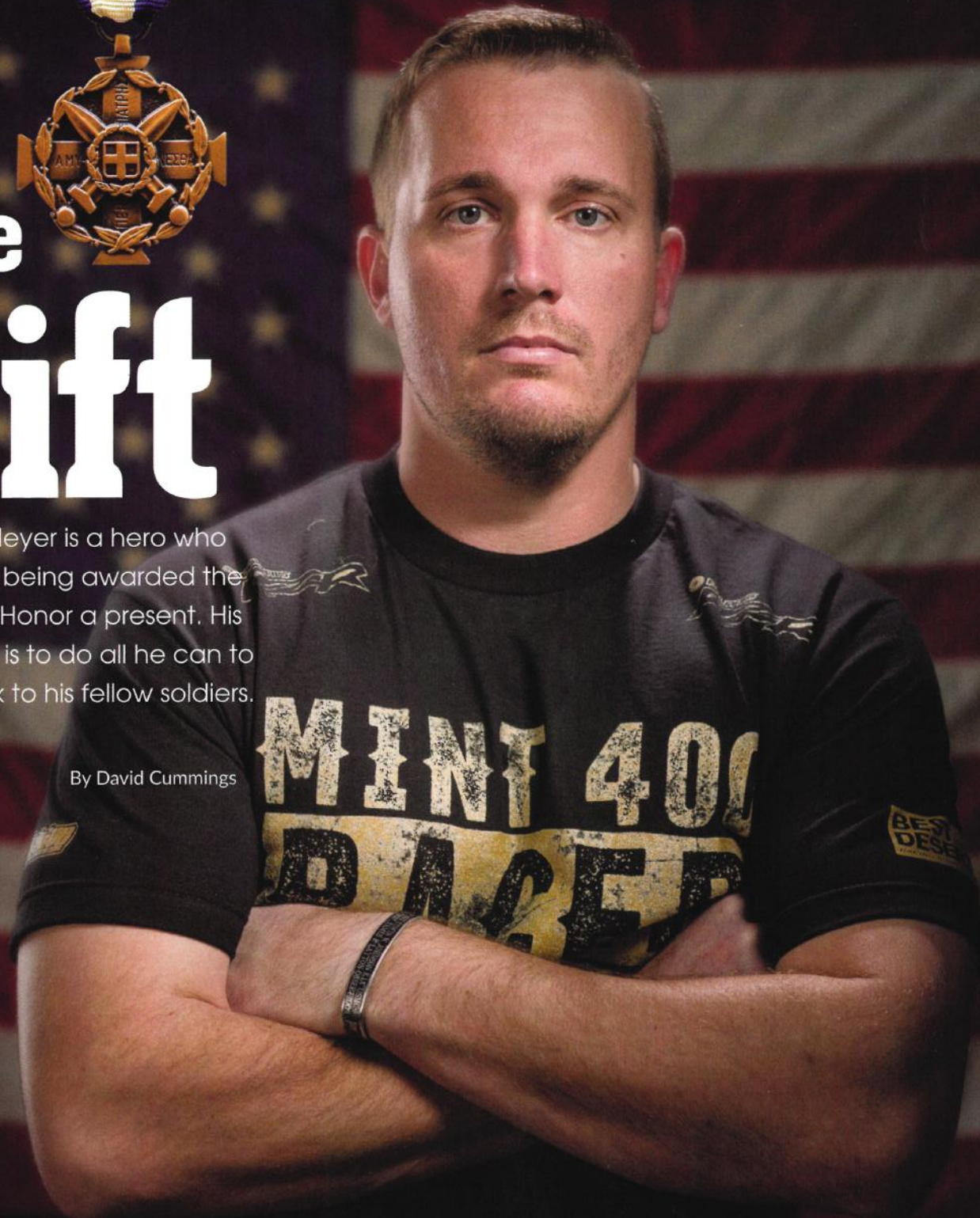


The Gift

Dakota Meyer is a hero who considers being awarded the Medal of Honor a present. His goal now is to do all he can to give back to his fellow soldiers.

