, he would borrow a friend's dirt bike for the rush that lifted him. The marriage wasn't ideal from the start; and with Tony now covertly struggling, the union took a turn for the worse. She moved to California without telling him, taking his daughter and divorcing before his first son was born. And that, Tony allows **"was the first sign that something was a little off with me..."** though admittedly, he did nothing about those warning bells.

In 1994, Tony came upon an incredible opportunity and, with his mother's help, spent everything he had to buy a horse ranch in Wisconsin; and it lit his heart on fire. His life and obligations changed direction, and he went inactive with the Reserves. **"Much like when I rode a motorcycle, I was now in control of where I was going and confident that life was worth living. Longing for that camaraderie like in service, I spent weekends at the rodeos with friends and breaking horses during the week."** Any riding Tony did then was done on a horse— it was where he found peace and the means to sustain his sanity. It was his release and it became his identity. Tony didn't talk about what he'd been through, he didn't seek counseling or support, but he knew horse life and rodeos absolutely kept his demons at bay and kept him alive.

With child support and costly ranch expenses over the years, Tony found himself living on hard times, financially and emotionally, and anger and despair reentered his life. He fortified himself with both his Army and Rodeo families; and eventually transitioned his Lucky 8 Ranch into showing and boarding horses for an

income and huge morale boost. Later Tony used its arenas to train horses, provide bull riding clinics, and supported the area's "Little Britches Rodeo" training. It was all the therapy he thought he needed for all he tried desperately to avoid; and he enjoyed the full circle moment it brought him. While life moved forward again for Tony, his heart still yearned for something more.

In 1999, while sitting in his dentist's chair, the sassy, whip-smart dental assistant caught his eye and challenged his inner fire. Tony somehow managed to get Peggy's number and, after taking her and her daughter on their first date, the two quickly fell in love and moved in together. On September 11, 2001, Tony stood in his living room with a cup of coffee and watched the Twin Towers fall, along with his heart. He knew what was coming; and not wanting to take a minute of life for granted, he proposed to the love of his life. And not wanting to be on the sidelines, he reactivated his Reserves standing the very next month, becoming a Drill Sergeant, for the income they needed and the involvement his soul craved. They married in July of 2003, learned a few months later they would be expecting their first son, and in January, 2004, Tony deployed to Afghanistan.

Tony, now 35, received a one-year deployment order to Afghanistan's Karshi-Khanabad Air Base on the northern border. Compared to his Gulf War experience, Tony thought he "had it made" when he saw his well-appointed base. The amenities, the free base movement without guns, in plain uniform and air-conditioned barracks would certainly set him up for a better experience in war. He settled in, began cross-training within the Armory and, after realizing there wasn't much need for a driver, he was reassigned. Tony became a "Door Gunner" pulling security for a Casualty Evacuation Helicopter team in combat zones: and it would be his job to man the gun as the helicopter swooped in to extricate the injured. **"Throwing on a harness and hanging out the door of a Sikorsky Black Hawk was an adrenaline rush. Once again, I was finding that mental release in the strangest place imaginable: a warzone."**

**"One June morning while pulling security for the team we took small arms fire. It wasn't the first time we were peppered with lead, but it was more than our bird could handle. The hydraulics went out, and we lost our straight and level flight. It seemed like forever as we spun to the ground. We hit broadside and did a textbook roll ripping the aircraft apart. Debris flew around us like mosquitos in a swamp. The harness used to keep me from falling out got wedged in the wreckage; and in an attempt to brace for impact my shoulder was torn from the socket. I laid there with a crushed foot, broken neck, broken ribs and a collapsed lung, bleeding from my torso with internal injuries and a second traumatic brain injury. Adrenaline wore off and it all started becoming a reality. We lost the Pilot on impact. I rolled to the Crew Chief and pulled him closer, only to find his body riddled with shrapnel. The Co-Pilot pulled me out and was the one that saved my life. As I laid amongst my team on the way back to Bagram Air Base, I held the hand of the Crew Chief, hoping he somehow knew he wasn't alone when he passed. I was stabilized and flown stateside and spent one month in Bethesda with holes in my abdomen, then the Army shipped me home for more surgeries on my neck and foot until I was fit for duty again."**

