Turning Tragedy into Triumph

For Special Forces warrior Greg Stube, the day he nearly died was the day he truly started living.
For many American Warriors, an indescribable tragedy occurs at some point during their service to country that divides their life into two distinct parts. Before that tragedy—typically an attack or battle—they are considered by most to be “warriors.” After the attack, however, they’re seen by many as a “wounded warriors,” in need of help from society, but with little to contribute anymore.

Greg Stube wants to change all that.
Greg Stube enjoys some time before a speaking engagement with son Gregory, a major source of inspiration in Stube’s recovery from near-fatal wounds received during the battle at Sperwan Ghar.
Stube is no stranger to warriors or wounds. He grew up in west Tennessee and followed the longstanding family tradition of pursuing a military career—specifically in the U.S. Army. After four years in the Infantry, Stube was selected in 1992 for Special Forces.

“Looking back, I’m not sure I even believed in myself that I could actually do it,” Stube said recently in an exclusive interview with NRA American Warrior. “I had thought that the infantry would turn me into Rambo, and it just didn’t happen. Like a young, immature person, I was looking for the next big thing—looking for what could provide what I wasn’t providing for myself.

“I wanted more. I tried out, and somehow I got selected. Then I spent the rest of my career as a Special Forces medical sergeant.”

Staff Sgt. Stube was assigned to the 10th Special Forces Group, where he served on several tours of duty. In 2001, he became an instructor at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center, where he spent four years teaching those who would one day save his life.

“I taught several different disciplines, starting off in surgery, anesthesia and trauma management,” Stube said. “I had been a medical sergeant on the A-Team, but it was a lot tougher going back to be an instructor. Students coming through seemed so much brighter than I ever was. They were reading ahead and studying hard.

“That steered me in a better direction and made me more proficient as a medical sergeant.”

Stube then went on to teach land navigation, patrolling and wilderness medicines to Special Forces candidates.

“When I finished up there, I was on the first thing smoking to Afghanistan in ’06,” he said. “I had been on many, many deployments overseas to places like Bosnia and Kosovo. The difference now was I ended up working in Afghanistan with guys that had been my students. At this point it wasn’t acceptable to be on a learning curve anymore. I needed to be the seasoned veteran that my experience would indicate.”

Then came September 2006 and Operation Medusa, where Stube’s Special Forces group was enlisted to support Canadian troops in a sector where they had just assumed command.

“We were a maneuver element for the operation,” Stube recalled. “We started meeting more resistance than anyone expected. It turned into the battle of Sperwan Ghar.
holes all through my body.

Stube's devastating hip and pelvic wounds took months of recovery—a time when he often fought feelings of guilt for returning home alive when many others hadn't.

Stube's Humvee was little more than a pile of burned rubble after the attack.
"We were moving up a hill to take the actual hilltop called Sperwan Ghar and an IED was detonated. I was lit on fire and there were holes all through my body. It launched my driver 70 feet onto the hill beside us, miraculously without injury."

Despite his injuries, Stube continued to focus on the mission and the welfare of his fellow Special Forces soldiers, even crawling out of the burning wreckage to fire his weapon at the enemy. His buddies immediately dragged him to safety and began administering medical care.

"I found out that if you stick to your standards in training, it may be tough for people at the time but they'll always love you for it later," Stube said. "And I saw that in combat. I ended up being saved by people who were new to the Special Forces. But because of the high standard of training, these guys performed as well or better than I ever have."

"When I was younger it would have been an insult to say my students were better than me, but I'm so proud this younger generation of fighters is better than mine ever was."

In the attack, a 1-lb. piece of shrapnel penetrated Stube’s leg before traveling through his pelvis and abdomen. As a result of the shrapnel injury and fire, Stube suffered devastating internal injuries and third-degree burns on his lower back and legs.

He was evacuated to Kandahar, where he had emergency surgery, lost a good portion of his intestines and had his right leg reattached below the knee. Four days later, he was sent back to the United States, where doctors could continue their attempt to save his life.

**A Higher Calling**

End of story, right? Wrong!

For many seriously wounded warriors, this type of story goes from bad to worse. And to be truthful, Stube and his wife, Donna, faced many extremely challenging days during his year and a half in the hospital. He had to rely on his faith in God, family and country.

"I credit faith in God and a strong desire to be good for my wife and son in the future in helping carry me through the hard times," he said. "My son was a year and a half old at that time. I was scared about what kind of dad I would be for him. Would I be able to do all the things he would want to do? I couldn’t help but think that he deserved better from me. No matter what had happened to me, I couldn’t use that as an excuse to not be a good dad."

Unlike many wounded warriors, Stube didn’t feel bitter about the wounds he received when fighting for his country. He had always known such devastating injuries were possible, although he never expected it to happen to him.

