

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Kevin Holland and this is my story.

I grew up in the foothills of North Carolina hunting and trapping the hills of Wilkes County. I played football and baseball in high school and I signed up on the delayed entry program to join the US Navy after high school.

I entered the Navy on 28 June 1988 and completed boot camp and Navy Photographer School and volunteered for Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training. I arrived in Coronado, CA in November 1988.

My BUD/S class started with 80 people and in July of 1989 at our graduation there were 8 of us left. My entire class was assigned to SEAL Team 8.

I then drove to Fort Benning, Georgia to US Army Airborne School. I was the youngest in my class of 300. Upon graduation, I reported to SEAL Team 8, located in Little Creek, Virginia.

I was assigned to a platoon and we began our 18 month work-up preparing for deployment. This includes jumping, diving, land warfare, survival, close quarter battle, ship boarding and various training exercises in Europe.

We deployed in 1990 and during our deployment Desert Storm began and we were assigned to Northern Iraq doing deep reconnaissance and sniper missions. Upon completion of the deployment I was awarded the Navy Achievement Medal and sent to Sniper School since I had proved I was a good candidate conducting real world sniper missions without the training.

I attended Naval Special Warfare Sniper School at Atterbury, Indiana and completed the school as honor graduate and received the top shooter award. I returned that spring as a guest Instructor.

I interviewed for and was accepted to Naval Special Warfare Development Group. This organization recruits the top 1% of all SEALS in the Navy. In the summer of 1992 I left SEAL Team 8 and checked in to Dev Group. I separated from the Navy in 1995.

In 1995 I separated from the Navy and went in business with my Dad in the textile industry. When NAFTA was passed all the work was sent overseas so I applied and was accepted to the Wildlife Enforcement Division here in NC. I attended the academy in 1997 along with 16 other candidates and was awarded top marksman out of my class.

I was assigned to Henderson, Montgomery and finally Wilkes County my home county. I was home enjoying my family and working as a game warden content to live out my life and end up a fat old wildlife officer driving around to all the gun stores "working" till retirement.

I would occasionally teach platoons of SEALS and classes of civilians survival and land navigation to supplement a game warden's meager income.

Then 9/11 happened and all that changed. I immediately called my old command and spoke with some people there about coming back to help out. I had a friend there that was with the US Army Special Operations in Somalia in 1993. He told me that organization was already in the Middle East and if he was me he would go try out for that unit. I contacted them and went and tried out.

I attended their selection with 116 other candidates and one month later 16 of us remained. I was then assigned to Fort Bragg. I have been assigned to the US Army Special Operations Command since 2002.

I completed the 8 month Special Forces Qualification Course (Q Course) in 2005 and earned my Special Forces Tab and Green Beret.

I have deployed 20 times to the Middle East conducting over 2000 combat missions. I was wounded with shrapnel in 2004 when an IED exploded behind my vehicle killing one of the members of my team.

We would have insurgents hide in the palm groves and we would have to go in and ferret them out in close quarters sometimes ending up in hand-to- hand combat. We conducted hundreds of these type missions.

It was on one of these type missions that I wasn't so fortunate. It was March 2011 as we watched a patrol of foreign fighters. All were well armed and on a mission. They took a house from a villager and that's when we launched. My team's mission was to eliminate two individuals that had walked out into a palm grove behind the house. As we came in on helicopters, the individuals started shooting at us so we returned fire with a grenade launcher wounding one of them. The other one ran deeper into the palm grove. We landed and eliminated the wounded individual that was still shooting at us, and pursued the other. I was being directed to the insurgents' location and when I rounded the corner of the villagers' house, the insurgent opened fire with a belt fed PKM Machine gun from 20 yards hitting me in the chest above my armor, immediately paralyzing my left arm. Another round glanced off the weapon magazines on my chest and another shot my radio in half, which was on my side. I dove into an irrigation ditch as the individual kept firing his 200 round belt of ammunition at me, hitting the pack I was wearing multiple times. He then started firing at my team and when I realized I wasn't being shot at anymore, I raised up above the water, laying my weapon on its side on the mound of dirt in front of the ditch and started shooting at the insurgents muzzle blast. He then came running at me as I was shooting at him. I was told later that he was shot in the foot and that's why he fell nearly on top of me and hobbled out of the gate where he was captured.

After about 10 minutes I got out of that ditch and found my team, got patched up, walked out to the helicopter and flew to the nearest base.

I have been re-habilitating ever since trying to regain full function of my left arm. I retired from active military service in 2013. The doctors have told me they do not have a lot of data on my wound because not a lot of people survive being shot through the chest where I was shot so they don't know a whole lot about how long it will take the nerves to come back if they come back.

The Lord was watching out for me that night and has been every since. I am thankful to be alive.

Among over 30 awards are included seven Bronze Stars with two awarded for valor in combat along with two Purple Hearts.

Since retirement, I work as an independent consultant contractor for the government, and product development with Daniel Winkler of Winkler Knives. My first experience with Daniel Winkler was in 1992 after watching The Last of the Mohicans. My SEAL team tasked me with finding a combat breaching axe. During the credits I noticed the knife maker was from near my hometown. I contacted Daniel and he willingly agreed to make me an axe. That was 23 years ago. I carried that axe with me on every deployment, both in the Navy and Army, and now, Army, Navy, and Air Force Special Operations personnel all over the world carry Winkler knives and axes.

I live with my family back in the foothills of North Carolina not far from where I grew up. My wife Tram, stepdaughters Sophia and Ava, and son Colton live together there. My daughter Makenzie is a journalist in Wilmington, and my son Connor is a US Army Ranger stationed in Savannah GA.

Thank You,

Kevin Holland