



**Introducing Veteran Recipient #70:  
Marine & Army National Guardsman, Sergeant First Class Chad Olson  
of Janesville, Wisconsin**

Chad Olson was born and raised in Janesville, Wisconsin. His earliest memory is one of domestic violence. After his mother left his father, some of his best childhood memories are of riding with his dad on the occasional visit and his mother's friends surrounding their home with motorcycles. Motorcycles were always going to be a part of Chad's future, but first the conflicted young man needed to get through high school.

Chronically labeled as "not living up to his potential" and bored by school, Chad found his release playing football, wrestling and running cross-country. He knew he wanted more out of life but lacked direction until his neighbor, Roy, became a father-figure who helped guide the adolescent through those rough years. Chad's mother instilled in him the need to be a leader and to always help others. Looking for a future that spoke to selfless service, and chasing the approval of a father who'd always wished he'd served, Chad joined the Marine Corps as a senior in high school. Two weeks after graduating in 1994, he was standing on the yellow footprints at Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego with his best friend, beginning a journey that would shape the next 23 years of his life...and adversely affect every day of his life after.

Chad went in on an open contract, meaning the Marine Corps could assign him his job: and, subsequently, he specialized as a Supply Operations Clerk. His first duty station took him to Iwakuni, Japan for a year. He hated the desk job he was working, but he loved Japan. He returned to San Diego, and as a reward for his first year, Chad bought his first motorcycle: a Suzuki RFR 600. He rode throughout southern California every chance he got. Wanting more challenging work, Chad volunteered to join the Surveillance Reconnaissance Intelligence Group (SRIG), a specialized military command structure at the time. As a proficient, physically fit Marine, he would support and perform covert operations in this new role. From this he was afforded the chance to become one of our nation's few Airborne Marines and went on to serve with the 1st Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company (ANGLICO) and trained other countries on the use of our air assets. All of this, he loved: it was work that reflected both his toughness and his willingness to take on demanding assignments. And he wanted more.

As his Marine Corps contract neared its four-year completion, Chad pursued officer training. Although he was doing exceptionally well, he was denied the opportunity; and upset with the decision, he transferred into Wisconsin's Army Active Guard Reserve with a plan to attend college and come back as an officer. That would never happen. Instead he would serve the next 19 years, working full time in automated logistics and supply management, and rising in rank and responsibility. He couldn't foresee that path then, nor could he have predicted it would be the best decision he would ever make.

As his time in the Marine Corps ended, Chad sold his motorcycle before leaving California and planned to buy another once settled, but life intervened and delayed its purchase. He returned to Janesville, his hometown, and worked at Madison's Army National Guard base arranging for resources and supplies. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, Chad was temporarily reassigned to the Dane County Airport as an armed presence to deter potential terrorist attacks. It was during this time that he met his, now-ex, wife and plans for college and officer training were lost.

In 2003, Chad took a recruiting position for the WIARNG out of Beloit for a year. While working he had the opportunity to support and mentor one of his prospects from the National Guard's Challenge Academy, a quasi-military residential program to help redirect at-risk teens. Chad was honored for the chance to guide and shape a young life, and tutored him in off hours to assure his graduation. Little did he know then that this young man would go on in service to our Country and, twenty years later, guide and shape Chad's struggling life.

In June of 2005, Chad deployed to Kuwait for a 15 month assignment at Camp Arifjan in supply and logistics for the large influx of troops moving in theater. It was his job to ensure service members had what they needed for life support (tents, water, food, waste facilities, etc.) as well as equipment (MRAPS, tanks, etc.), all while operating in a difficult and dangerous part of the world. Supply packaging results in waste; and burn pits fired continuously to incinerate the excess along with everything else produced, used and disposed of on base. Chad considered it a necessary evil at the time, never imagining the respiratory disease it would cause him years later. Most supply items would arrive by ship then be distributed via convoys to bases throughout Iraq. Convoys posed their own logistical and safety risks: and Chad lost two close brothers he'd trained with to IED attacks after leaving his base. Despite his own grief, he held the solemn tarmac ceremony honoring the fallen warriors as they began their final journey home. Those moments, those images, and that anger stays with a person.

