



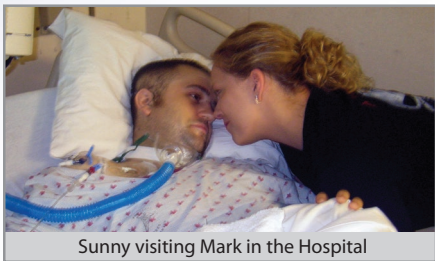
# Often Overshadowed, Impossible to Ignore

**HEROES  
WITH HEARING LOSS**

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OEF Afghanistan Veteran

## CPT Mark Brogan's Battle with Traumatic Brain Injury and Hearing Loss

Soldiers in a war zone know that their best alarm system is their gut. Call it a sixth sense, instinct or just training; anyone who's ever been in combat understands this sensation and knows you have to react. For Captain Mark Brogan, the extra fraction of a second his combat instincts gave him was the difference between life and death.



Sunny visiting Mark in the Hospital

On April 11, 2006, Captain Brogan was leading a Stryker team as part of a Quick Reaction Force patrolling Al Anbar province, Iraq. Somewhere between Falluja and the Syrian border, Mark and his team found themselves in the unremarkable little village of Rawah along the Euphrates River.

"My platoon sergeant and I both intuitively knew it was way too quiet. Something was wrong. One of my NCO's turned around to say something to me when he noticed a guy run around the corner and put his hand up his shirt. Then he blew up."

The soldier behind Mark was killed instantly. By the time Mark himself landed several feet away, he had a collapsed lung, shrapnel in his spinal cord and brain, and

his arm was almost completely severed. Everyone thought he was dead.

The explosion left Mark with a traumatic brain injury (TBI) followed by years of rehabilitation and therapy. While the brutal nature of the more obvious injuries left him slumped unconscious and dying in Iraq, it was the forewarning trickle of blood coming from his ears that signaled one of the biggest challenges Mark would ever face.

Often overshadowed by the more visible and publicized wounds of war, hearing loss remains the number one service-connected disability for military members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2011, the Department of Veterans Affairs treated nearly 1.5 million veterans for hearing loss and tinnitus. For combat veterans like Mark, hearing loss is often also intertwined both physically and emotionally with Post Traumatic Stress, TBI or other conditions resulting from their time of service.

Rarely far from Mark's side, Sunny Brogan supports her husband with the kind of love and dedication from which movies are made. "Once the physical issues were gone and it was just the two of us home from the hospital – coping with the anger and the PTSD and the hearing loss – that's when I was like, this is going to be really, really hard."

Sunny says support groups and organizations such as the Heroes With Hearing Loss® program provide her and Mark with a community where they can

both share their experiences and learn what has worked for other veterans and their families. "It's amazing for him because he knows other people are going through the same thing."

For Mark, the opportunity to again be part of a military community only reinforces the bond the uniform provides. "Sharing what I've learned with other veterans is extremely important. It's the only way we can address this in the best way. We have to share with each veteran our own experiences."

Mark has overcome incredible odds, but the every day challenges of hearing loss remain. It's the simple things that prove most frustrating, like ordering dinner at a restaurant or talking on the phone. Fortunately, through the Heroes With Hearing Loss program, Mark has discovered some of the latest technology and resources available to assist with the challenges of hearing loss.

"My family used to say, 'why don't you call?' – well, because I can't hear." Now, with the help of a captioned telephone, Mark is able to speak with his family, set up his own VA appointments and more effectively advocate for other veterans.

Even Sunny has seen dramatic improvement in Mark's level of confidence and independence. "I am very proud of Mark. Just the fact that he has come so far and that he has found a purpose helping people with hearing loss and brain injury. He amazes me every day."



Mark and Sunny's story is compelling, and just one of many. Fortunately there are solutions available right now to help veterans manage the impact of hearing loss. Help us spread the word by becoming part of the Heroes With Hearing Loss team. The conversation [starts here](#).