With extensive time in and out of military hospitals, Tony had seen the worst of war's inflictions on his Family; and despite his own struggles, he knew how lucky he was. Tony worked hard to rehabilitate, welcomed his second son and returned to the Reserves for its known comforts. Always the fighter, he determinedly tamped down the horrors he'd endured, and the many nightmares they produced, and pressed forward without recognition or counseling lest he be seen as weak or risk his job. **"Although I returned to duty physically fit in April, 2005, my wife will tell you I was not the same person that left for Afghanistan. With a second major traumatic brain injury on record and a few seizures because of it, I lost my license and all driving privileges: that loss of freedom alone nearly put me over the edge."**

From 2006-2010, Tony found himself mobilized to Fort Benning, Georgia, as a Drill Sergeant. He loved this new calling and the chance to train new soldiers to the level he'd expect on his own line; and he signed on for a second two-year term while there. He made it home for the occasional long weekend and was there

when his third son was born, but being away from his wife and family greatly impacted his morale in private. Drill Sergeants automatically receive counseling; but despite the chance to talk and the supportive camaraderie of his Brothers, the long, lonely 18 hour shifts began eroding his life. With no horse to turn to for support, a buddy lent him his motorcycle to find release in riding again; and it worked, immediately reconnecting Tony with his passion of days gone by. **“I think I’ve been on every back road from central Georgia through Eastern Alabama.”**, trying to clear his head and stay in the game for his family—blood and military. **“Feeling like I didn’t fit in, I mobilized as often as I could— Fort Benning again and another two years at Fort McCoy... anywhere I could. Over the course of the next years, I missed birthdays, holidays, vacations and being a father. Before my wife said enough is enough, the Army said I had to retire or take a medical discharge. In 2017 I limped to retirement after 31 years as a crusty, disgruntled soon to be civilian.”**

Civilian Tony was angry, hurting physically and psychologically, and still in denial that there was anything wrong with him; and now he needed to find a job. For the man who thought so little of an academic future back then, while in the military he earned several degrees in Educational, Organizational and Behavioral Psychology. Ironically, while he could now expertly understand and listen to others better, the advanced education gave him little insight as to his own problems, characteristics and needs. **“After leaving the military, I found work in a construction company. Life seemed like it was getting back on track. I had a job with a steady income, was going to school again, and starting some much needed therapy. With my PTSD and physical disabilities, I am a bit disgruntled and not always ‘politically correct’--so it’s been hard to keep a job outside of the military. My time in construction was short lived and I was once again looking for work, trying to find a place to fit in.”**

Tony could understand, in part, why people didn’t like him; but he struggled more so with that thinking from his wife. They’d been through marital counseling, and he used the Employee Assistance Lines through work, but it wasn’t until she issued him the ultimatum of therapy or divorce, did Tony finally realize his precarious impact on those he loved most. In 2019 he called the VA and finally said, “I think I’m ready for this” and opened himself up to personal counseling he still uses to this day to process his years of avoidance, trauma and pain.

Addressing his medical needs was never a problem, until they forced him to lose his passions and support systems. With the benefit of hindsight and treatment, Tony can now acknowledge that he’d been oozing signs of PTSD for most of his adult life: anger, despair, irritability, depression, anxiety, nightmares, isolation and suicidal ideation, all of which likely worsened by his two traumatic brain injuries. **“It doesn’t feel right to say I have a hardship, but I’ve learned to acknowledge that my life is the way it is because I have barriers. I can’t stand for long periods because I lose feeling in my foot. I have limited movement in my neck due to fused vertebrae that also causes tension headaches. Hearing aids in both ears and tinnitus affect conversations and make complex tasks difficult. My tendons never healed in my arm which is causing muscle atrophy and requires I get cortisone shots regularly. I can’t ride horses like I used to.... PTSD is a barrier and an ongoing cause for therapy that has kept me from attending some public events, family gatherings, crowds and affects my ability to converse in a professional manner. It is hard to go to sleep and stay asleep because... tomorrow is a concern for me. Most importantly, it is my inability to keep friends that don’t have a military background or can understand me.”**

