

Hearing Loss Association of America

November/December 2017

hearingloss.org

Hearing Loss Magazine

**SPECIAL
VETERANS
ISSUE**

Sgt. 1st Class
David Schible is

**Fighting
the War
on
Hearing
Loss**



Fighting the War on

My name is David Schible and I am a Sergeant First Class in the United States Army. I serve as an infantryman, or foot soldier, with a specialization in Weapons and Tactics, and I am extremely proud of all that I have accomplished in my 19 years of service to our country.

I have a severe hearing loss, due mainly to the nature of my job as an infantryman. I also have tinnitus, which is a loud ringing in my ears, that I find very annoying. I can't sleep at night, have constant headaches and have trouble hearing people, with or without my hearing aids. But these daily struggles also make me stronger.

I can sometimes see the frustration on peoples' faces when I have to ask them to repeat themselves or if they think I am ignoring them. They don't understand that it's really because I can hear only certain sounds and miss most of what they are saying. I have learned to be patient and calm. I used to walk away embarrassed and angry because I couldn't handle the abrasive attitude of some folks. There were days I wished I could just be "cured" of my hearing loss and regain my hearing, but of course that's just wishful thinking. I hated myself at times because I wasn't like the majority of people who could hear.

But today it's different; I tell people my story and talk about how big of a problem hearing loss has become in the Armed Forces. I talk to them about hearing loss prevention and how hearing protection devices can save their careers. I don't want a service member to go through the same struggles I have faced. I am not a hero; I'm just leading a mission to fight the War on Hearing Loss.

The Beginning of the War

I joined the Army in the winter of 1998. As an infantryman I have held many positions, including gunner, team leader, squad leader, platoon sergeant, drill sergeant and ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) instructor.

I have been deployed three times—to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kuwait. Loud noise was always constant. I was deployed to Afghanistan from 2004 to 2005, and our unit went through some tough times. Our compound, Forward Observation Base (FOB) Cobra, was a hot target for enemy

attacks. We were mortared every night, there were constant firefights and many hours and miles were spent conducting mounted and dismounted patrols.

In 2006, I was deployed to Kuwait, then later to Iraq. Those 15 months were long, and our unit was constantly conducting patrols in the urbanized areas. When my unit returned to the States in late 2007, I decided to join the Special Forces.

I talked to the Special Forces recruiter and he told me I would need a waiver from an audiologist to be considered. The audiologic evaluation revealed I had a severe hearing loss. I was denied the waiver, which prevented me from entering the Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS) course, which is the first of four phases to become a Special Forces soldier. The audiologist also told me she was sending me for a consultation to be fitted for bilateral hearing aids. Then, without any remorse, she stated that I would be facing a separation from the Army within the next five years due to the severity of my hearing loss.

Needless to say, this was devastating news. But I was not going to let it stop me; I was determined to fight to prove that I could remain competitive and continue to serve, defending our great nation. And I did just that as an advocate for hearing loss.

When I was denied my waiver and could not move on to SFAS, I volunteered to go back to Iraq. Yet even though my decision to redeploy to Iraq was voluntary, I was denied because of my hearing loss.

There was a representative who cleared the soldiers to be deployed, but she would not stamp my packet, so the minute she was distracted I stamped my own packet and left. I would have felt useless if I didn't do one last deployment, and I hated that the audiologist told me I might possibly be separated from the Army.

