



**“Just because you take the uniform off doesn’t mean you stop serving.”**

**Meet Sergeant First Class Paul Morrison,  
Army Veteran of Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin**

Outside of military travels and base life, Paul Morrison has lived his entire life in Wisconsin Rapids, WI. He grew up with small town family values, a strong faith and a desire to serve. He enlisted in the Army National Guard’s delayed entry program while a junior in high school and drilled his senior year. After graduating in 1985, Paul left for boot camp and then spent his next 22 years serving through multiple tours and specialized operations too numerous to list, three combat deployments, and earning several personal and unit awards for dedication and heroism along the way. In those years Paul lived by the seven core Army values: Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, Personal Courage. The values reached far beyond his military career to impact his personal character and contributions as well. Unfortunately, Paul also learned that the values of selfless service and personal courage come with a steep price: one he’s been paying most of his adult life.

Without many job opportunities in the Guard at the time, Paul worked as a Cook until 1986 when he enlisted for Active Duty. While in active duty, he completed Airborne training and specialized in Military Police. After time in South Korea, he received his first combat deployment; and in 1990, headed to Kuwait in advance of the Gulf War. During Operation Desert Shield he conducted highway patrols, was a part of the Quick Response Force for violent area incidents and provided base security. As the War phased into Desert Storm, he secured supply routes and, attached to an Infantry Unit, moved with them in-country to set up and manage our over-crowded enemy prisoner of war camps. They lived and worked amongst tents in the arid desert with scarce resources, outdated equipment and continual threats of chemical warfare, all of which compounded frustrations and anxieties. As mission objectives were achieved, Paul’s Company then moved into Saudi Arabia for six months of security operations in the tense and culturally restrictive country. His deployment complete, Paul returned to Fort Bragg, NC, where it was “business as usual”. There was no transitional support or discussion about what they’d just been through or how it affected them. In fact, to do so at the time would have been viewed as weakness and likely had you removed from duty. In response, Paul learned very quickly to process his memories, actions and emotions stoically and silently...and there began his pattern of denying his PTSD.

While home on leave in 1992, Paul met his first wife and mother to his eldest daughter. She moved to North Carolina where they lived off base and did their best to create a happy life. Paul took advanced skill and leadership courses and rose to the rank of Staff Sergeant. In 1994 he received his second combat deployment order and headed to Haiti for three months where, in a U.S. effort to restore democracy, Paul secured landing zones and communication networks, and he managed enemy detainees amid the country’s severe unrest and massive refugee crisis. The past nine years had begun to wear on his body; and although he wouldn’t acknowledge yet, on his mind and marriage as well. Wanting a better life balance, Paul transferred back into the WI Army National Guard’s 32nd MP Company in Milwaukee, returned to Wisconsin Rapids and pursued an additional form of service: law enforcement. In 1996 he landed a Deputy Sheriff’s position within the Adams County Sheriff’s Office, stayed with them for the next 20 years, and brought his core Army values with him:

Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, Personal Courage.

Life moved along as planned, until September 11, 2001 upended the world as we knew it. Minutes after the second plane hit The Towers, Paul was called to duty. He reported to Central Wisconsin Airport that very day to lead security efforts as part of our nation's protective response. Six months later, with the world on edge and war upon us, Paul went to eastern Europe to provide security while NATO countries conducted joint training missions. It was only a matter of time before Paul would receive combat orders; and in January, 2003, he learned his job would take him to Iraq. He began pre-deployment training and worked with the Sheriff's Department right up until it was time to leave. Following a day in court testifying, he and his partner responded to a mental health disturbance in the neighborhood; and one targeted gunshot later, Paul found his partner's lifeless body, senselessly murdered in the line of duty. Six days later, still reeling in loss and anger, he flew out for Iraq and immediately buried the pain back home.