Chad returned home in September of 2006 to find the Harley Softail Deuce he'd ordered while overseas waiting for him in his garage...and he rode as much as he could to clear the demons claiming space in his head. He was hypervigilant, avoided crowds and struggled to reconnect. To soothe his pain he turned to drinking after work. What surprised him most were the memories triggered by his return...not of his time in Kuwait, but of his time as a Marine on covert missions. Scenes, actions, and traumatic outcomes long shut-down, and still classified, played through his vulnerable mind and disrupted his sleep. And when the drinking didn't stop the rotation of those hard memories, he drank more.

Chad's transitional challenges created marital friction; and his response was to focus his energy on work and move forward. But when their first child arrived, it helped positively redirect Chad's struggles and outward behaviors at home. As he grew enthralled with his son's young life, and wanting to be more than what his father was to him, Chad's attention and involvement shifted more to his family.

Chad deployed again in February, 2009—this time to Iraq, where he was assigned to Camp Bucca until March, 2010, when the base closed. Attached to a facility engineering team, Chad's primary mission was infrastructure reconstruction in Safwan, a small border town near Kuwait that served as a vital security checkpoint and logistical hub during the drawdown of U.S. forces. Their team rebuilt schools and clean water supply systems to stabilize the area. While he found this work rewarding and appreciated the chance to positively impact the war torn area; he found it equally frustrating to have the sites looted by the very people they were trying to help.

Camp Bucca was a Forward Operating Base (FOB) that housed a massive theater internment facility, and it carried an ugly history of overcrowding, detainee radicalization and prisoner abuse. When the FOB announced its pending closure that September, the second half of Chad's tour changed to detainee holding. As the Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) in charge, Chad provided oversight to the team monitoring the detainees as they awaited transport to Iraqi custody or other U.S.-run facilities. The climate was oppressive, the accommodations were rough, the rotations were long and frequent, and the detainees were anything but good. It was a hard, demanding mission that took a steep toll on Chad's mental health. There was inmate violence and uprising, division and anger amongst sects, and covert strategizing to monitor and address. After the several thousand detainees had been relocated, Chad's work turned to happily dismantling the jail.

Chad returned stateside in January, 2010; and as is the case for many combat veterans, coming home did not mean leaving the war behind. Although he tried hard to push the memories, anger and frustrations away...they found their way out. He returned to drinking after work at an even heavier pace, often to the point of passing out just to be able to sleep. He was short-tempered, closed off and emotionally unavailable. His anxiety and hypervigilance worsened and caused him to further isolate and become suspicious. Pride forced him to tamp down and hide his struggles so that he could perform well during the day, further fueling his exhaustion and depression. The only time Chad felt like he could truly let go of war's traumatic memories and emotions was on two wheels. And to make that time even better, he bought his beloved 2010 H-D Street Glide to improve his ride, and his life.

The young family welcomed their second child in 2012: a daughter who immediately became the apple of his eye. Chad, more than anything, loved his children and the joy they offered his struggling life. They gave him purpose outside of work; and as much as he longed for better, PTSD's compounding damage from his service made that intent all the harder to manage.

Despite Chad's struggles on the home front, his military career in Supply Management and Logistics continued to excel. To earn promotions he took positions at different area Guard bases, gaining experience as an NCO and eventually becoming the Readiness NCO in charge of daily Guard operations. For as much as he excelled at work, 2015-2016 proved to be hard personal years. His marriage deteriorated to the point of divorce and unmanaged anger and excessive drinking created problems with the law. Through Veterans Court, Chad first connected with the VA in 2016, was diagnosed with PTSD, and then resisted any offered help. Again, his pride stood in the way; and while describing himself as a "functional alcoholic", Chad believed he could pull himself together for his shared time with his children, and for work... and continued his self-destructive, isolating ways in his own time. Riding, more than ever, helped him deal with the hard blows delivered.