Drill Sergeant (of the Year) Schible

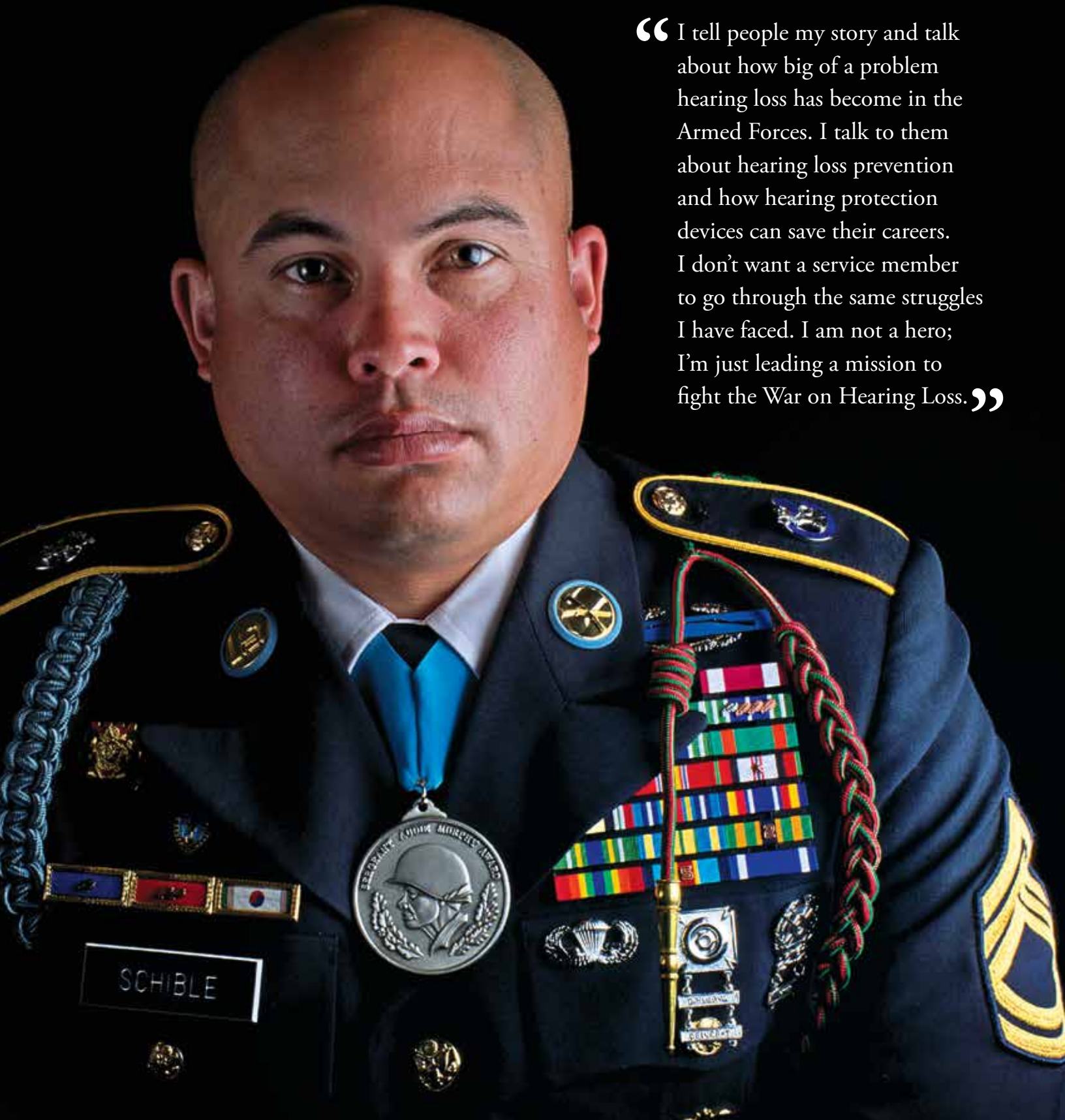
If I was facing the prospect of being separated I wanted to make sure I had the greatest impact I possibly could before I left. To me, that was by becoming a drill sergeant. Drill

continued on page 14

Hearing Loss

By David Schible

“ I tell people my story and talk about how big of a problem hearing loss has become in the Armed Forces. I talk to them about hearing loss prevention and how hearing protection devices can save their careers. I don't want a service member to go through the same struggles I have faced. I am not a hero; I'm just leading a mission to fight the War on Hearing Loss. ”



WAR ON HEARING LOSS *continued from page 12*

sergeants have the opportunity and ability to transform a civilian into a soldier. That's the impact I wanted to have. My goal was to be the best, and I was.