By David Cummings



If you're wondering why soldiers returning home from battle have a difficult time adjusting to civilian life, Dakota Meyer's succinct reason makes a ton of sense.

"It took the military three months to turn me into a soldier," Meyer says. "But they gave me one week to become a civilian."

There it is. Is there a more precise explanation of why statistics claim a veteran commits suicide every 22 seconds? According to the Veterans Affairs Administration, the number of veterans filing disability claims for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder has tripled in the last decade from 345,000 in 2008 to 940,000 in 2017. Veterans of previous conflicts continue to experience symptoms of PTSD. The National Institutes of Health estimate that, of the approximately 2 million veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, up to 20 percent suffer from PTSD. Those figures are dismal. They don't tell the full story because most veterans do not seek help.

"I think the battle after the battle is the hard one," says Meyer, who in September 2011 was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during a battle in Ganjgal while deployed in the Kunar Province in Afghanistan. His heroics during his service and his activities after leaving the military are the reasons PTSD Journal honors Sgt. Meyer in his issue, which recognizes June as National PTSD Awareness Month.

Meyer's heroics started after he disobeyed his commanding officer's orders to stay put. "I knew my brothers were in harm's way," he says. "Me and another soldier jumped in a vehicle and went to get them. It's that simple. They were in danger, and I wanted to help them out."

Meyer's heroics started after he learned fellow Marines and a Navy officer who were members of his squad were missing after being ambushed by a group of insurgents. Under enemy fire, Meyer entered the area known to be inhabited by the enemy and eventually found the four missing servicemen dead and stripped of their weapons, body armor and radios. Meyer saw a Taliban fighter trying to take the bodies. The two got into a brief scuffle, Meyer grabbed a baseball-sized rock and beat the fighter to death. With the help of Afghan soldiers, he moved the bodies to a safer area where they could be extracted. During his search, Meyer evacuated 12 wounded and provided cover for another 24 Marines and soldiers to escape.

His training prepared Meyer to take such risks and survive. But nothing prepared him to live when he returned home.

The United States' military branches have their own specific individual training programs. They take young men and women, spend multiple weeks and months educating and indoctrinating them into a new way of life. Into a different human being. And for the last two decades, many of them have gone into battle and fought in wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and other locations throughout the world. During their tour of duty, they witness human carnage and suffering. Death and destruction. After years of seeing all this, there comes a time when you eventually come home.



Sgt. Jimmy D. Shea/Leatherneck magazine

President Obama honored Meyer for his heroic effort with the Medal of Honor.

Meyer, who is the first living Marine in 38 years to receive the Medal of Honor, acknowledges the transition was not smooth. When he moved on from the Marines in 2010, he wasn't prepared for life as a civilian. "My transition wasn't a good one," he says. "I'm not going to blame the military. I put it on myself by not understanding what I was getting into and not putting enough emphasis on it and the importance of being ready for a new way of living."

"I think the battle after the battle is the hard one,"

— Meyer says.

Meyer says a significant step in turning his life around was realizing he suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He says he didn't admit to having PTSD until 2016. "It's such a stigma," he says. "I take fault on my shoulders because I avoided talking about it for six or seven years. We need better representation of PTSD out there. What does it look like?"

What does it feel like? It's like you're expected to have a normal reaction to un-normal circumstances."

Eight years after leaving the military, Meyer says he's still adjusting. But he's helping others. His status as a Medal of Honor winner allows Meyer to work with numerous organizations and companies to support their efforts to improve soldiers adjust to civilian life. One of those companies is Toyota.



Meyer says nothing made him prouder than standing beside and serving with his fellow soldiers.

The car company wasn't looking for a celebrity endorser when Ed Laukes, Group Vice President of Toyota Marketing, got a call from one of Meyer's reps asking if they would be interested in partnering with him on some veteran's initiatives. "It just so happened I just saw Dakota on the news when he was receiving his Medal of Honor from President Obama," says Laukes, admitting he was concerned that Meyer would be willing to partner with a Japanese company. It turns out Meyer was well aware of Toyota because one of its main American plants is located in Georgetown, Ky., a suburb of Louisville that's about two hours north of Meyer's hometown of Columbia. The company's origin was a non-factor as far as Meyer was concerned. "He was much more impressed with the work we did in America and all of our plants, dealers, and infrastructure in the United States," Laukes says.