**“I’ve spent my life putting the Army first, now it’s time to make my life a priority; but to do that I need to be mentally stable. I’m trying. My wife, Peg, was always my biggest support system, even when I was away for years on end. I’ve had two families in my life, one being related by blood and the other whom I shared blood with. Friends said it would be hard to leave the military behind. The camaraderie is all I miss and still long for every day. I’ve experienced things most will never understand and unfortunately missed out on life events I can never get back. I look at my life now as making the best of the time I have, not trying to make up for the time I lost.”**

**“I found a position as a Disabled Veteran Outreach Program Specialist, within the Department of Workforce Development, assisting Veterans to overcome barriers to employment in central Wisconsin. Now that I work with Veterans with problems like my own, it’s easier for me to relate and build rapport on a different level. It doesn’t pay much, but it is rewarding and makes me easier to get along with.”**

Tony has worked hard to move forward and build relationships within his family and military community, but he’s still raw, reserved and guarded. He enjoys his job and has found immense purpose in supporting Veterans. Tony leads small mental health groups, he’s self-funding the creation of a military resource network, and he keeps his own dark thoughts at bay by raising suicide awareness amongst others. He is 55 years old now and supporting his children’s needs has always been Tony’s priority: he’s helped three of the five through college and still has one 16 year-old still at home. He still manages his family’s ranch to keep his own beloved horses close to his heart, but no longer runs it as a business. His heart and mind yearn to ride; but between their fixed income, dwindling savings and today’s inflationary demands, buying his own bike is far out of reach. Tony has had three bikes through the course of his lifetime; and when he didn’t have one, he borrowed one for the mental release he desperately needed.

**“With my disabilities keeping me off the back of a horse, I’ve hung up my spurs and now find comfort in throwing a leg over a Hog instead of a horse. I can’t afford a bike of my own, lucky for me I have a Veteran friend that lets me borrow one of his. I’ve found that over the last few years, riding has given me that reason to make it to tomorrow. I find myself saying “nothing can hurt me” every time I get on a bike. I’ve found in riding, my life with my family, coworkers, and friends has gotten better; and it gives me a sense of belonging like nothing I’ve had since the military; and in a way, it’s allowed me to find a missing piece in my puzzle. I’ve sat on this application for three years, and it took me two years to fill it out...and my psychologist believes writing it all down was the best thing I’ve done for myself so far.”**

Our Advisory Board thought it was high time someone supported Tony by putting this legitimate Cowboy back on his own Iron Horse to ride...whenever he wanted and without making a hard ask of anyone. Although Tony had been to several of our Giftings the past three years, he stayed far in the back and never approached us. Though he knew who we were as soon as he saw us, we shocked the hell out of him with a long-overdue personal introduction and our news. Tony hit the trail to test ride models with a close friend, Recipient #30, in fact, who said “it was love at first sight when Tony saw his dream bike”. Sitting on West Bend Harley-Davidson’s floor was a 2022 Street Glide Special, with only 3,500 miles on her, in his favorite colors depicting his Red Roan and Black Stud horses. The first thing Tony did was make sure his cowboy hat fit in the saddle bag, then took it for a test ride; and he hasn’t stopped shaking his head in disbelief or gratitude since. As we wrapped up this season by buying our 50th Harley in just over eight years, our friends at WBHD helped us celebrate by dropping that already-below-budget price even further to purposely leave more fuel in the tank for next year’s Veterans. Seriously folks, we have met some amazing, generous people on this journey... which leads us to our next introduction.

Unique to this bike, it has been fully sponsored by the 2023 fundraising efforts of Wisconsin’s International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 139 who, last year raised enough to gift three bikes this year. Tony’s ride is the third to roll out this season with their compliments, and it is their ninth fully sponsored bike overall. And on another amazing note, they handed us a check for \$75,000 from their two events this summer for us...enough to cover another three bikes in 2025.

We will be wrapping up our 2024 season by placing #49 and #50 back on the road together! Join us for this **Double Presentation of Keys Ceremony on Saturday, August 24 at 1:00 pm at the Fond du Lac American Legion Post 75** during their summer Corn Roast & Brat Fry Community Party. We will be

hanging out from 11:00 am until 4:00 pm and look forward to sharing hugs with all of you who have supported this stunning, healing ride of ours. It is definitely a milestone for all of us.