Due to Army regulations I would have to re-enlist for another four-year term in order to apply for drill sergeant duties. So when I got to Iraq in February 2008, I did just that.

When I arrived at the U.S. Drill Sergeant School at Fort Jackson, South Carolina I was initially denied entrance due to the severity of my hearing loss because it was considered a safety hazard. I had to convince the drill sergeant leaders that I was fully capable of performing this duty.

The Deputy Commandant, Sergeant Major Robert Maggard, heard my story and allowed me to attend. I promised him I would not fail him and that I would prove my ability to be an exceptional drill sergeant. But he had one request—I was to see the Fort Jackson audiologist before I started training.

I met with the audiologist, Major, now Lieutenant Colonel (LTC), Jillyen Curry-Mathis, and she immediately knew what had to be done. She signed off on my hearing profile, which cleared me to attend Drill Sergeant School.

In 2012, I competed in the Fort Jackson Drill Sergeant of the Year competition. The drill sergeants in this

competition were some of the most professional men I have ever met. The winner of the competition that year was Staff Sergeant, now Second Lieutenant (2LT), Jeff Heilman, who also wears hearing aids as he has a bilateral hearing loss.

After the competition, 2LT Heilman left Fort Jackson to become the top drill sergeant at Fort Eustis, Virginia. I was honored to be named the Fort Jackson Drill Sergeant of the Year when he left, which gave me the opportunity to serve with the Post Command Team.

I credit my First Sergeant, now Command Sergeant Major, Lamont Christian with teaching me everything there was to know about becoming a successful drill sergeant. I want to thank him for his mentorship (and secret handshakes!). I also want to thank Sergeant Major Maggard for listening to my story and giving me the opportunity to attend Drill Sergeant School. Without these two men I would not have achieved the level of success I have as a drill sergeant.

Lieutenant Colonel Jillyen Curry-Mathis— Mentor and Hero

LTC Curry-Mathis is passionate about her work and takes a great deal of pride in her job. I interacted with her about once a week, and as I got to know her better she asked if I would consider being only one of the few hearing program advocates for the Fort Jackson Basic Training Units. I answered “yes” without any hesitation.

A One-Man Army

David Schible's work on behalf of others doesn't end at the gates of Fort Stewart. Along with all he has done and accomplished for soldiers with hearing loss, he also spends a great deal of his personal time giving back to his local community.

David is the former president and now secretary of the Sergeant Audie Murphy Club, an elite nonprofit organization made up of the top two percent of the noncommissioned officers in the Army. The club does charity work for the homeless, helps the elderly, assists the handicapped, and works to provide a better life for everyone in the community. The Fort Stewart Chapter serves the community within Fort Stewart along with the cities of Hinesville and Savannah and other areas in Georgia, South Carolina and Florida.

Children are near and dear to David's heart. He volunteers at the Fort Stewart Child Development Center, assisting with games and fun activities, and visits local schools to read to children and speak to them about the values of life and learning. David is also involved with the Savannah Speech and Hearing Program, where he conducts audiometric evaluations on elementary and middle-school aged children to identify any type of hearing loss.

And it doesn't stop there.

After he witnessed a car accident in 2009, David wanted to do something to help stranded motorists, so he decided to offer roadside assistance to anyone who needs it. He outfitted his own truck with safety lights and other equipment, and when someone breaks down he will do whatever it takes to get them on their way, whether it's changing a tire, giving them fuel, even offering money if they can't afford a tow truck. David is also a volunteer firefighter with the Liberty County Fire Department and is on the board of his homeowner's association, giving countless hours to help improve the neighborhood, which is comprised of more than 95 percent military personnel and their families.

