

Recovery for Bomb Survivor Involves Family, Helping Others

Gunnery Sgt. Blaine Scott survived a bomb blast five years ago in Iraq, but not without years of surgeries. He now mentors those entering the ranks of a Wounded Warrior unit.

- By Daniel Woolfolk
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Gunnery Sgt. Blaine Scott in 2008 (left) and 2011 (right). He began treatment with Operation Mend in 2008. After thirteen surgeries with the project, he says he is able to eat more comfortably and gets fewer questions in public. Courtesy of Michelle Van Vliet, Operation Mend

Photos



Credit Courtesy of Blaine Scott



Credit Courtesy of Michelle Van Vliet, Operation Mend

Editor's Note: For the past two weeks, we have run the series [Beyond the Battlefield: Rebuilding Wounded Warriors](#), which featured service members from throughout the country. Today, we meet Gunnery Sgt. Blaine Scott, a Twentynine Palms Marine who, for the past five years, has lived as a Wounded Warrior.

During a 2006 patrol in Iraq, Blaine Scott was hit with a massive improvised explosive device. The staff sergeant—a member of 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion at Twentynine Palms—lost three members of the platoon he was leading.

Immediately after, he didn't worry so much about the physical pain he felt and assumed he had only some burns and a broken leg.

But it was far worse.

He didn't see his image in a mirror until months after the incident, when he was on his way to an appointment at a military hospital and saw his reflection and the scars that covered his face and the burns that had disfigured some of his features.

His reaction, however, was typical of a tough Marine.

"I really got jacked up," he remembers telling himself.

The bomb left him with 40 percent burns to his head, face, arms and legs. But not only did he have to see a different image in the mirror, his family had to get used to his image once again.

Since then, the Marine, now a gunnery sergeant working as an operations chief with Wounded Warriors at [San Antonio Military Medical Center](#), has recovered with support from his family, a UCLA program and the community.

When Scott was first in the hospital, his wife, Lillia, was pregnant with their second child. Not only did she have to see him in pain, but the two had to reintroduce Scott to their 3-year-old daughter, Isabella.

She saw him and was instantly taken aback and scared, but one familiar trait was comforting—his voice.

"She was awesome," he said. "She accepted it five minutes after I had seen her."

After he was released from the hospital, the family moved to San Onofre where, he said, the community was welcoming.

"People accept you for who you are or what you do," he said.

His image was not his only concern. The damage to his face affected how he went about his day.

"I couldn't really get a chicken nugget in my mouth," he said. "That's how restricted my mouth was."

While living in Southern California, he learned of [Operation Mend](#)—a partnership between Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center, Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, TX, and the VA-

Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System. The program provides badly wounded service members with plastic surgery and is led by [Dr. Timothy Miller](#), a plastic surgeon and Vietnam veteran.

Operation Mend, so far, has had 54 patients.

Scott was the seventh patient when he went in for a consultation in 2008. Miller's team performed 13 surgeries that included procedures to his eyes, nose and mouth.

Operation Mend is the most satisfying thing Miller has done because it's a wonderful opportunity to be able to give something back, the doctor said. The surgeries not only change his patients' appearance, but it also changes their demeanor.

"Their personality without any exception is improved and their outlook on life is entirely different," he said. "As they are getting better and they're getting to look less scarred, their personality changes very dramatically."

For Scott, the change in the community was different. Before the surgeries, he had gotten a lot of questions from strangers and got fewer after the program.

Lillia, he said, has worked hard in keeping the family on track during the past five years.

"My wife had a lot to do in my recovery," he said. "She's the bomb. I love her to death."

After five years of working with severe injuries, Scott has focused from his recovery to that of newly injured Marines in his new position in Texas within the Marine Corps. In addition to being a mentor, he helps Wounded Warriors navigate the military medical system and works to get them to transition back into a Marine unit or to the civilian world.

"That's my goal for every one of these guys I've got," he said. "When I see a Marine leave the hospital, it's the best part of my whole job."