Paul landed in Baghdad in May, 2003 for a one year tour to the recently invaded country. The Iraqi Army had been disbanded, sending thousands of well-armed men into the streets. The jails had been emptied, the corrupt regime was on the run and the dwindling Iraqi police force required reinforcement and training. As an MP Paul had two primary roles: transport security detail and Iraqi police support. Early war in Baghdad was guerilla warfare and most had little preparation for what they came upon. Insurgents violently struggled to gain control and retaliated amongst themselves as much as against us. Mistrust was rampant and warranted: the child he played soccer with one day, hurled a grenade onto Base the next...and the kind-looking elderly woman who wouldn't stop her approach, then let the hidden machine gun fall from her burka when she finally put her hands up. At every turn there was a threat of violence that Paul dealt with: disguised hideouts, daisy-chained explosives on routes and IEDs cleverly hid in animals, boxes and, as Paul would later learn, in curbing. Injuries and loss happened rapidly and it demanded a constant state of vigilance and preparedness. Amidst all the violence, destruction and death in Baghdad, Paul quickly "grew numb" in protective, exhaustive response. Numb to the grisly sights he'd seen and the tortured cries he heard. Numb to the rampant gunfire, explosions and their close proximity. Numb to the threats of others, the lives taken and the many Brothers he lost in war. And numb to the deep pain each of those would eventually cause...simply to stay focused on the mission at hand, survive his deployment and later, to reenter society.

They lived in hot tents that were easily mortared or, when lucky enough, the occasional evacuated palace or mansion floor we now controlled. They often slept in uniform and with their boots on: ready at a moment's notice. Between the two roles, Paul worked long, often 18 hour shifts on continual heightened alert and wearing 80 pounds of protective gear. One oppressive 115 degree day in August, 2003, the need for air conditioners was identified; and Paul's Squad was tasked with obtaining the units. While driving into downtown Baghdad they passed another U.S. Humvee just as it took a tragic IED hit: the explosion damaging their vehicle, but blowing out the occupants of the other with a massive fireball that critically burned its soldiers and melted the vehicle. Paul's team got out to screams from colleagues and sniper fire; and after that, he next remembers bullets landing at his feet as he unloaded his weapon in response. While seeking shelter, he found a bloody trail that led him to one critically wounded soldier, BJ, and then he found another. With the help of endangered citizens, Paul provided life-saving care to one while the litter team treated both of BJ's severed legs. Paul threw the man over his shoulder and led the team out of the building to a Humvee in wait as tanks and troops rolled in. Almost immediately, Paul passed out from shock and heat exhaustion and later awoke, panicked, to an Iraqi medical student rendering him care near Baghdad's Green Zone, never knowing what happened to the soldiers he rescued. Paul was issued a personal recognition from General Myers, the Joint Chief of Staff, and an Army Commendation Medal with Valor for his personal heroic efforts. Seven years later, upon meeting BJ for the first time since that explosion, Paul gave BJ his medal. Twenty years later however, Paul still hangs on to all the flashbacks, vivid memories and their horrific details, and the survivor's guilt that this engagement, along with a multitude of others, would cause.

Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, Personal Courage.

Accomplishments in war come at great expense and from the personal sacrifices of many. Less than a month before his tour was to end, Paul's deployment was mandatorily extended another four months. It was during this time, May 2004, that Paul left an Iraqi police training he'd just led and, less than a mile away, passed an IED hidden in a curb when someone remotely detonated it. Hundreds of pounds of explosives and cement chunks hit the left side of his truck and his body. He awoke to a smoke filled truck that was still moving forward and hit a building. He saw that his gunner had sustained significant head injuries and another two of his team had been blown out of their truck. Paul's knees had broken the gun resting between them during impact; and despite the searing pain to his body and head, he got out of the truck, disoriented but ready to shoot, when others arrived to help. He was medevaced to the local, U.S. occupied, hospital for the multitude of shrapnel wounds covering his entire left side; and it would be three weeks before he could walk on his own. Paul declined the offer to be sent stateside for care; and instead, requested he stay with his unit until they all left for home, together. He was awarded a Purple Heart for personal injuries resulting from enemy action; and earned a life filled with chronic back, disc and nerve pain, a knee injury that would require surgery and eventually replacement, a traumatic brain injury that would much later slow his cognition, and PTSD that would take him years to gain control of.

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Paul came home in August, 2004, again without transitional support or counseling; and within days he was back to work with the Sheriff's Department. By now he'd mastered the art of pushing horrible things out of his mind; and to keep moving forward Paul threw himself into work, picking up extra shifts and overtime as much as he could. Over time he grew angry and short-tempered at home and hyper-vigilant in public. And as he struggled to communicate and show emotion, his family life further crumbled. Paul knew something was wrong, he "wasn't like this before war"; but not wanting to be judged or labeled, he withheld and withdrew, and further lost himself. In 2005 the marriage ended and there began years of sharing time with his daughter, scraping by to make it on a Deputy's paycheck and struggling to find himself. In 2007, facing another Iraq deployment with the increasing physical limitations his injuries had caused, Sergeant First Class Paul Morrison chose to retire from military service with 22 years in, and on his own terms.

