

Wounded Veterans Ruck to Remember Their Fallen Brothers and Sisters

CHICAGO, June 20, 2016 /[PRNewswire-USNewswire](#)/ -- Despite the pouring rain, long march, and serious subject matter of the day, wounded warrior and Army veteran Alberto Principe manages to laugh about his experiences at the 3rd Annual Ruck of Honor. The 22-mile march gave participants the opportunity to challenge themselves with a ruck through Chicago with approximately 22-pound rucksacks. The event raised awareness about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and veteran suicide, as well as honored those who have died in combat.

"I might have overdone it," he joked. "They told us to pack for 22 pounds worth of gear, but I threw some frozen water bottles and other supplies in my ruck. That was before the bag was soaked from the rain – it only got heavier as it got wetter. When the march was over, the bag was almost 36 pounds. That's a hard day when you start at eight in the morning and go until five in the evening, but I'm very happy I did this."

Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) gave Alberto and a group of wounded veterans the opportunity to attend the event and challenge themselves. The event was deeply personal to Army veteran Alberto Principe – he marched in honor of a friend who had died in Iraq.

"I did this to bring attention to the 22 veterans we lose a day to suicide," said Alberto. "I also did this to remember a sergeant major I was friends with who I lost in Iraqi Freedom. I marched with his picture on my rucksack, along with a picture of a Vietnam vet who committed suicide not long ago. I marched to honor them both."

Alberto served as a medic during the Iraq War. His memories and experiences there made a significant impact on his return to civilian life – he lives with PTSD. However, it was not always something he believed in.

"As a medic, we lose people. I can't tell you how many we lost, but there's a few I remember specifically," said Alberto. "Some people don't believe that PTSD is a real illness. I used to believe that too – that you could control how you think and feel at all times. As a combat medic, I was able to keep on moving and doing what I do. I avoided meeting psychiatrists because they wanted me to bring these memories back up. I didn't want that – I wanted to keep moving forward and not get bogged down in the past."

After a time, Alberto's memories came back on their own. Like many living with PTSD, triggers in his environment would set it off, and like many, at first, he wasn't sure what he was suffering from.

"It began when I was watching a war movie," said Alberto. "I got anxious; I couldn't calm down, and I couldn't understand what was happening to me. I had to leave the room. Soon after that, the bad dreams started. Now, I can't watch war movies or anything that features deserts. They're triggers for my PTSD. I don't know if there's a cure, but there are people who want to help, and there are programs for those struggling with it."

Soon after this first experience with PTSD, Alberto got connected with Wounded Warrior Project. He began to receive emails about activities but was uncertain about attending for fear of running into people he knew. Then, he saw an email about physical health programs and fitness training.

"I wanted to learn something new and saw that it was about nutrition," said Alberto. "How many programs do that? I couldn't believe it. I attended the course, had a great time, and learned a lot. I met some great people there, including my friend Ryan who works at Wounded Warrior Project. We clicked almost immediately. Any time he sees something that's of interest, he will

send it to me. I became aware of the Ruck of Honor event because Ryan kept in touch with me."

Alberto noted that since learning about his PTSD, he has begun to see more and more of his friends and fellow warriors discuss it more openly.

"Every one of us who has PTSD just wants to go back to the way we were before. Others who struggle with PTSD want this too. This event, and the other events I have attended, are all about that. It gets us out of our comfort zones; it gets us in touch with people who are under the same circumstances, and it gives us a chance to feel normal again. At one event, I met a young Marine who still stays in touch, and we still check on each other and support each other."

In addition to the physical activities and events that WWP hosts for wounded veterans to live active, healthy lifestyles, WWP offers a variety of mental health programs. Recently, Wounded Warrior Project launched a joint partnership with four major academic medical centers across the United States to help warriors receive access to state-of-the-art mental health treatments. To learn more, please visit <https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/programs/warrior-care-network>.

About Wounded Warrior Project

The mission of Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) is to honor and empower Wounded Warriors. WWP's purpose is to raise awareness and to enlist the public's aid for the needs of injured service members; to help injured servicemen and women aid and assist each other; and to provide unique, direct programs and services to meet their needs. WWP is a national nonpartisan organization headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida. To get involved and learn more, visit <https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/>.

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