On the flip side, Laukes was enamored with Meyer after hearing him talk about the reason for his efforts. "He got to the point where the discussion was, 'What are you doing for veterans?'" Laukes remembers. "That was his concern. He told me he felt the Medal of Honor was a gift, and he was going to use it to help others."

Laukes knew then he wanted to be in the Dakota Meyer business. One of their first efforts was combining with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and creating Resumeengine.org. The website helps veterans create a resume that will help employers understand how military skills and experience make soldiers great employees.

"What really, really struck me about Dakota," Laukes says, "was a story he told me about a job interview he went on. Dakota said he got out of the service, he got a Medal of Honor and went down to a job interview. He sits down with the recruiter of the company he was going to work for, and the HR person asked him, 'So what was your last job, sir?'" Dakota told

him, 'I was a sniper, sir.' The HR person goes, 'Well, I don't know if we really need snipers here.'"

The encounter exemplified why working with Meyer was a good idea, Laukes says. "Unfortunately, most HR professionals aren't trained to translate how what it takes to be a sniper fits into the workplace," he says. "They're not equipped to understand how the skills of the military translate into work life. The things you learn are not necessarily about being a sniper, but it's the incorporation in and the empowerment and ability to train to be a sniper. Those traits translate well into decision making and leadership,"

Meyer says right now he's focused on family and growing his brand to help others. Yes, he and his wife, Bristol, made news when it became public they were considering filing for a divorce. They never went

through with it. Meyer says his wife being former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin's daughter has nothing to do with their relationship. It irks him that people feel like they can discuss his family with no regard. "My wife and I are regular people. But it's like we don't have any chances to mess up," he says. Ironically, Meyer requested to push back the original time he set aside for this interview. He had to go pick his daughter up from the bus stop. When he said, "I can't do this right now, can you call back in 10 minutes?" It was a reminder of another time Meyer put someone off.

As the story goes when President Barack Obama's office called Meyer to tell him about the Medal of Honor, Meyer told them they had to call him back on his lunch break because he was at work. "We were going round-and-round and coordinating the call was hard," Meyer says. "So they said to give him your cell phone, and he was going to call. He's busy. I'm busy as well. I have to pay my bills. He ended up calling a few minutes later, and I told

them I'm sorry, but I'm working. Nothing against him, but I had to work. He didn't pay my bills anymore."

The two eventually hooked up and on Sept. 15, 2011, Meyer attended a White House ceremony where he became the second-youngest living Medal of Honor recipient and the third living recipient from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He's proud of the honor. He considers it a gift to give back to others.

"I don't think it's necessarily a company's responsibility, or the military's responsibility; it's our responsibility as Americans to help veterans better prepare themselves to get out of the military," he says. "The military is working hard to fix this issue. But it's going to take time to train a service member how to transfer from the service to civilian life. All I'm trying to do is bring together all the resources I can to educate and help veterans to a better life."

“They were in danger, and I wanted to help them out.”

— Meyer says

Alpha Support

Hurting from his battle with anxiety, Dakota Meyer turned to the Alpha-Stim device and found immediate relief.

Dakota Meyer was in pain. In his words: "Anxiety was kicking my ass."

It was October 2016 and the Marine with the Medal of Honor was lying on the floor when he reached out to the Veterans Administration for help. He then called some former soldiers and friends. One of them sent him a device called Alpha-Stim. "I was like, you're kidding me, no way I'm going to use this thing," Meyer says. "It sat on my table for a few weeks."

The small device that resembles an old Blackberry uses cranial electrotherapy stimulation to ease pain from anxiety and depression. When Meyer finally decided to use it, he couldn't believe the results. "It changed my life," he says. "It changed my life so much I said I have to get this to other people like me."

