

CLAUDE BOUSHEY



Claude Boushey grew up surfing in the waters around Barbers Point Naval Air Station in Hawaii, watching military aircraft take off and land — and dreaming that someday, maybe he'd be a pilot himself. In 1983, he joined the U.S. Army as an avionic mechanic and started to work his way up the ranks. Ten years later, he went to flight school and became a helicopter pilot.

His unit deployed to Iraq in 2004. One day, Claude and his copilot Dwight were on the way to assist at the site of an explosion and ambush when their helicopter crashed into a swamp. The impact shattered and compressed Claude's vertebrae and compromised 80 percent of his spinal canal.

"Usually, if your spine is compromised more than 40 percent, you're paralyzed," says Claude. "But after four surgeries and eight months of grueling rehab, I proved doctors wrong and started walking again."

While Claude was recovering in the hospital, one of the pilots who helped rescue him in Iraq, Captain Johnson, died in a crash. "That's when the emotional and mental roller coaster kicked in," says Claude. "I was never able to thank Captain Johnson for the things that he did. That really impacted me a lot."

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"WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT HELPED ME FIND FULFILLMENT."
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Even while dealing with post-traumatic stress, Claude was dedicated to returning to service. Fifteen months after his crash, Claude accepted another deployment to Iraq. Given all he'd been through, when he retired from the Army in 2008, Claude knew he had to find a way to stay connected with his fellow warriors — and that's when he found Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP).

"Whenever you're around a bunch of warriors, it's always a good thing," says Claude. "Wounded Warrior Project gave me a platform to vent my frustrations and talk about my issues — and no one was being judged or criticized."

Through WWP, Claude has found his new purpose — mentoring other warriors through the Peer Support program. "Everyone I mentor is unique," says Claude. "But they all have one thing in common — their hearts and minds are reacting to abnormal experiences."

Today, Claude serves as a civilian helicopter pilot for the Maryland State Police and remains passionate about helping his fellow wounded warriors.

"I know what it's like to be in a hospital bed, unable to move, to be carried, pushed in a wheelchair, struggle to stand, and struggle even more to step. Recovery is an emotional roller coaster ride. Often, warriors don't want to reach out for help. That's why I make it a point to reach out to them."

