

VETERAN'S CORNER

While serving as Army sniper, Tualatin Soldier had leg amputated from ambush in Afghanistan. After recovering, he made the choice to remain on active duty rather than take a medical discharge

BY DALE POTTS

Positive thinking and enthusiasm have played a big role in molding recent Tualatin resident Joel Dulashanti's life. Critically wounded in an ambush in Afghanistan in 2007, he could have taken a medical discharge from the Army. But he chose to stay in the Army to prove that it could be done. Joel was wounded while deployed as a sniper assigned to 4/73rd RSTA, 4th Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division out of Ft Bragg, NC. He and his partner were tasked to a cavalry scout platoon chasing two Taliban guys who were riding together on a moped. The Taliban ran into a field and they went after them. He said it was "about 110 degrees, some 6,000 feet above sea level. There was no humidity, all you could smell was the earth and burnt grass." While walking in knee high grass, he said "I started to smell body odor. So I stopped. As I turned to my right, towards the direction of odor, they started shooting with AK47s." Joel explained "they were firing from a prone position on the ground about 10 meters away. I took two rounds to

my right knee. As I continued turning and falling, I was shot through my left knee. The next round came through under my arm, through my rib cage and, since I was parallel to the ground, traversed my entire abdomen down to my pelvis. That last round was the worst." He said "We returned fire and those guys were finished." He added "we learned that one of the two was number 34 on the Taliban 'most wanted list'. He was the cousin of Saraj Haqqani, who had a well-established network of terrorists."

Two platoons that Joel operated with as a sniper were on his route out of Afghanistan. One donated plasma when he reached his first treatment table. The platoon leader for the second group stayed at his bedside until he was boarded up for Germany. It took eight months at his next stop, Walter Reed, for him to feel comfortable walking again. He explained the "the recovery process started off slow but I accelerated fast. I have a partial knee replacement on my left side. I have an above-the-knee amputation on my right side. I'm missing half of my stomach and 90 percent of my intestines and gall bladder and half of my abdominal wall is gone" When he returned to active duty, he was assigned to the Pentagon where he worked in the Army Legislative Liaison office. He also finished

course work to earn a BS in Biology from University of Maryland. When asked why he didn't get commissioned, he said "Being an NCO meant more to me than any other aspect of the military. I couldn't have led from the front or impacted soldiers the way that I wanted had I been commissioned." Next he served as an instructor at Fort Benning, GA where, for three years he trained between 400 and 500 paratrooper students every three weeks to safely parachute.

In Oregon, Joel has been very active in veteran support organizations and into Purple Heart recognition. He testified to help pass legislation to make Oregon the 15th Purple Heart state and designating I-5 and other Oregon highways as memorial highways. He also worked with Forest Grove, Beaverton, King City and Tualatin city councils to make each a Purple Heart City. Joel was a speaker at Tualatin's latest annual Vet Appreciation Breakfast. He plans to start graduate school

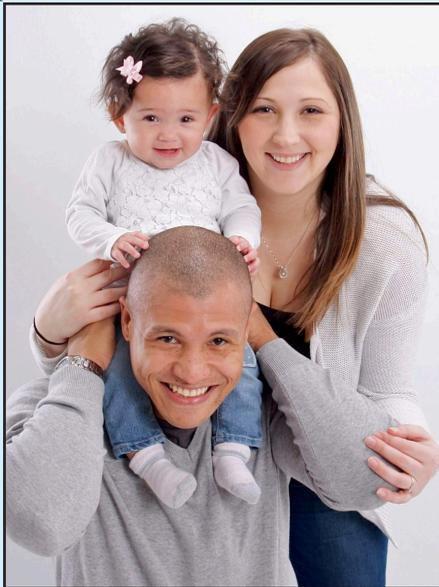
in March but says he will continue to help veterans, their families and severely disabled children through the local chapter of Military Order of Purple Heart.

Joel's advice to others with handicaps is simple -- choose whether or not to have a positive outlook. "Make up your mind," he said. "Everybody has to go through their own coping mechanisms. Sometimes you're in a denial state; when you come out of that denial state, then deal with what it is you have to deal with. If you need it, get counseling. I never gave negativity even an opportunity to invade my mind. There was only one route for me."

Dale G. Potts has organized and MC'd Tualatin's Memorial Day observation for the past 13 years. He is a Navy Vietnam vet, serving as the Public Affairs Officer of the Aircraft Carrier USS Yorktown. After active duty, he remained in the reserves, retiring as a Navy Captain (same rank as an Army Colonel). His civilian career was primarily as the Oregon Public Affairs Officer for IRS. Contact Dale at vet.dale@gmail.com.



Lieutenant Dale Potts



Joel and Samantha with their nine-month old daughter Téa.



Army Sergeant Joel Dulashanti when serving with 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division.



Joel is presented an American Flag flown over Ground Zero, NYC by former Army Vice Chief of Staff GEN Chiarelli at the site for the National 9/11 Memorial Museum. The event was Microsoft's Salute to Heroes by the USO.



Wearing running leg. The next day Joel placed third in the Long Jump at the 2014 US Paralympic Track and Field Nationals.



Joel and sniper partner Rich Raineri familiarizing themselves with XM-110 SASS; they were the first to use this rifle in combat in Afghanistan. Raineri was also shot in the firefight that wounded Joel but didn't realize it until later. The round didn't penetrate past several layers of body armor.



Recovering at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Before gaining use of his prosthetic, Joel underwent several knee surgeries and also a partial knee replacement.



Purple Heart organization members including Joel and daughter Téa, Bev Smith and Bill Manderfeld from Tualatin hold Memorial sign that has been placed on I-5 along South Tualatin.



Wearing the most prized possession all infantrymen, a blue cord, at his first Congressional testimony. Infantrymen say "What makes the green grass grow? Blood makes the green grass grow. Why is the sky blue? Because God loves the infantry."



Calvary soldiers wear Stetson hats in dress uniforms. With Joel are Medal of Honor recipients Walter J. Marm, Jr. and Bruce P. Crandall, both featured in the book and motion picture 'We Were Soldiers'.