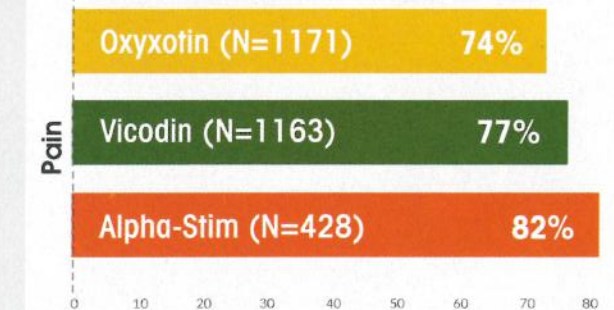
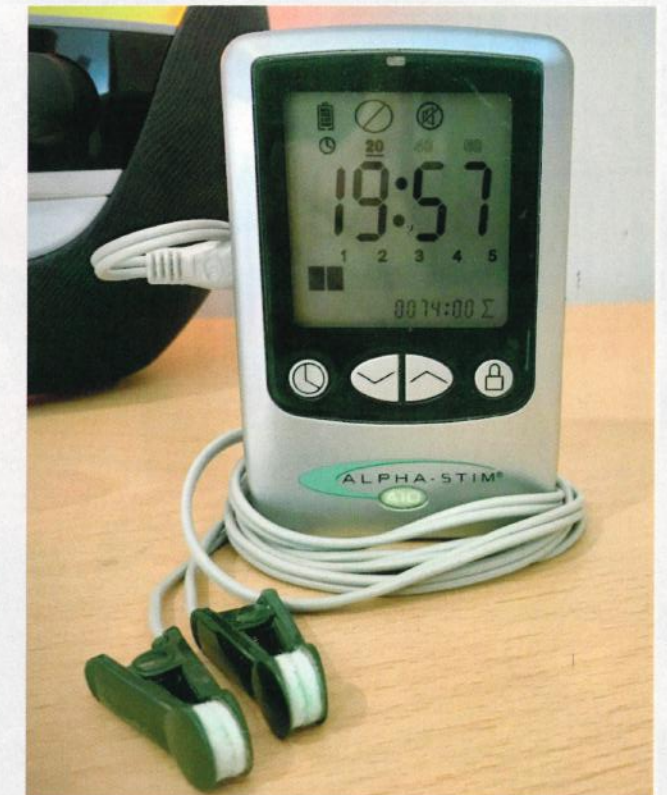
Meyer immediately did a Facebook Live post, describing his immediate relief from using Alpha-Stim. He described how easy the device was to use. "All you do is put the electropod in both ears and turn it on and wear it for about 20 minutes. For me it melted my anxiety away. I'm telling you it was like someone lifted a pack off my back."

Danielle Boyd, the marketing manager for Electromedical Products, Inc., the manufacturer of Alpha-Stim, got word of Meyer's Facebook Live chat and his social media posts about his experience. The company reached out to Meyer to see if he was interested in a formal relationship. Having a decorated war hero publicly discuss how Alpha-Stim helped treat his anxiety

was a no-brainer. The device has also showed results in helping treat insomnia, depression and pain.

"When we first started working with Dakota, he went out on his own and let people know he was struggling with anxiety and found something that helped him," Boyd says. Meyer eventually traveled to Alpha-Stim headquarters in Wells, Tex., and met with executives. "We made us a video of him explaining his

Meyer mirrors his hero soldier image as a civilian.



An Alpha Stim survey shows patients get better results using its device than taking certain drugs.

experience," Boyd says. "He took the opportunity to explain how coming home from war his transition to civilian life and the coping mechanisms he was using simply were not helping him."

Since they worked together, Meyer has traveled to conferences to speak about his experience with the device. Boyd says the company hopes to expand its relationship with school districts, police and fire departments and first responders across the country. Studies show this population, similar to combat veterans, is exposed to trauma on the job, resulting in silent wounds like anxiety.

"I couldn't believe the results," Meyer says. "Everyone needs to know about Alpha-Stim."