



Lost — in a moment

Navy Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff explains the Viper fiber communications terminal to ABC's Bob Woodruff onboard a U.S. Air Force C-17 en route to Afghanistan, July 14, 2009. DOD PHOTO BY MASS COMMUNICATION SPECIALIST 1ST CLASS CHAD J. MCNEELEY/RELEASED

A traumatic brain injury on the job in Iraq turned journalist Bob Woodruff into an advocate for veterans experiencing homelessness

BY ROSETTE ROYALE
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In 2006, journalist Bob Woodruff went to cover the war in Iraq. But when he suffered a brain injury caused by an IED, he became part of a different story.

The Marines knew Taji, Iraq, was a bad area. The city, roughly 12 miles north of Baghdad, housed lots of insurgents. But the information didn't stop the military convoy that rolled through the city on Jan. 29, 2006.

Standing up in the back hatch of a light-armored tank, the lead vehicle in the convoy, TV journalist Bob Woodruff prepared to tape a segment for ABC. He and his cameraman wore body armor and protective helmets. Without warning, an improvised explosive device blew up near the tank.

There was a BANG. Everything shook. Then it all came to a standstill. And Woodruff, who had succeeded Peter Jennings as ABC World News Tonight co-host only weeks before, fell over in the tank.

Shrapnel tore a hole in Woodruff's neck. Another piece sliced into the left hemisphere of his brain. Convulsions shook his body. Trying to stanch the flow of blood, a soldier pressed his hand over Woodruff's neck. "Come back!" the Marines yelled at him. "Come back!"

Indeed, for a brief moment, Woodruff came back and opened his eyes. He asked

a question. Then he slipped back into unconsciousness.

He and the cameraman underwent emergency surgery in a U.S. Air Force hospital near Balad, Iraq. From there, both were airlifted to a hospital in Germany. In serious condition, Woodruff was flown to the Bethesda Naval Hospital, where he stayed in a medically induced coma for more than a month. Finally awake, he required months of therapy for brain-related trauma. (The cameraman fully recovered.)

More than five years after that explosion, Woodruff has become a spokesperson of sorts for others who have suffered brain injuries, particularly service members. The accident and injuries he suffered led to the creation of the Bob Woodruff Foundation, which offers support to injured service members, vets and their families.

In mid-July, Woodruff visited Seattle for

a talk and a panel discussion entitled "Are We Serving Our Veterans?" Of particular focus that evening, which was sponsored by Seattle University's Project on Family Homelessness, was a topic he speaks about with eloquence: homeless veterans. Prior to his arrival, Woodruff talked by

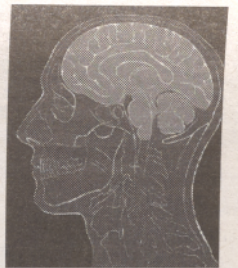
phone about his recovery from brain injury, what service members suffering brain trauma can teach others, how vets from Iraq and Afghanistan differ from those from Vietnam and, with a tad bit of humor, the explosion itself.

Rosette Royale:
Before you went to Iraq in 2006, what were your experiences with people in military service?

Bob Woodruff:

Well, I'd covered a couple wars. I was also embedded with the 1st LAR (Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion) of the Marines for the first invasion of Iraq — that was the first embedding that I ever

"For the ones who've been injured in these wars — again, in how extensive and how bad your injury is — you certainly go into moments of depression and frustration. It depends on what happens to you. And a lot of it depends on who you've got around you as well."



Read more about traumatic brain injury and its relationship with homelessness in a special Street Roots series, available at www.streetroots.wordpress.com, searchword "TBI."

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