Changes within the National Guard structure and training standards proved frustrating for Chad and, in 2017, he decided it was time to step away from military life and he retired. After he wore the uniform for 23 years, served in two branches, worked full time throughout his career, stood watch after 9/11, deployed twice to combat zones, said goodbye to close Brothers who did not make it home, earned several Army Commendation Medals and Army Achievement Medals for meritorious service throughout his years, and rose to the rank of First Sergeant... Chad began life as a civilian. And that transition, and all the loss it created, was harder than he'd ever imagined.

After months of overly quiet and difficult down time, Chad grew bored and decided to seek civilian work. Finding HVAC systems to be of interest, he pursued technical training and found work with a local company. He enjoyed both the job and the company, but over time his destructive ways pulled him further from the life he wanted and took a toll on his physical health. Eventually Chad would decide to step away from work to focus on his spiraling health needs—a courageous and difficult decision for a man who'd hid his struggles for nearly two decades.

Life has a way of circling back: a family life-line reached out to Chad, via the Challenge Academy teen he mentored twenty years earlier, and invited him to attend a local Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association (CVMA) meeting. Chad hesitantly rode in; and after that first meeting, knew he'd found a Veteran's group he could get behind and, in return, gained support from those who understood his path. He began socializing more, talking through his experiences, and fundraising for other Veterans, all of which motivated his heart and mind to be better. The relationships he built amongst his brotherhood were not only personally therapeutic, they were formative. His Brothers directed him toward the additional Veteran benefits he'd earned, prevented him from self-harm when times got dark, and encouraged him to obtain substance abuse treatment.

Stepping forward is a decision that takes courage, humility and a willingness to finally place healing ahead of pride. Through the VA, Chad entered a residential treatment program in Milwaukee. It was not the right match for his needs, nor was he truly at a point where he was ready to accept the hard path ahead. He relapsed. Then he got back up and attempted outpatient intervention with some success. After his daughter pleaded, "I want you to walk me down the aisle some day.", the gut punch Chad experienced gave him the personal impetus he needed to continue on.

Recognizing his need for simultaneous PTSD and Substance Abuse treatment, Chad entered a three month inpatient program at the Tomah VA...and this time his hard work took hold. This time it wasn't a secret; and as Chad learned of the amazing support he had garnered, sharing his journey and being accountable was made all the easier. This time he's got tools that work along with ongoing counseling, medication and a new-found dedication to his path forward. This time he set his pride aside, opened himself up and, with nothing more to hide and everything to win, he has stepped toward something better—for him, for his children, for his community. Unfortunately, what he no longer has, nor able to afford while unemployed, is the motorcycle that allows him to further free his mind and stay within his CVMA brotherhood.

Chad's two children are his world. Period. Over the years he's worked hard to build and provide a future they can thrive and develop in, despite the challenges and setbacks he's grappled with. In January he was faced with an unexpected custody battle; and in order to retain a lawyer, he sold his beloved Street Glide. Hogs For Heroes believed returning Chad to the road with our gift of a motorcycle would help keep him on his healing path...and we chose to join Team Chad.

Chad was beyond shocked and excited to receive our news; and eager for his newfound chance at freedom, he found his dream bike the very next day. Sitting on the showroom floor of Reel Brothers Harley-Davidson in Mauston, WI was a gorgeous 2023 H-D Road Glide in a Billiard Blue and Gray combination, loaded with the raised bars he wanted, the throaty pipes that made his heart soar, and a mere 6,000 miles on her to take him far into his healing journey ahead.

Full bragging rights to this, our 70th Bike and Veteran pairing, go to the Construction Business Group, a Joint Labor-Management organization assuring fair practice and standards of excellence across Wisconsin's construction industry. Chad's **Presentation of Keys Ceremony will be on Saturday, July 25, 2026 at 5:00 pm at the Janesville VFW Post 1621.** His gifting will follow the return of Larry's Ride, a benefit ride for Hogs For Heroes. Join us for the ride and stay...or come just for the ceremony...and help us welcome one more injured Veteran rider back to the healing road.