Between his service to our country, giving his time to children, volunteering in the community, and his work on behalf of soldiers with hearing loss, David is truly a one-man army. The world needs more David Schibles. **HLM**

As hearing program advocates, LTC Curry-Mathis taught us things such as how hearing loss occurs and the repercussions it could have in our military careers. I was given the opportunity to have Initial Entry Trainees (new recruits entering basic training) test different variations and provide feedback on the Tactical Communications and Protective System (TCAPS), which is a hearing protection system designed to minimize the effects of loud noise while still allowing soldiers to hear voices and softer sounds around them.

LTC Curry-Mathis was—and still is—on a mission to help protect the hearing of our service members. She wanted to show the entire Army how big of a problem hearing loss was among soldiers. Another major undertaking of hers was to document the stories of soldiers who wear hearing aids and prove to the Army that better hearing protection should be a priority.

To this day, LTC Curry-Mathis remains one of my greatest mentors and heroes. If it weren't for her, my service career would have ended much sooner than I planned.

The End of the Road. Or Is It?

In the summer of 2012, I was sent to the Medical Evaluation Board (MEB) because of my hearing loss. I was afraid my career was going to come to an end. I had done everything I possibly could to prove to the Army that I was fully capable of continuing my service to our country.

After the MEB does their evaluation the report gets sent to the Physical Evaluation Board (PEB), whose job is to determine whether or not a service member qualifies for Department of Defense (DoD) disability. The DoD found me unfit for duty, and offered me a severance of \$99,506. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) rated me at 80 percent for other service-connected injuries, but I was told that my monthly checks would pay the severance off until I could start receiving the monthly payments from the VA.

I was not happy with this by any means and my response was “No!” I could retire after 20 years of service, and I still had five years left. However, this decision meant I was only being separated, not retired; I wanted to finish those last five years so I could retire. So maybe there was still a chance. I spoke to the PEB Liaison Office representative and she told me I could appeal the decision, but my chances of it being reversed were slim. But I was determined.

Having worked for the Fort Jackson Post Command Team I had built great relationships with every brigade and battalion commander and command sergeant major. I decided to request a letter of recommendation from the majority of them for my appeal. It worked! The decision to separate me was reversed, and I was approved to stay in the Army so I could retire at 20 years of service.

continued on page 16



David speaks to every arriving soldier at Fort Stewart to educate them about hearing loss. (© Johanna Hood)



David with the Fort Stewart hearing program team: (back row, l to r) audiology technicians Jimmy Conforme, Natalie Cepeda and Frank James; (front row, l to r) ear, nose and throat technician specialist Brittany Cureton, David, and audiologists 1LT Marisa Ragonesi and CPT Jennifer Noetzel (© Johanna Hood)



David and a fellow soldier with local children during his third deployment to Iraq

WAR ON HEARING LOSS *continued from page 15*

Now What?

At that moment, I felt relieved. But the question was, “What do I do now?” The answer was the Army ROTC.

I left Fort Jackson and served with the San Diego State University Army ROTC program for two years. During my time there I had the opportunity to train, mentor and instruct some of the finest Army ROTC cadets in the nation. In fact, some of my students ranked in the top 10 in their year category out of more than 5,000 cadets across the entire ROTC program. It was truly an honor and privilege to be able to give them the tools necessary to become successful future military leaders.

One morning I received a phone call from the U.S. Army Cadet Command’s 8th Brigade command sergeant major regarding a change of duty station. He told me I was being transferred to the 3rd Infantry Division at Fort Stewart, Georgia. I was thrilled! It also meant we would be closer to family as my wife Michaela is from Bluffton, South Carolina, which is only 70 miles away.

When I was going through inprocessing at Fort Stewart, it was mandatory to receive a hearing loss prevention briefing. As I listened to the audiology technician,



David and his wife Michaela

Natalie Cepeda, discuss the severity of hearing loss, I heard soldiers in the back having sidebar conversations and ignoring the briefing. This made me angry and uncomfortable. I went home that night, sat in my garage and thought about what I could do to help the hearing program. Then a lightbulb went off.

Hear Me Out—It Could Save Your Career!