"I might have trouble with some of this psychologically if I’d been hit by
A 1-lb. piece of shrapnel penetrated Stube’s leg before traveling through his pelvis and abdomen.
a drunk driver or something,” he said. “But I volunteered for this, trained for it, and we were fighting to preserve the safety of our own citizens in our own land. It was a hotbed of training for terrorist actions against us over there, and we were doing what needed to be done.”

Even through the dark days, Stube never lost hope. And his time in the hospital proved to be a new beginning for what Stube was truly called to do in life.

“There were people from my unit and from the hospital who would tell someone, ‘You gotta go visit Stube, let him tell his story. He’s killed more (m.f.’s) than smallpox,’” Stube said. “It was hurtful to me to hear it that way.

“When they would come to my bedside and talk to me, what I would talk about was quite the contrary. I talked about how lucky I felt to be an American. How lucky I felt that I didn’t have to regret what I had done. I felt like it was worth it, and I talked about the reasons we fight, in my opinion being love and compassion—love of freedom and compassion for the human condition. Americans have always fought for those things.

“Being a part of that, and being able to come back home, was everything to me. And it became a contagious message.”

Going from hospital patient to motivational speaker obviously wasn’t in Stube’s plans at the time. But those hearing his message knew he had to share it with others. It was a natural progression.

“That wasn’t something I was looking for, it just happened that way,” he said. “And at the time, just for myself as a Christian, I was struggling with how to accept God’s grace because I felt so guilty about surviving when others didn’t. I saw this initially as a way to pay something back, although I’ve come to realize I can’t pay it back.”

Stube’s first real speaking engagement to a large crowd was at the Celebration of American Values at the 2007 NRA Annual Meetings & Exhibits in St. Louis.

“I had a colostomy bag and tubes—three different openings in my body under my suit that I spoke in,” he said. “My doctor at the time was a member of the Fifty Caliber Shooters Association and a Life member of the NRA. I wasn’t supposed to go anywhere but he made special permissions for me to go to that.

“For me personally, it was part of my transition from living off the sympathy and support of others. An understanding had to come about. Everybody was being so nice to me and providing for me. There had to come
Stube shares a light moment with 4-Star General David Petraeus, then head of U.S. forces in Afghanistan.
a time when I had to get out of the sympathy mode, turn the switch and start providing for my own family.”

After that speaking engagement, more invitations began to come in. Stube realized that, while he couldn’t pay back the debt he owed his country and other servicemen and women, continuing down the trail of recovery came much easier when relating his experiences to others.

“Now I know all I can do is live the best I know how and try to be a good representative of these core values that we share,” he said. “Now I want to empower veterans to keep holding up that honor that it took to volunteer even after their service, and after traumatic events. I want to see them bring that honor, training, education and experience home in a way that it benefits the country we are serving.

“I’m ready to say, ‘I’m not a victim, I’m a volunteer. I’m not wounded, I’m a warrior!’”

In addition to his motivational speaking engagements, Stube now has his own television show—“Coming Home With Greg Stube” on NBC Sports. The program ties our outdoor heritage as Americans to the freedoms earned on the battlefield by those in military service in a unique, entertaining and informative way.

Stube also is working closely with the NRA Life of Duty Program, which honors and serves those who strap on a gun every day and head to work in service to others.

“I will tell you that ‘Life of Duty’ describes my life. Because I spent 23 years in the military, it is who I am to a ‘T,’” Stube said. “But if you ask me, I’m still on active duty. I’m on active duty as a citizen of this country I love so much and still want to serve. That ‘Life of Duty’ is a state of mind more than a uniform. I don’t think you have to serve in uniform to share that.

“For my transition from the military into American society, ‘Life of Duty’ describes my state of mind and who I want to be for my God, my family and for my country.”

Stube’s latest endeavor—as if he didn’t already have enough irons in the fire—is writing feature stories for NRA American Warrior magazine.

“I’d like people to know that my return to American society makes me hungry to learn about all the different people within all their different Lives of Duty,” Stube said. “I’m interested in hearing from people, going where they live and work, and seeing what citizenship and duty mean to them.

“I’m looking for stories to write. I want to capture some of this. If it’s not the real American story, then we’re wasting our time. We want to hear from you.”

Those living the Life of Duty can contact Greg Stube by e-mailing GregStube@NRAamericanwarrior.com.
Stube’s wife, Donna, and son, Gregory, were constantly by his side during his recovery, providing inspiration for his first NRA American Warrior feature, which begins on the following page.

Ed. Note: Turn to the next page to read “Shadow Warriors,” Greg Stube’s first NRA American Warrior feature.