Keeping the conversation alive

PTSDJournal partners with DAV to maintain focus on invisible wounds

From left: Medal of Honor recipient and Marine veteran Dakota Meyer; Past National Commander Dave Riley; Army veteran Prudential Insurance Co.’s Vice President of Veterans Initiatives Jim Beamesderfer; and PTSDJournal founder and Marine veteran Christian Benedetto Jr. led the discussion about military members and the difficulties they have transitioning out of the military during the Invisible Wounds Conference in Newark, N.J.

As a young Marine infantryman, Christian Benedetto Jr. was awake for four consecutive days of combat operations during
the opening salvos of the ground war phase of Operation Desert Storm, which changed his life forever.

“I was in the second armored vehicle to breach the berm on the Iraq border as part of the 2nd Marine Division,” said Benedetto, founder of PTSDJournal. “Being part of the tip of the spear, getting stuck in a minefield as well as many other things were all contributing factors to my eventual [post-traumatic stress disorder] diagnosis.”

PTSDJournal recently partnered with DAV to support both organizations’ shared mission of ensuring veterans can access the mental health care they’ve earned. The partnership will also help work to ensure PTSD remains in the national conversation.

“Our goal is to educate people who have PTSD, their loved ones and the rest of the country,” said Benedetto. “A little knowledge goes a long way, and we aim to remove the stigma of PTSD via education.”

Benedetto, a DAV life member, sought DAV’s help in getting care and benefits after trying to tackle PTSD on his own for nearly 20 years.

“When I finally came to accept my PTSD in 2013, DAV helped me navigate the VA system, which is getting better daily, but having a guild of supporters personally helps me,” he said. “I still email, call and visit my local DAV office in Newark, N.J., with questions.”

Benedetto invited DAV’s support for the inaugural Invisible Wounds Conference, a daylong discussion focused on PTSD, which included a panel discussion on military members transitioning to civilian life. DAV Past National Commander Dave Riley spoke openly about the internal struggle many veterans face when dealing with effects of trauma, but also how families suffer as well.
“My wife, Yvonne, was the one there who had to make the life-or-death decision to amputate all four of my limbs,” said Riley. “She has spent 20 years of her life devoted to her role as my caregiver. When I suffer, she suffers. But people tend to forget about the families.”

Riley went on to remind the conference attendees that although his wounds are visible, many veterans return home with wounds that are invisible, and it’s essential to continue this discussion to prevent any veteran or family member from slipping through the cracks of the system.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health and the National Center for PTSD, the disorder may occur after living through any dangerous event, such as a bad car accident or a natural disaster.

Benedetto advises service members and fellow veterans to not enter the mind-set that PTSD happens to “other people.”

“There is no shame or stigma to PTSD,” he said. “You may have scars, but it’s because you are stronger than what tried to break you.”