

Client: Johnson & Johnson

In the Line of Fire... Employees Recall the Sacrifice and Rewards of Wartime Service

For the 225,000 Americans stationed in the Persian Gulf, military service brings pride, lifelong friendships and rigorous training. In wartime, it may also bring raw fear, monotonous intervals, and anxiety about jobs and loved ones left behind. Here, four Janssen employees share their memories of military service during war.

Chris Thompson, senior director of healthcare compliance, was working at a small biotechnology firm when he was “reactivated” and sent to Turkey during the Gulf War. “I was a special weapons officer involved in nuclear, biological and chemical weapons,” explains Chris, who had transferred after four years of active duty to the Army Reserves as a captain. “When the Gulf War broke out, Uncle Sam called me back.”

Although the five months Chris spent in Turkey were monotonous, boredom was a blessing. “Considering my expertise,” says Chris, “if they had needed us, the situation would have been very bad. So no news was good news.”

Chris enlisted in the Army as a way to give back. “We enjoy incredible rights as American citizens. Those rights require responsibilities. For me, one of those responsibilities is serving my country.” When Chris joined Janssen in 1991, he was pleased to see that sense of responsibility on the corporate level. “It’s there in our credo – a commitment to service. I really like that.”

After the Gulf War, Chris continued in the Reserves until 1995. Today his military training helps in the business arena. “I learned to lead and motivate people,” he says. The military also taught him to manage in a fluid, dynamic environment. “You learn how to manage chaos. I have yet to be involved in any kind of Army exercise where the plan was executed exactly as it was issued.” But for Chris, the biggest benefit was the people. “You work with some of the greatest people in the world,” he says.

So how does he feel about being here while others are over there? “I have mixed emotions,” admits Chris. “Part of me really wants to be there with them.”

Dave Meek, CNS Field Sales Director, was a sales representative for Janssen when called from the Army Reserves as a captain in Operation Desert Storm.

“Leaving my job was the biggest challenge for me,” says Dave. “I’d only been with Janssen for a year and a half and was in the Management Development Program. I worried about what I’d come home to. What would happen to a career that had been so promising?”

Dave was quickly reassured. “Janssen people talked to me and said not to worry. They said, ‘Go do what you have to do. We’ll take care of you.’ And that’s exactly what happened. I came home and fifteen months later was promoted to district manager.”

Operation Desert Storm was a radical change for Dave. “One day I’m selling pharmaceuticals, and three weeks later I’m in the middle of the desert commanding a unit of 120 people. It was definitely different than being an individual contributor as a sales representative.”

Dave was well prepared for the challenge. As a senior at the University of Cincinnati on an ROTC scholarship, he was corps commander of 400 cadets. He then served in active duty for four years, joined Janssen and transferred to the Army Reserves.

Dave believes that military service provides “a better education than any business school. The military gives you an incredible amount of responsibility at a very young age. It formed me professionally more than anything else.” He credits the military for instilling confidence and adaptability. “It helps tremendously from a leadership standpoint.”

To Janssen those employees now serving their country, Dave offers some advice. “Tell us what we can do for you and your families. You’ve got Janssen and Johnson and Johnson behind you. While you’re gone, let us be part of your family.”

For **Pam Alexa**, Regional Business Director, a member of the “Janssen family” reached out unexpectedly while she was a first lieutenant in Desert Storm. “My sister forwarded a Janssen letter – and on the back of the envelope was a handwritten note from Dave Meek! He’d intercepted it from thousands in the military postal area!”

Like Chris and Dave, Pam was in active duty before joining the Reserves. “I’d been a nurse in the civilian sector, and my specialty was burns. I wanted to get more training and serve my country too. So I joined the military.”

In the Gulf War, Pam was a nurse at an “evac” (evacuation) hospital “one step away from the line of fire.” It was a big change from her Janssen position as a district manager in Pittsburgh.

“All of a sudden you’re in a war zone,” says Pam. “You fly for 17 hours, land in Saudi Arabia, get picked up by a bus, get lost for two hours until it finds your site, which is a parking garage, where you sleep on the floor.”

The site was subsequently bombed, but fortunately Pam and her unit were 10 hours north by then. “We assembled the hospital,” she says, “which was a fully equipped 400-bed facility with eight operating suites.”

Pam’s unit provided wonderful care. “The American soldiers were in good shape,” she recalls, “with twisted ankles, kidney stones, nausea and the like. But we were concerned about the attitude of the Iraqi prisoners. As it turned out, they weren’t hostile, because they had been forced to join the military at gunpoint.”

Pam’s unit also cared for civilians. “You don’t expect to do humanitarian work,” she says, “but we did. How could you not when a mother hands you her child and says ‘Please help’?”

Pam says Janssen for backed her “100 percent” while she was in the Middle East. “The company supported me emotionally and financially,” she says. “They maintained my salary. They maintained my position. And they sent many communications company-wide.”

For Pam, re-entry was easy. “I stayed connected on voice mail while I was away. We returned on Memorial Day, and some people took the summer off. But I went to work on Tuesday. It was good to get back.”

Vietnam veteran **Frank Russell**, director of institutional accounts, was just 17 when he joined the Navy in 1966. As a gunner’s mate on a landing ship tank, Frank cruised through the Caribbean and around Norway, Sweden and England. Then he was assigned to Vietnam. When he came home, it was with two Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star.

“I was on PDR – Patrol Boat Rescue,” says Frank. “Our job was to transport SEAL teams and escort barge traffic in the Saigon River and Mekong Delta.” During his nine months “in country,” Frank was wounded twice. The second time was very serious.

“Our squadron was ambushed by the North Vietnamese during the relief of Hue City in the Tet Offensive,” says Frank. “Between the six crewmen on our gunboat, we took 13 wounds. Everyone was hit, and most were hit twice.” Frank was wounded in the chest, lung, liver and back. “But we were able to fulfill our mission and take wounded Marines down to the aid station.”

Frank remembers raw fear. “You are terrified to the point where you act without thought. It’s a matter of survival.” To this day he appreciates small things that others take for granted. “A hot meal, a hot shower, soap that lathers, and privacy. Things like that. And I used to be a picky eater, but it’s amazing what you’ll eat when you’re hungry enough.”

Despite his ordeal, Frank calls his military service “one of the best experiences I ever had. At 17, I had a skull full of mush and a chip on my shoulder. It was a maturing experience.” Today he treasures friendships forged under fire. “The depth of the friendships you make is incredible,” he explains. “Other than my wife, I’ve not duplicated relationships like that.”

After being patched up, Frank left the Navy and continued his education. “My military experience showed me that I’d rather work with the muscle between my ears than the muscle in my back.” He then worked as a parole officer and as superintendent of a correctional facility before joining Janssen in 1987.

Frank says that his military service holds him in good stead today. “It teaches you to think beyond the end of your nose – to look into the future and see how decisions and actions will serve us years down the road. And I’m still a pretty good shot with a rifle, too.”

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