



Member Spotlight

Trials & Achievements of a Hero



Maj. Alex Toney (USA Ret.) Battles Multiple Sclerosis

by Joy Blackburn
MSA Staff Writer

Photo: Melissa Minkner

Alex Toney had 17 years with the US Army under his belt. He'd seen combat in Iraq and was now stationed in South Korea with the 2nd Infantry Division while President Donald Trump and Leader Kim Jong Un were exchanging menacing tweets. It was a front-row seat to history. Stateside, Major Toney had a wife he adored and two children who looked up to him as the hero he aspired to be. His life was set.

And then it all ended.

"In 2018, I woke up paralyzed from the waist down," Alex told me. "The MS hit me that suddenly."

The Troop Medical Center sent Alex to the hospital. "No one knew what was wrong, but they kept pumping me with steroids so that I could feel my legs again." It took them a week to get Major Toney back on his feet, then he was sent home to Colorado where a neurologist diagnosed him with multiple sclerosis. The army issued discharge papers, and Alex's life went into a freefall.

While he's quick to say he's glad how everything has turned out for him, at the time he thought the mili-

tary should have let him finish out his last three years to retirement. "I felt like I was being thrown away," he told me. "They said, 'You're eventually going to wind up in a wheelchair and you need to be thinking about your future.'"

But Alex had trouble even thinking about his present. He felt tired all the time – even after a full 8 hours of sleep. He started having bowel trouble. "I just wasn't the same guy," he said, noting how he could see it in the way his family looked at him.

Alex explained it this way: "Someone says he has cancer, and your like, 'Okay. I know what cancer is.' But MS is different for everyone that has it. One

Trials and Achievements of a Hero *continued*

guy I knew with MS went blind.” Major Toney (retired) separated from his wife to focus on what actually happening to him.

“This is when I met Nikki,” he told me, referring to Nikki Pfeiffer, Executive Director of the MS Alliance of Southern Colorado. “It was the best thing that ever happened to me. She was so positive,” Toney said, quoting her as telling him, “Alex, this is something new for you. It’s your new normal, and you have new limits. You will learn what they are. You can do this.”

Major (R) Toney joined the MS Alliance and took advantage of the free programs Nikki offered — from PT and yoga to group therapy and nutritionists, as well as guest speakers presenting an array of prescription and orthotic treatments. Options for in-person and online meetings are offered. For a soldier like Toney, who has always been all about “the do,” these opportunities to take action made an enormous difference – both in his health and his outlook.

Today Alex has his MS under control. He is back with his wife and family and is working at Space Command. “I don’t regret a second of my time in the military,” he told me, adding, “I just want to give others what Nikki gave me. The military has a lot of people with spouses and family members that have MS. I want them to know that they don’t have to suffer alone.”

Joining the MS Alliance of Southern Colorado is free; it takes only a phone call. Alex suggests, “Spouses, significant others, family members, you can join too! It’s a great way to find out what your loved one is going through as well as how you can help support them.”

Alex noted, “I used to help my daughter with her gymnastics, and now I just

Alex poses on the Great Wall of China in 2018, prior to his first bout with Multiple Sclerosis.



At first, Major Toney was shocked by the military’s response to his diagnosis. “I felt like I was being thrown away.”



Photo: Melissa Minkner

couldn’t help her anymore. As a parent, you just want to be there for your children all the time. But now there are times when I need to take a knee.”

Alex paused as if recognizing that he had just voiced the point of his own story. “Forgiveness of self comes into play here. We need to learn to be okay with our own limits. No matter who you are or how you see yourself: When you need to, it’s alright to take a knee.” 🇺🇸

Retired Major Alex Toney, on behalf of the MS Alliance of Southern Colorado, we want to thank you for your service, both in the military, and beyond!

(Right) Alex visits with Nikki Pfeiffer at the MS Alliance offices in 2022. He told me that meeting Nikki, “...was the best thing that ever happened to me.”



Photo: MS Alliance