



## **Case Studies....**

### **Peter Bell's story:-**

Peter Bell was aged 61 and suffering from depression and alcohol abuse as symptoms of chronic post traumatic stress when he contacted the PTSD Resolution charity. Living in supported accommodation, Peter was taking medication for stress. He was bedding down each night on a sofa: 'couch treatment' he called it, dozing uncomfortably in order to avoid deep sleep and the nightmares that would follow.

"While we were serving we all just gritted our teeth and got on with the job, however painful and unpleasant it was. We knew we could not show emotion as it would be seen as weakness; but we did have a support from our comrades, and this helped us to cope at the time," Peter explains.

Peter joined the Army as a medic when he was 15 years old and served with Special Forces in various theatres including the Falklands. He left the services when he was 40, spent ten years working in Accident & Emergency roles, and a further 12 years as a trainer of medics.

At first Peter was hesitant to seek treatment – he thought it would not work for him because of his background: he was trained in 'Resistance to Interrogation' techniques and was formerly a Registered Psychiatric and General Nurse. In fact PTSD Resolution is effective irrespective of the background of patients.

Therapy with PTSD Resolution showed that there were five separate traumatic events in his military career with which Peter struggled to cope. However, it was not until he was made redundant from his most recent job, where he had spent ten relatively enjoyable years, that he descended into a spiral of depression, drink and eventual homelessness.

"It was after leaving the service, and working in A&E that I started reacting to some of the things I experienced. I started having flash backs, behaving irritably and sleeping badly, gradually becoming more and more depressed. Colleagues were sympathetic, but there was not the same feeling of comradeship as in the services. My manager said I was stressed and should take a year off. There was no mention of PTSD, and even as a medic I did not recognise it. I started taking to alcohol".

At the beginning of the treatment, the therapist explained to Peter that he would be helped to 'de-stress' for each separate trauma he'd experienced. He was reassured that this would be without every having to describe the actual experiences.

Peter's self-esteem and confidence returned over the course of the six sessions with the PTSD therapist, which was arranged on an out-patient basis. Peter came to terms with the issues that had so deeply troubled him and was once again able to sleep soundly at night.

"I found the idea of relaxation and 'rewinding' memories without discussing them in detail difficult to understand, to start with. As I got to trust my therapist I found I could look at the past objectively, and the future more positively. After the ineffectiveness of my 'couch treatment', to avoid deep sleep and dreams, it was a wonderful relief to be able to sleep properly in bed again. It was equally satisfying to kick the alcohol."

Peter has not drunk alcohol for five months. He has reduced his medication, and is using the coping techniques he learned during treatment. Volunteer teaching work and attendance at peer support groups for non-drinking is helping him adjust to a more normal, balanced life.

"Looking back, alcohol was what brought it to a head. As I drank more and more in my attempt to overcome my memories and cope with life, I became increasingly unreliable and depressed. I was aware I was self-destructing, and having suicidal thoughts. A neighbour noticed I was not around so much and visited me at my home. He saw what a tip I was living in and said I had to get help and introduced me to the local drop-in centre.

"I tried group therapy for drinking but did not like it so I stopped. I phoned Combat Stress and they sent someone to see me. He spent the whole day assessing me and said I had PTSD and should have a two-week in-patient stay. I was never given an appointment and when I asked why a year later, I was told they were too busy dealing with the bullying problem in the Army! Meanwhile, the drop-in centre knew about a homeless facility for veterans, and I was given a place. It was here that I met a therapist from PTSD Resolution".

"I think the medical profession has got it wrong when they make the distinction that more people in the forces are suffering from alcohol and drug dependency than PTSD. It is because of the symptoms of PTSD that people resort to alcohol and drugs. PTSD Resolution has got it right and I would recommend them to anyone who's suffering, and to get help sooner rather than leaving it too late."

### **Mike Sterling's story:-**

Mike Stirling joined the Parachute Regiment aged 18. He served a full career, reaching the rank of Regimental Sergeant Major; was then Commissioned as a Quartermaster retiring with the Rank of Major, at the age of 60. He served in various theatres including Aden, Radfan, Bahrain, Oman, Malaya, Cyprus, Belize, N Ireland, Falkland Islands; and was with the US Army ( Ranger Department ) at Fort Benning in Georgia, during which time he saw and was involved with the returning US Servicemen from Vietnam and saw at first hand the effects of what is now known as PTSD. He is now 67 years of age.

Mike first noticed changes within himself when he retired. Until then he had led a full and busy life, engaged by his job, with no time for reflection on the past. Although he felt 'down' at times and stressed, he attributed that to the demands of work, and was able to deal with it within the supportive structure of the military as well as his family.

After retirement Mike found he had time on his hands to reflect on the past. Memories of military life started coming back. He began to feel and behave entirely out of character: "I felt really depressed for several days at a time. I took to my bed during the day, and also become really argumentative. My family commented that I had changed: I wasn't like I used to be. There were nightmares and I'd suddenly awaken at 3am every night, and have to go downstairs for a smoke and mug of tea. It was pretty bad".

The 25th Anniversary of the Falklands Operation, in June 2007, brought matters to a head. The day had been enjoyable, but as he reminisced with friends, memories came flooding back about things that had 'gone wrong' or could have been done better: "I started feeling agitated. In the early evening I suddenly blew my top and verbally abused my wife loudly and publicly - something I never would have done in my life before. I was later filled with remorse and decided that I must get help".

Mike first went to his GP, who referred him to the Psychiatric Department of a local Hospital. An assessment followed, but he was told no appointment was available for another ten months. He decided he could not wait that long and through the

Falklands Veterans Association was put in touch with PTSD Resolution: "I considered Combat Stress, but then I didn't want to take a place that might go to a more 'deserving' case, who maybe didn't have family support like me".

Mike's first contact with PTSD Resolution was in a phone conversation, which was for a counsellor at the charity to assess his current situation and agree arrangements for treatment. A one-to-one session was organised with a local PTSD therapist: a network of 250 are located throughout the UK.

During the therapy session Mike was able for the first time to talk about his experiences in the military: "I felt I could go over and consider the effect on me of a particular event in Cyprus. When I was aged 21, I'd been severely burned and had seen three colleagues killed; others with me were hospitalised with severe burns and other injuries".

Mike felt able to come to terms with the effects of other events too: eighteen years after the Cyprus incident, in the Falklands, when he had witnessed an explosion at Goose Green that resulted in Argentinean soldiers being burned to death.

"The treatment session must have lasted several hours. I was helped to relax deeply and then to deal with the emotions that arose from thinking about these events, in a very calm and controlled way. When I walked out of the session I felt as if a great weight had lifted from my mind".

From this point onwards Mike had no more nightmares or other symptoms of traumatic stress. He reverted to his former self: a cheerful, loving family man. His wife noticed a further change: he was able to express his emotions for the first time on issues related to the armed forces - such when watching current affairs reports on military operations - without being overwhelmed by them.

He was also able to involve himself in organising and participating in veterans' visits to the Falklands, which he never felt able to do before the therapy.

So would Mike recommend PTSD Resolution to other veterans?

" Definitely. I have done and will continue to do so. The main benefit of Resolution is that I can now talk about my experiences in a calm way. I can sleep normally. My wife and I would urge anyone who is suffering from stress from their time in the services to seek help sooner rather than later. The help provided by Resolution is immediate, convenient and it's very effective. I recommend it unreservedly".

Ends...