

**Here is Kurtis' story in his own words:**

I was wounded in Iraq and received the Purple Heart on three different occasions. The first was during the battle of Fallujah (Operation Phantom Fury) on November 12, 2004. I was wounded with shrapnel from a hand grenade while my platoon was on a wide street doing house-to-house clearing. During that time, I was in the back of a truck providing frontal and roof top security for the Platoon. I moved my gun to the right because a firefright broke out on the right flank. I saw a hand grenade come over the wall next to the street and thinking that I was safe and in the clear of the shrapnel blast, I engaged the enemy for a few seconds before the grenade went off. I remember the explosion and felt something hit me in the neck. I thought it was a rock at first until it started to bleed and burn. From there a good friend of mine was able to extract it with his leather man tool.

The second time that I was wounded was outside a small city called Barawana on the other side of the river from Haditha. We were on our way back to our forward operating base inside the city when we received a call to provide security for the Regimental Commander who was on his way into the city for a meeting. Being that we were the only mounted patrol in an area that was abundant with IEDs, they put us on the job. As we came to our observation point, which was set on top of a hill overlooking the two main routes in and out of the city, my rear vehicle gun truck struck an anti-tank mine that was boosted with a 130mm artillery shell. I was the turret gunner on the machine gun and was thrown from the vehicle. There were many witness accounts of how far I was thrown and none of them match, but all said it was quite a distance. I sustained damage to my hip, back and knee, and it also gave me one heck of a concussion. I don't remember much of it, but what I do remember was that it happened pretty quickly. But in actuality, everyone says I was out for at least 2-5 minutes. For that one, I've been receiving treatment for the last three years off and on.

The last one was July 31, 2007, just outside the city of Karmah, east of Fallujah. During that time period, we had been sent into an area that had really never been secured or patrolled due to a gap in that area of operations. A platoon from India Company was sent down to secure and find everything down there when they hit a massive IED that destroyed their 7-ton and wounded about 15 marines. That's when they called us (Lima Company) to go assist. My platoon was sent down with our trucks, a tow truck, and some EOD to secure the rest of the area that had been receiving small arms and mortar fire all night. When we arrived that morning, everything was fairly calm and we received the order to move into the flanking position and moved out. On our way there, we came to an intersection that we really had no choice but to move through. When we made the turn, my truck was hit with 300 pounds of explosives that knocked my driver and I unconscious. I damaged my back and also my neck from hitting the roof with my head, which resulted in another Traumatic Brain Injury. After that IED, I was not able to return to my unit. While in the hospital, I reenlisted and was then given orders to join the Wounded Warrior Battalion at Camp Pendleton. Now that I am with the Battalion, I continue to be treated for my TBI, neck and back injuries, as well as for PTSD. I will never be able to return to full duty with the Marine Corps and will most likely be medically retired.

Kurtis D. Foster