Working in law enforcement was tough; and since losing his military brotherhood was another hard loss on his own battlefield, Paul began exploring coping strategies for his mounting stress. In 2008 he took up motorcycling and quickly grasped the liberating peace riding provided him. He started out on smaller sport bikes then grew in bike size and miles accrued. The Road showed him how to release his stresses, clear his mind and build relationships. He then began volunteering within his community and church, and with local Veteran organizations, where he found the brotherhood he'd been missing. One day while talking to the newly hired Deputy, Paul realized the Deputy's sister, Jenny, was a long-lost childhood friend. The two reconnected, quickly fell in love and married in 2009. They soon began building their family and eventually welcomed two strong, bright daughters to fill his heart with joy, wonder and pride. His family was his world: and he would do anything to protect them, including keep his wife on the periphery of his struggles.

It wasn't until 2013, while volunteering at the King Home, that Paul met a Korean War Veteran who shared his biggest regret was not talking to his wife about his war experiences and struggles. He urged Paul to acknowledge his demons to not only release them, but to let others in and move forward in life. It was at that moment, after years of fighting, hiding and denying, that it all made sense to Paul...and he broke down. It was a hard reality check for his self image, but it was right on. Soon thereafter he found the courage to slowly begin talking with Jenny, opening up to other Veterans, and finding more ways to safely release his burdens, including riding. He still can't begin to explain it all to her, but she understands enough to know how impactful his coping strategies are and she supports him fully.

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In 2016 Paul finally acknowledged the changing tide in law-enforcement and the toll it had taken on him and his family; and after almost losing his brother-in-law in the line of duty, he retired with 20 years in. Paul put a lot of time and effort into better understanding and managing his dark fight with life after war, but there are still tough times where symptoms surface and he needs to employ other strategies. Wind therapy gave him great reprieve; and it made him a better person, father and husband. Staying active and involved provided him with purpose and support...so he found new ways to fill his days after retiring. Paul went on to obtain a Bachelor's Degree in Organizational Leadership and while a student, he started counseling. Looking to guide others, he works as a substitute teacher within area districts and as a high school wrestling referee, both of which bring him great joy. He volunteers in his church, his children's school and within the Royal Rangers, a church-based scout program. He found great peace being outdoors and surrounded by nature: and so he took up hunting and fishing, and, again, he rode as much as he could. As he spent more time within the American Legion and VFW, Paul expanded into leadership and outreach roles; and just recently, he accepted the nomination for President of the State VFW Riders Group.

Riding became woven into Paul's life fabric over the years. Unfortunately, as his back's degenerative disc pain worsened and his knee required surgeries, the rider position of his 2008 Suzuki Boulevard began limiting how much he could ride and to the point last year, where he could no longer handle the pain it caused. The angst of not riding and not having excess funds for a different, upright model quickly eroded his spirits and raised his anxiety. After reading Paul's application, Hogs For Heroes knew this man was a rider at heart; and understanding the loss Paul faced after the efforts he's made, we knew our gift would help him stay on the good path he's created for himself and for others.

Since submitting his application this March, Paul learned more about our past Recipients; and feeling unworthy compared to the others, believed he would not be chosen. He reconsidered ways to afford a bike without compromising his family and home needs; and he spent hours searching for what his first Harley-Davidson might be. With riding season and his presidency underway, Paul grew more despondent and convinced he wouldn't be selected...until he was, and it was an emotional moment. Fate works in mysterious ways, folks. There aren't many preowned Road Glide Ultras out there, but Paul found the 2019 black beauty he wanted at Vandervest H-D in Green Bay, where our friends took great care of him. Another amazing Veteran & Bike match made possible by the generosity of so many!

Paul's bike is the second of three bikes to be fully sponsored this year alone by the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 139's fundraising efforts last year...and it's their ninth overall! Join us for **Paul's Presentation of Keys Ceremony on Saturday, June 22 at 4:30**, along with #45, in a joint ceremony following the Operating Engineers Poker Run benefiting us that day at Summit Ridge Bar in Wonewoc, WI.

Better yet, ride with us during the day's event—motorcycle or UTV this year—to have some fun and raise some funds with us!