

IN MEMORY OF
MARINE TRAVIS MACKIN



**IN MEMORY OF
MARINE TRAVIS MACKIN**



CORBIN MACKIN

Interview by Katy Regan

Corbin, from Plymouth, lost his brother, Travis Mackin, 22, who was serving in 45 Commando, the Royal Marines, when he was killed in an explosion on January 11th 2009 in the Kajaki area of Afghanistan. At the time of Travis' death, Corbin was also serving in 1st Battalion The Rifles and deployed in the same operation in Helmand.

As a result of his brother's death, Corbin was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the symptoms of which mean he finds it very difficult to talk about his experience and declined to for this project. The below is from Help for Heroes who treat Corbin. The words that follow are excerpts from a previous interview with Corbin in *The Sun*. Corbin and reporters, Mike Ridley and Nick Pritchard, very kindly gave their permission to Help for Heroes to use these words.

Help for Heroes and Psychological Wellbeing:

Help for Heroes is a Charity that exists to support those who have suffered injury or illness while serving or as a result of serving. These injuries may be visible or invisible, physical or psychological (such as PTSD). Maintaining and restoring the psychological wellbeing of those who have suffered life changing injuries or illnesses, and their families, is vitally important.

While taking part in these activities may suffice for some, others may need more support in managing their psychological wellbeing. To this end, Help for Heroes offers both therapeutic support on site at its Recovery Centres as well as access to our bespoke psychological support programme, Hidden Wounds.

Dr Vanessa Lewis, Help for Heroes Head of Psychological Wellbeing says, "Despite seeing

a slight reduction in stigma around mental health, people do still find it difficult to come forward and talk about challenges they are facing. There are certain help-seeking barriers including a fear of being perceived as weak or not able to cope, or a feeling that they may not be understood by the person they are speaking to. People can also perceive the prospect of revisiting their traumatic experiences of the past as potentially very distressing and may therefore try to avoid re-exposing themselves to what they have been through, especially if there are associated feelings of guilt or shame. However, talking about these memories is key to someone's treatment of PTSD so it is vital that they get the support to do this in a safe environment using evidence based treatments."

Corbin Mackin:

"I was told by my commanding officer around the breakfast table. As soon as he said 'your brother' I knew it was bad news; I had a massive out of body experience. I felt numb, empty and hollow. It was such a strange feeling and I wouldn't wish it on anyone. Then, I was angry. Why had no one found the IED before it exploded? That was my job out there. I was devastated, I'd lost my big brother, my best mate and my role model at the same time. Only one of us coming

back alive was hard to deal with.

Corbin accompanied his brother's body home on the eight hour flight from Afghanistan to RAF Lyneham in Wiltshire. "He was my role model – I couldn't leave him. I had lost my best friend." His funeral was in January 2009.

"People thought I was strong, they thought I was coping but I wasn't."

Corbin left the army in 2010 but found it difficult adapting to civilian life and regularly ended up in fights. "I am a good person, fighting isn't in my nature, but I kept on doing it. I did it because I could let out my anger, but I didn't realise I needed help."

In December 2012, just two days after Travis' birthday Corbin was involved in a head-on car crash. Although he was unhurt, he awoke the next day having forgotten that Travis was dead.

"I came downstairs and saw a picture of him and that's when it hit me that he was gone" says Corbin. "I just started crying. I had bottled up my feelings for years but everything then came spilling out."

It was then that Corbin realized he needed help, so he contacted Help for Heroes and was soon after, diagnosed with PTSD. Corbin began therapy and counselling to deal with his condition and joined Help for Heroes Band of Brothers, a fellowship for wounded, injured or sick Servicemen, women and

veterans who can offer each other support. "I just feel that the Help for Heroes Band of Brothers is such an important thing." Says Corbin.

"Trying to explain what I have been through or what PTSD is like can be impossible, but with these guys you don't need to as everyone has been through their own trauma. It makes things so much easier."

Even though the PTSD still has a massive impact on Corbin's life, he is slowly on the mend and has found his own coping strategies in physical exercise and personal challenges. "Having physical goals really helps me." He says. "I've climbed Ben Nevis and I do a lot of surfing. I also try and think of good things, like my little brother and good times with my older brother before he died. If I feel lost, angry and overwhelmed by life's problems I get out in the water and go surfing. I need to keep my mind occupied. I can't allow myself to get bored and irritated. I'm trying to battle with life and make the most out of what I can, because I now know how life can get taken away so easily. The battle doesn't end when you get back from Afghanistan. People can never understand what you've been through. I never want to forget my brother. I feel more alive and happy talking about him. I'm trying to live the life he would have lead."

To support men and women like Corbin, sign up to the Help for Heroes Friends Campaign at www.helpforheroes.org.uk/donate



ABOVE

Before: Corbin and Travis photographed in Cyprus.

RIGHT

After: Recreated in Blackpool Sands, Devon, 30/07/15.



Before They Were Fallen deals with remembrance. Louis Quail and Katy Regan use the power of photography and testimony together, to link memory, the passing attribute to all those British soldiers who gave their lives in the Afghanistan conflict.



B E F O R E

T H E Y

W E R E

F A L L E N

LOUIS QUAIL

**WORDS BY
KATY REGAN**