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# After an officer was killed in the line of duty, a wounded veteran decided to honor him. Turns out the flag was worth more than money.

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**WISCONSIN** – Twenty-two veterans take their own lives per day. For suicide, that number is astronomical, but the pain doesn't stop at 22 every day.

Multiply that number by the average amount of close friends and family each of those veterans have and now you're looking at hundreds of people.

That's hundreds of people per day that are devastated and will have their lives changed forever due to veterans dying by suicide. I don't even want to think about the amount of people involved if you were to multiply those figures by the weeks and months in a year.



Mitch told Law Enforcement Today:

And these figures don't even include law enforcement and first responders.

One man, Mitch Kriebel, almost became one of the 22. In 2016, he suffered a back injury while deployed to Afghanistan as an infantryman. Shortly thereafter, he lost several friends to suicide and felt hopeless.

**“Everything was just kind of piling up, so I just went in a deep, dark place. They talk about how you go into that isolation and you’re just going to quit on yourself and, you know, I’d come up with a scheme of how I was going to end my life.”**

In fact, he was only moments away from being another heart-breaking statistic:

**“I was the very small percentage of veterans that got caught in the act. I was downstairs in my house and [my wife] was looking for me. I was about 30 to 45 seconds away from taking my own life.”**

In less than a minute, he would have been another suicide. But by some miracle, his wife had the inclination to look for him and when she did, his life changed forever.

Mitch said:

**“She was looking for me and found me. I bawled my head off, kind of spilled my guts like, ‘this is my plan. This is what I was going to do.’  
“I had envisioned it every day for, for...God knows how long, years maybe.”**

Suicide is no easy decision and one that veterans and first responders grapple with for a long time- in many cases years. And the battle that rages within is a struggle all its own.

**“People always say suicide is selfish and this and that. And so, you know, I fought those demons every single day but I didn’t want to be a burden to my family anymore. I’m just lucky I don’t have those feelings anymore and I was able to get help.”**

But his fight didn’t end when he was caught in the act. During the recovery from his back surgery, a friend encouraged him to register for the Bataan Death March charity event in New Mexico. He joined thousands of veterans, police officers, service-members and first responders and finished the grueling 26.2-mile course.

That’s when everything came to a head and a miracle happened.



Mitch said:

**“By the end of the ruck I was bawling my head off. Just hearing people’s stories about PTSD, suicide, the military in general, families, Goldstar moms, and I was overwhelmed.”**

### **Ruck 4 the Fallen**

Shortly after the Bataan ruck march, a local police officer was killed in the line of duty in Mitch’s home state. Feeling compelled to do something, he decided he would do his own 31-mile ruck march while holding the Thin Blue Line flag to raise money for the spouse.

Once completed, he handed the flag off at the police station in Wisconsin, who then passed it along from one police station to the next all the way to Washington State.

Mitch said:

**“I raised enough money to give the widow a big ole’ check. But the widow said all she wanted was the flag.”**

With the flag story making it to news media outlets, Mitch decided he would continue showing up to ruck events to spread his message.

Mitch said:

**“Now we put together prevention teams... but our biggest thing is bringing veterans and first responders together so they can communicate and don’t get into that isolation portion of suicide... and that’s how Ruck 4 the Fallen was really born.”**

And it seems his organization is making a difference, even if it’s a small one. After speaking with many veterans and first responders, he began to notice a trend in what he was hearing.

Mitch said:

**“The constant thing I hear is people can’t go to sleep at night, because they think of every bad thing they’ve done or everything they could have done. And then when they wake up in the morning, that’s what they’ve been dreaming about all**

night long or having nightmares so they'll self-medicate- which then creates the cycle of depression, the cycle of addiction.”



His organization wants to intervene and break that vicious cycle and has found a way to get the word out- ruck marching. Mitch has rucked over 2400 miles since 2018 and it would've been more but Covid-19 slowed it down.

But his plans are growing. He hopes to build a ranch where veterans and first responders and their families can go to be together along with professionals, therapists and classes- all in an effort to help.

If you want to donate to help Mitch and Ruck 4 the Fallen, visit his website, [www.ruck4thefallen.org](http://www.ruck4thefallen.org). You can also find him on Facebook.

If you are thinking about suicide or you relate to any part of this article, please speak to someone.

Veterans Crisis Hotline 1-800-273-8255

Law Enforcement Hotline 1-800-COP-LINE (267-5463)

Fire/EMS First Responder Hotline 1-888-731-3473

*About the writer: Eddie Molina is a leadership professional, blogger and author. He voluntarily writes articles to keep the law enforcement, first responder and military community informed. For more of his articles and to listen to the full Zoom interview with Mitch Kriebel, go to his website, [www.eddiemolina.com](http://www.eddiemolina.com)*