

# HEALING THE SCARS OF WAR

## SHIELD OF FAITH MISSIONS & FRONTSIGHT MILITARY OUTREACH

Story by Barbara Maher  
Photos courtesy Shield of Faith Missions

*But You, O LORD, are a shield for me, my glory, and the One who lifts up my head.* PSALM 3:3

The beauty of Afghanistan's Korengal Valley, with its tall cedar trees, steep rock mountains, and terraced landscapes, was lit with the unforgettable sights and sounds of war. Captain Damon Friedman, a U.S. Air Force Special Tactics Officer and lead Joint Terminal Attack Controller, was perched on an approaching helicopter. Damon recalled, "Very quickly, we found ourselves in the mission of a lifetime. We were dodging incoming RPGs while calling in airstrikes and coordinating the use of howitzer fire. For seven days we were dropping bombs, blowing up machine gun positions, and eliminating the enemy. I had been in firefights before and had engaged the enemy many times. But there was nothing like this—the enemy was everywhere."

Damon's mission was to coordinate aircraft munitions and weapon systems against Taliban fighters battling American troops who were shutting down the deadly Korengal outpost. Opened by U.S. Marines in 2006 to root out insurgents hiding deep within the Afghan mountains, the outpost overlooked what was known as Death Valley, where more than 40 American service members had been killed and hundreds more wounded over the prior four years.

*I cried to the LORD with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill.* PSALM 3:4

Damon recalled one specific patrol when he could clearly see the enemy machine gun position. "They had the higher terrain, the vantage point. I had to drop a bomb and clear the enemy position, but it was within 95 meters of our friendly position. I remember thinking that the bomb had to be perfect. If there was any error at all, our guys would get killed. There is nothing worse than trying to kill the enemy and bombing your own forces instead."

He prayed as time stood still. "I cried out, 'God, please help. There's no way I can get out of this. My men are not safe ... I need Your help. Lord, if You save my men ... if You save

me ... if You bring all my brothers home, I will know that it is by Your divine hand. And if You do this, I will serve You the rest of my days.'" Damon remembered thinking, *While God doesn't negotiate with man, He understands our weaknesses and our entangled situations.* "All of a sudden this bomb hit ... and crushed the enemy." Damon thanked God for the miracle of his comrades' safety.

Damon collapsed after 72 hours of battle. "I was exhausted. It was a combination of many things—six months of deployment on the battlefield, multiple concussions, and traumatic brain injury from exploding ordinance. Returning to the Black Hawk helicopter, he asked God: *Now what? I made this commitment to You, now how am I going to do this? I am in a dark place and I don't know what to do.*" *I will pay You my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth has spoken when I was in trouble* (Psalm 66:13b,14).

### Shield of Faith Missions

Very soon, Damon began to see the truth about his life. He had been self-focused for a long time and his marriage was suffering. Having received Christ as his Savior while in college, Damon knew that he had not been glorifying God. He said, "I remember God reassuring me when He



**Top: Veterans re-enact military action in Afghanistan in the docudrama *Surrender Only to One*, produced by Shield of Faith Missions (SOFM). SOFM, a missions ministry serving Calvary Chapels globally, offers Christ-centered support for veterans suffering from PTSD. The film shares the testimonies of six veterans who trusted God, rather than their own strength, to heal the invisible wounds of war.**

**Bottom: Damon Friedman, co-founder of SOFM, prays with a veteran (right) before filming.**

**"I CRIED OUT, 'GOD, PLEASE HELP. THERE'S NO WAY I CAN GET OUT OF THIS.'"**

DAMON FRIEDMAN

told me not to worry about all the dark stuff that I was dealing with. He assured me that if I would give Him all of my heart and all my soul, and do it with all of my strength, He would heal me and make all things new.” Damon began to pursue God. “I stopped trying to fix everything, including my marriage, in my own strength and my own wisdom. I prayed that God would renew my heart and mind.” The change was not overnight. “For me, it took a year and a half to get my head out of the darkness.”

While God was working in Damon’s life, He was also healing his wounded marriage. Damon and his wife Dayna began to read God’s Word and to search for a church fellowship. They found welcoming arms at Calvary Chapel of the Sandhills in Aberdeen, NC. Damon said, “That’s where God worked in and through me, and I began to sense the call to do something for Him.” Partnering with a physician who had treated Damon for his concussions, the two set out to build a medical clinic in the Amazon. Their medical work in the Amazon birthed Shield of Faith (SOF) Missions.

***Above all, take the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.***

EPHESIANS 6:16

Founded in 2011, SOF Missions began as an international missions organization, serving over 65,000 people by rebuilding orphanages and schools, conducting massive food distributions, and providing disaster relief. With military veterans making up a large part of the organization’s team, SOF shifted its focus to outreach promoting the healing of American war veterans.

