

## No Holds Barred: Meet Specialist Ryan Hall, Army Ranger from Los Gatos Following His Five Deployments to the Middle East

By Ellen Manzo, Board Director, Veterans Memorial & Support Foundation of Los Gatos

“Being a Ranger has changed my life. It has shown me what I can do physically and that life is not just a physical battle but more of a mental battle no matter what. You really see that your physical abilities are limited only by your mental state. To become a Ranger you have to do four weeks of what is considered the most hellish thing on earth. You are starved, sleep deprived, and exercised beyond belief. Those four weeks feel like forever. It is not just a test of the mental and physical. Candidates also have to know their history. While you’re getting ‘smoked’ (doing a bunch of push-ups), not getting sleep, and having to do exercises, candidates also have to study because if you don’t pass a written test, you don’t become a Ranger.”

Ryan Hall is an Army Ranger from Los Gatos who served five deployments in the Middle East, once to Iraq and four times to Afghanistan. He became an Army Ranger, an elite soldier in Special Operations, to make the greatest contribution he could to America. He credits his father for instilling in him the value to always be the best even if it calls for taking the most challenging road. The U.S. Army puts recruits through extensive rigor as its soldiers compete for this coveted position. Of those who enlist, only about 0.5% meet all the requirements to ultimately join the Ranger force.

Ryan knew as he volunteered for Special Operations that he was likely to be called upon for multiple deployments. When asked if there was any positive attraction about returning to the front Ryan commented, “My brothers were going and I had to go to make sure they returned home. Second, at the end of deployment one could see the major difference we made with enemy forces and the significant impact made by my unit. Being part of something that changes the world is uplifting, and it makes one just want to keep going.” Ryan and his wife are currently expecting their first child, so returning to war is not on his radar screen at present. However, if Ryan was called upon to serve in a war that threatened his family, Ryan would sign on again without hesitation. Ryan’s a huge believer that serving is something “Everyone needs to do. Giving up some day-to-day basic freedoms and building a stronger self made me the man I am today.”

Ranger training was grueling and exhausting at first but became much easier following adjustment. Ryan described the bonds it created with his brothers as unbreakable. On Ryan’s first deployment, he saw and appreciated “all the hell” he had been put through and realized that boot camp prepared him for most everything he was to meet on the battlefield. A typical day on deployment included waking up, working out, attending a briefing, eating, performing the day’s mission, working out again, eating again, sleep, repeat.

As Ryan looks back on his service, he considers his greatest challenge the loss of friends killed in action. He views the greatest



lessons learned were true friendship, survival skills, how to follow orders and hold his tongue even when orders were given by someone whose command he didn’t respect. In Ryan’s words, “Serving was an eye opener. No school could have adequately prepared me. There is no way someone could ever learn the kinds of lessons gleaned from serving without experiencing it firsthand. My perspective of life changed as a result of having this experience. Most notably, I discovered how big in ways and how small in others our world really is.”

Repatriation back to America is a continual struggle for Ryan and many veterans. “Repatriating is like restarting my life from scratch and I find that I now don’t fit in with most of the people around me.” At first, he didn’t feel the support of his community. Now that support fortunately “keeps growing in every direction, thanks to individuals close and far.”

Ryan returned to America in December 2012, and then served two years in the Army Reserves. His advice for his fellow veterans is to “find the help you deserve. We don’t like asking or seeking help but that is the best thing we can do for ourselves and for our future. Second, look for resources outside the VA for help. There are many resources available to veterans and most do a great job of getting us on the right path.”

Some veterans suffer Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of their service. Ryan has worked with other veterans at the Veterans Administration Hospital and therefore has a view greater than that of his own. He concludes that there are basically two levels of PTSD. Ryan remarked, “A service member may first experience PTSD given the obvious traumatic experiences one is exposed to while in combat. My own observation is that service members who suffer from PTSD deal pretty well with PTSD while on the front and manage to move on. I think that is because our brothers are there and have gone through the same thing to a greater or lesser degree. While in combat, we’re able to support