

'I've Emerged as a Stronger and More Empathetic Human Being'

A VFW Life member who is a quadruple amputee continues to devote his life to helping veterans by serving as an example

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It was a glimpse at the human condition from the fifth floor of the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, in 2010 that gave John Peck hope.

The Marine and quadruple amputee, one of five veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to survive such level of trauma, watched as a fellow amputee waited for a bus down below.

"And I was thinking, 'He's going to throw himself in front of a bus,'" said Peck, who served with 3rd Bn., 1st Marines, in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2007 and 2010, respectively. "But instead, this woman and little girl come up and grab his hand, and they all walk away."

The image offered Peck a canvas, upon which he could paint what life could offer if he continued to fight for his own.

"I remember thinking, 'If this guy can find love and have a family, maybe so can I,'" added the Life member of VFW Post 4551 in Antioch, Illinois. "There was no epiphany, just moments like these that helped pull me back through."

Peck delved into bettering himself, learning how to use a wheelchair and taking care of his body and mind. He left behind what used to be, opening up to the possibility of what was to come.

By 2016, he had received a rare double- arm transplant and met a woman, remarried and began assembling computers.

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Every month since the transplant, Peck relives that image he witnessed from the fifth floor at Walter Reed. Now, his wife, Jessica, helps him return to military doctors to undergo treatments designed to prevent his body from rejecting the new limbs.

Peck also began chronicling his experiences in what became the book, “Rebuilding Sergeant Peck: How I Put Body and Soul Back Together After Afghanistan,” in 2019.

In the memoir, Peck opens up about his two traumatic experiences and their aftermath. Peck writes about the roadside bomb in Iraq that left him with traumatic brain injuries in 2007, from which took years to recover. He also writes about his return to active-duty military service and the other IED he stepped on in Afghanistan in 2010, resulting in a three-monthlong coma and the loss of his two legs and eventually both of his arms.

“Through it all, I’ve emerged as a stronger and more empathetic human being — truly rebuilt, including my new arms,” Peck wrote. “I want readers to know that things will always get better, to have faith, and to try to have a sense of humor about it all. If I can achieve my goals with all that I’ve been through, anyone can.”

The book’s success and traction within the military community earned Peck an audience with then-President Donald Trump in 2019 at the White House in Washington, D.C., where he spoke in front of a large crowd.

The now 35-year-old Marine also has served as a motivational speaker, traveling across the country to share his experiences with physical pain, bouts of depression and his adjustments to life as a quadruple amputee.

Peck continues to donate portions of his memoir’s royalty checks, as well as his public speaking income, to veterans’ charities. He also has begun dabbling in real estate and plans on creating a crypto-currency to help provide financial assistance to other veterans. He added that partnering with groups focused on veterans’ mental health is a priority, too.

“If there’s something I can do for my fellow brothers and sisters, then I want to do it,” said Peck, whose most recent recognition includes the 2021 Military Times Veteran of the Year award. “I’ve always wanted to help. If I share my story, if I can talk about being suicidal and how I got through that, maybe it can help.”

This article is featured in the 2022 March issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Ismael Rodriguez Jr.](#), senior writer for VFW magazine.