Today the ministry supports warriors who struggle with post-traumatic stress and the negative impacts of combat.

A vast network of veterans, doctors, healthcare providers, contractors, group leaders, missionaries, and volunteers are passionate about making a positive difference in the lives of veterans. The ministry focuses on creating awareness, through film, of the warriors’ challenges—PTSD, suicides, and physical and psychological wounds.

Dayna has witnessed family reconciliation and the rekindling of relationships in the lives of those impacted by war. She stated, “One warrior chose to live in isolation and didn’t want to live by his kids or his family. He received the help that our program provides and has reconnected with his parents and his children after healing from the invisible scars of war.”

Currently, Damon, Dayna, and their two young children attend CC Fellowship in St. Petersburg, FL. The staff and supporters of the ministry have produced a movie called *Surrender Only to One*, a winner of six film festival awards. The docudrama tells the true story of six veterans, five men and one woman, all Special Forces operators from various branches of the military. The movie depicts their unwillingness to surrender to the enemy on the battlefield and how they experienced true healing from their scars of war only by surrendering to God.

### FrontSight Military Outreach

***Open my eyes, that I may see ...*** PSALM 119:18

Joe Holguin is a Marine Corps combat veteran who was deployed to Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1994. Today he serves as the Director of FrontSight Military Outreach (FSMO), a ministry of Calvary Chapel Golden Springs in Diamond Bar, California. His wife Deanne serves as a full-time volunteer. FSMO helps disabled veterans with service-related illnesses.

Joe left the military in 1999 but experienced the psychological scars of war many years after combat. He and his wife were married in 1999, and after the birth of their children, Joe set out to build a successful career in logistics management. “I had the big house, the fancy cars, the big toys, but there were a lot of bad things going on. I was a non-believer and our marriage was struggling.” It wasn’t until 2013 that he suffered his first flashback at a small paintball store with his son; they were trying on nighttime vision goggles. Joe recalled, “I could see the tracer rounds ... and at that moment I was ... in Somalia. I began to smell gunpowder and to hear my friends screaming ... and the gunshots from my machine gun.”

The experience left Joe in emotional turmoil. After several counseling sessions with a professional who was not a veteran, he felt he wasn’t progressing. “I couldn’t stop crying. I had an overwhelming amount of guilt and sorrow,” he recounted. He fell into depression, anxiety, and anger; his marriage was on the brink of divorce. While sitting in the counselor’s office, he and Deanne noticed a flier for FrontSight. “My wife told me that I needed to go to the group or else we were done.”

FSMO became the refuge where Joe began a relationship with Jesus Christ and found spiritual healing for his mental scars of war. With God’s help, Joe was able to reconcile with his wife and ultimately left his career path to help the outreach. Over time, his talent and desire to serve God led him to accept a call to be the director of FSMO. “I remember asking, *Who am I to lead this ministry?* I thought about Psalm 119:18 and prayed, *Please, open my eyes and my heart. Help me see everything that You have for me to do in this ministry and equip me to do Your work.*”

FSMO was started in 2008 by Vietnam veterans Dave Ford and Raul Ries, senior pastor of CC Golden Springs, to help Afghanistan and Iraq veterans experiencing PTSD and suicidal thoughts. It is a fully funded, Christ-centered facility offering fellowship, worship, and help for a broad spectrum of combat- and service-related issues. Veterans and their families can find camaraderie, trust, and healing for their visible and invisible wounds.

***Surrender Only to One* will be simulcast on Veterans Day, November 11; visit [sofmissions.com/veterans-day-simulcast](http://sofmissions.com/veterans-day-simulcast) to sign up to host.**

**An average of 20 veterans commit suicide every day.**

—Veterans Administration



**Top right: A scene from the docudrama *Surrender Only to One*.**

**Center right: Pastor Jack Hibbs (left) and Damon talk before showing a preview of the docudrama at CC Chino Hills. The film was also shown at CC Golden Springs, which ministers to veterans through FrontSight Military Outreach.**

## POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

PTSD is a mental health condition triggered by experiencing or witnessing a terrifying event. Anyone can experience PTSD, but members of the military are particularly at risk. The U.S. Veterans Administration (VA) lists four categories of symptoms for PTSD. According to the VA, the suicide rate for veterans and other military personnel in 2015 averaged 20 per day.

*Those suffering from PTSD may experience:*

- Reliving the event, triggered by sight, sound, or smell; to include nightmares and flashbacks.
- Avoiding situations that remind you of the event, to include talking about the event.
- Negative beliefs and feelings, such as guilt, shame, or an inability to trust people.
- Feeling keyed up, always jittery, and on the lookout for danger.

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