I thought if I shared my story with soldiers I could show them firsthand how serious a problem hearing loss is. I needed to warn them about the repercussions of hearing loss and hopefully prevent another soldier from being separated from the Army because of it.

I spoke to Jimmy Conforme, an audiology technician, about my idea. He referred me to the audiologist, First Lieutenant Danielle McCall. She loved the idea! In fact, Dr. McCall recommended that I become certified as a hearing program officer, which would allow me to instruct and educate soldiers and give me the authority to enforce the Hearing Program guidelines. She also suggested I become certified as an Occupational Hearing Conservationist (COHC) through the Council for Accreditation in Occupational Hearing Conservation (CAOHC). The CAOHC is a professional organization that trains and certifies people who are working to prevent noise-induced hearing loss, whether it’s in civilian employment settings or in the DoD and military.



Left: David during his first deployment to Afghanistan



Right: Drill Sergeant Schible

“My personal mission is to use my story to send a clear and strong message to other soldiers about the repercussions of hearing loss and how it could affect their careers.”

Learning so much in these courses drove me to want to do more. The Fort Stewart Hearing Program is the most actively engaged clinic on the installation. The professionalism of the team is second-to-none. We ensure the highest level and quality of service, whether we're performing hearing screenings or teaching hearing loss prevention courses.

I wear state-of-the-art hearing aids and my life is better because of them. When I talk to soldiers about how sophisticated hearing aids have become they typically want a set. But I am also honest, reminding them that hearing aids will not replace your hearing, they mainly amplify the sound, and that they might not work if they get wet or damaged.

Every audiologist I have had the pleasure of working with at Fort Stewart has made a huge impact on me. Being part of this team makes me feel like I am making a difference too. When I speak to soldiers they instantly tune in as soon as I tell them my story, how hearing loss actually occurs, and its repercussions. Because of the hard work of our audiologist and the entire hearing program team, we have seen a significant decrease in the number of soldiers with hearing loss at Fort Stewart.

Today I continue to serve as an advocate for hearing loss prevention in the Fort Stewart Hearing Program. I speak to nearly every arriving soldier to educate them and to clear up the many misconceptions about hearing loss. I also have the opportunity to speak in hearing loss prevention courses to discuss the importance of my role as a hearing program officer.

The mission of the program is to identify soldiers with a potential hearing loss and educate them about hearing loss prevention. My personal mission is to use my story to send a clear and strong message about the repercussions of hearing loss and how it could affect their careers.

LTC Curry-Mathis once made a statement that has really stuck with me. She said, “We conduct contingency operations around the world. We are at war in some of these countries, but there is an unfamiliar war that we are also exposed to, and that is the War on Hearing Loss.” **HLM**



David with “Soldier for a Day” Richard Culliver

My Toughest Mission Yet

By David Schible

In 2013, I had the opportunity to grant a wish for a 7-year-old boy named Richard Culliver. Richard had been diagnosed with diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma (DIPG), an aggressive and inoperable tumor in the brain stem. Fort Jackson Post Command Sergeant Major (CSM) Kevin Benson gave me a mission: to make this young man's wish to become a soldier for a day come true. I got right to work, spearheading a two-day event for Richard to go through basic combat training.

Richard arrived at Fort Jackson in December 2013. After he was presented a custom-made uniform and sworn in, he was ready to begin training. He went through several “training exercises,” including physical training, operating a flight simulator, firing a weapons system and sitting in helicopters.

U.S. Drill Sergeant School Commandant CSM Michael McCoy wanted to challenge Richard on an obstacle course. He and Richard went through the mud together and enjoyed every minute of it. After each training exercise Richard was awarded a badge or patch to mark his achievement.

On the second day Richard graduated in front of more than 4,000 friends, family and service members. It was a very special experience for him.

Richard passed away on August 24, 2014. He was buried in his uniform with every badge and patch he earned. Richard was an inspiration to me and so many others. His story reminds us that life is too short and we should never give up. Play hard to the very end and dreams can become reality. I will always miss and love Richard Culliver. **HLM**