

Soldier Takes Huge Risk to Get PTSD Help

Army Specialist Who Went AWOL Returns to Fort Campbell on Veterans Day

By Armen Keteyian



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Nearly 70,000 Americans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan have been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Many more may suffer from it, but are reluctant to come forward. Armen Keteyian reports on one soldier who took a big risk to get help.



Jeff Hanks, who says he went AWOL from the Army because he couldn't get treatment for mental health issues. (CBS)

(CBS) Jeff Hanks is a 30-year-old Army specialist on a mission.

In 2008, Hanks served a six-month tour in Iraq, reports **CBS News chief investigative correspondent Armen Keteyian**. His first taste of war was taking a haunting toll.

"People need to understand that this is a problem, a widespread problem," Hanks said.

One graphic image - a marketplace bomb - hit too close to home.

"There was a little girl. It was hard to tell she was a little girl," Hanks said. "She was badly hurt. I try to talk about this but I always get upset. She was about the same age as my daughter and I saw her in pain and it's always stuck with me ... I just tried to deal with it, you know."

Earlier this year, he was deployed again, this time to Afghanistan. He returned home in September often angry and panicked, a stranger to his wife and two young girls.

"She didn't want to be around me," Hanks said of his wife.

Hanks said he asked for help last month. Instead, he claims, a superior officer at Fort Campbell ordered him back to Afghanistan, just days before he was set to get a mental health exam. So, he walked away, going absent without leave, or AWOL in military jargon.

"I felt like I had no other choice," Hanks said.

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At home in North Carolina, Hanks got evaluations from three civilian therapists who all recommended he get tested for post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, with one doctor stating his "current functioning is clearly severely impaired."

On Veterans Day Thursday, [he headed back to Fort Campbell to turn himself in](#), feeling nervous and scared.

Hanks then walked across the street, into a waiting car and an uncertain fate.

A spokesperson at Fort Campbell said Hanks would be treated the same as any other soldier who chooses to go AWOL. Hanks told CBS News Thursday night he will now get the mental health care he so desperately wanted. It begins on Monday.