

Purple Heart Veteran Finds Purpose in Serving Others

'The reason I'm still serving is the same reason my brothers and sisters serve as veteran volunteers – it's because we still can'

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Sherman Watson, Jr. is **#StillServing**.

Sherman Watson, Jr., served in the U.S. Marine Corps as a heavy machine gunner and was deployed to Iraq three times in seven years. He's now using as much of his time as possible to help others and is grateful to have the chance after surviving combat experiences.

"With every deployment, I was a recipient of the Purple Heart since I was wounded each time. I was very lucky. Many of my brothers did not make it back from the same deployments," Watson said.

Watson is **#StillServing** as a VFW Life member with Post 5394 in Compton, California, and part of the Compton Veterans, a nonprofit made up of members of the Post who encourage veterans to serve the community as they transition to civilian life. Through his service, he's also engaged with other veterans' groups and nonprofits.

Most recently, Watson has been involved with food distribution throughout the COVID-19 crisis. In March 2020, local organization Joy of Giving asked Watson about Post 5394 and Compton Veterans helping to expand a longstanding effort to fight food insecurity. They were able to coordinate and hold events every week, which they coined "Operation Nourish."

"Joy of Giving and VFW comrades would pick up food from local food banks in bulk, then we would organize the food on pallets for a drive-through giveaway," said Watson.

"In 2020, we gave away over 50,000 pounds of food essentials to veterans and community members in the City of Compton and surrounding cities. In 2021, the effort still continues

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and we're currently adjusting our days and times."

Taking care of fellow veterans is important to Watson as well, and he serves with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program.

"As a housing specialist with HUD-VASH, I support veterans with rental and utility assistance, emergency hotel vouchers and new home essentials such as a refrigerator or bed. I'm also tasked with reaching out to owners of properties to explain the HUD-VASH process in order to aid veterans with a wide range of rentals," Watson said.

"In addition, I'm a Veterans Affairs Certified Peer Support Specialist and assist veterans in taking back their own lives in order to be successful in the near future."

Watson believes that continuing to serve benefits both a community and veterans themselves, especially with their mental health.

"The reason I'm still serving is the same reason my brothers and sisters serve as veteran volunteers – it's because we still can. Serving our community provides us a sense of purpose, a means of therapy and rebuilds the camaraderie we still desire to have in our lives," said Watson.

"More importantly, we serve in an effort to continue to improve our communities in need. Today, more than ever, unbiased veteran leadership is needed to help reinforce these types of efforts across the country."

To find out more about the VFW's #StillServing campaign or to share your story, visit vfw.org/StillServing.