



A CHAPLAIN'S MIRACULOUS RECOVERY

In December of 2004, Army Chaplain Jeff Jay (M.Div. 2000) faced the most difficult trial of his life. His story is one of amazing hope.

During the few months I was in Iraq, I'd been shot at and witnessed mortar attacks and car bombings. I had gotten used to sleeping through distant explosions.

When traveling through Iraq, it was much safer to fly than to drive. On the evening of December 29, 2004, we boarded a plane and took off—the engines laboring to speed us beyond the range of small arms fire and

mortars. The flight would be short, just 30 to 45 minutes. I must have fallen asleep.

Two weeks later I woke up in a military hospital in Germany. To this day, and perhaps this is a blessing, I have no memory of those intervening days.

I learned that the plane had landed on a damaged runway, skidding across a massive hole in the pavement and shearing off the underbelly of the plane. I

was found 12 feet from the plane severely injured. Doctors didn't expect me to survive the day. The list of my injuries was five pages long, single spaced.

The right side of my skull was crushed. An object had penetrated the left side and blood gushed from the wound. The sounds of the exploding engines had ruptured both eardrums. Lacerations covered my head and face. My nose was broken and my



left eye badly damaged. Several ribs were broken and my liver was punctured. They said I had extreme traumatic brain injuries and offered no hope of recovery.

For five days, doctors tried to stabilize me at an Army hospital in Germany. They asked my wife to prepare to fly over to be with me in case their efforts failed. Amazingly, they didn't fail, and they sent me on to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in D.C.

When my wife of 14 years, Lisa, and oldest daughter, Kourtney, arrived at the ICU, they didn't recognize my unconscious body. After verifying it was me, all they had energy to do was to sit down and cry.

Some time later, Lisa touched me gently on the shoulder. My swollen eyes opened slightly and I smiled. For the next several hours, Lisa and Kourtney talked excitedly with sporadic responses from me as I slipped in and out of consciousness.

It dawned on Lisa that I had not said her name since she had awakened me. She asked me to look at her, "Do you know who I am?"

I responded, "Charlie Brown." Lisa and Kourtney laughed for the first time since the accident. Lisa asked again. "Rumpelstiltskin." Only Kourtney laughed.

Lisa began to wonder how much of me she was going to get back, "Jeff, I really need to know if you know who I am?"

I must have realized my comedic timing was in poor taste, because I finally responded, "Lisa."

Seven days after the crash, I began my full recovery. The head trauma had knocked out my short-term memory. I remembered everything from the distant past, but not the color of the plastic cone the therapist had just put behind his back. The hospital staff told us they were recommending medical retirement based on the extent of my injuries and memory loss. I fought the recommendation and was sent home, to be evaluated again after three months.

At home I discovered the true extent of my brain injury. It negated my emotions, sense of smell and taste, craving for food and messed up my vision. I started speech and physical therapy.

Three months later, back at Walter Reed, they planned five days of tests to determine the status of my mind. At the end of the first day the head neurologist said, "Captain Jay, we are so sorry..." The doctor was smiling at me. He said again, "We are so sorry to have wasted your time. Though you aren't through the woods yet, you have made it much further than we expected. See these three people tomorrow and go home." I was stunned. "Just don't go jumping from airplanes or deploying to combat for a while."

The healing and recovery continued for 14 months. I had spent the past year trying to get back to what I was without realizing that I had become someone else—I was a different person because of the experience God had entrusted to me. God wants to use this story to inspire many more people. Now, I just want to be faithful to tell the story of God's amazing power to heal and preserve.

Praise the Lord!

Chaplain Jay was deployed to Iraq for a second tour in September 2006.