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## Veterans Gain Clarity, Control Over PTSD through Adventure Sport

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## **Veterans Gain Clarity, Control Over PTSD Through Adventure Sport**

### **By: Jeremy Dobbins**

**Photo Caption:** C. Michael Fairman and Jeremy Dobbins

**Photo Credit:** Will Davis/WYSO

*Today our Veterans' Voices series concludes with a conversation about the therapeutic benefits of adventure sports. Marines Corp veteran and Wright State student Jeremy Dobbins of Springfield spoke to fellow Marines Corp veteran C. Michael Fairman about coping with PTSD, and climbing the world's tallest mountain.*

*Transcript:*

**Jeremy Dobbins (JD):** When you were on top of Mount Everest, I'm sure you felt a big sense of accomplishment. Did you have a moment of clarity on top of the mountain?

**C. Michael Fairman (CMF):** Oh, you see that summit and you're empowered and the adrenaline is flowing and it's straight up and I couldn't move fast enough. So to finally crest that summit and there's no more ground, everything is falling away from you, and to realize, I am on Mount Everest. Stop and look around because you will probably never be there again, so take it all in. Clarity? Absolutely.

**JD:** It sounds like climbing is very therapeutic for you.

**CMF:** It fits with the lifestyle of most people who were in the military. You got a team, uniforms, we trade our rifles in for an ice axe. It's the one tool that never leaves your side. So it's kind of the same thing that goes on. Everything has a consequence. And for us, the struggle of climbing a mountain, the difficulties, all of that, absolutely mirrors dealing daily with mental health issues like PTSD.

**JD:** Dealing with my own struggles and issues, I also suffer from PTSD. I don't really suffer, I deal with it on a daily basis. I realized at one point that the things that happened in my life were going to define me, or I was going to define them. At some point, I felt like I was going to have to die and just get it over with, or get up and carry on.

**CMF:** I have a tattoo on the side of my arm and it's got the number of veterans we lose, and there's a minus one to remind me that I do not want to become one of those statistics. And I have to make that decision. My wife asked me, "How do I know that you're not going to attempt to take your life again?" I said, "I'm a smart person. I can tell you and the VA what they want to hear." I know how to convince people that I'm going to be okay. I'm the one who has to decide whether I'm going to do that, or not.

**JD:** That's something that I've had to do a bunch of times. I step back from everything and take tally, I guess, inventory of everything in life. It's easy to forget about all the good things you have when there's a dark cloud over you, or you feel like there is.

**CMF:** I don't mind sharing my story. Some people might find it embarrassing, but I don't. That's my security blanket. Because the more people I have around that understand where I'm at and where I'm coming from, and my vulnerabilities, that's how we protect each other.

**JD:** You brought that flag today. Is that the flag you took up with you?

**CMF:** Yes. This flag came together when we started looking around, and its people we've know and lost to suicide. There's a brother and sister we added not long ago that took their lives together, both veterans. There's men, women, every era of war, going back to the Korea War. There's a young girl who was a victim of Military Sexual Trauma. There are over 8000 veteran suicides a year, and that's only 21 states reporting and that's not including Texas and California, big veteran-populated states. And it's only the cause of death listed as 'obvious suicide', so it doesn't include drug overdoses, or driving your truck into a wall, or all the other ways vets tend to self-destruct. So it's my way to show, as someone who's attempted to take his own life, that you can go from lying in bed with a gun in your mouth to reclaiming your life, and taking on any challenge. This flag goes on every major climb with me. It's in my pocket everywhere I go. If somebody asks me, I do not hesitate to pull it out, because I want people to remember their names.

*Marine Corp veteran C. Michael Fairman is the co-founder of Summit for Soldiers, a nonprofit group dedicated to re-establishing control and purpose in the lives of veterans through adventure and outdoor activities.*

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