

A Conversation With A01 John Love

By Dan Steber

I had the chance to talk with the victim in this horrific story. Petty Officer Love is married with two children and awaiting the birth of his third. Since the mishap, he has been working at the Health and Promotions Office and is in therapy at Boone Clinic, Little Creek amphibious base. He is recovering well from his wounds.

Mech: Tell me about that day. How did it start and what do you remember?

Love: Flight ops had been cancelled and we started to break down the BDUs. Pretty much a normal day. I was working with one shipmate, and three other ordies were nearby. I remember putting the BDU into a storage crate and heard a loud explosion but didn't see a flash. It sounded like a shotgun, and I didn't feel pain immediately. I guess I was stunned. Everything seemed to go to black and white.

Mech: You lost your color vision?

Love: Yes, and the doctors tell me that's because of the drastic drop in blood pressure.

Mech: When did you notice your injuries?

Love: I stumbled away from the bomb build-up area, feeling pressure on my jaw and fluids dripping down my face. It felt swollen. I reached up to feel it and immediately knew it was bad. Someone stopped me and told me to lie down. That's when the pain started. My face had been hit with red phosphorus, and I told the people gathered that it was burning and hurt.

Mech: How long was it before medical arrived?

Love: Well, the squadron's corpsman happened to be in the area. He came out to me almost immediately. I never lost consciousness.

Mech: What was the first thing that crossed your mind when this happened?



Love: The first thing was a cuss and then I thought about my family. My wife is pregnant with our third child. I tried to think about how I had let this happen, but then the pain hit. I was on the ground, and then medical arrived.

Mech: Tell me about your initial medical treatment, surgery and rehab.

Love: The corpsman did what he could until the ambulance arrived. They shot me with morphine, and transported me to Virginia Beach General. I had surgery to install two metal plates in

my jaw, to fix muscle and nerve damage, and to close the wounds to my face. They had to wire my jaw shut, and I've been in therapy ever since.

Mech: What is your day like now?

Love: I work in the Health-Promotions Office at Boone Clinic and receive daily hyperbaric treatment. I continue with therapy to get ready for more surgery.

Mech: More surgery? Why?

Love: I essentially have been left with Bell's Palsy. The side of my face droops because the nerves and muscles are shot. The doctors are planning additional surgery to get more function back, but I have to get stronger before they attempt to repair my muscles and nerves. A big concern still is the infection caused by the red phosphorus. So I'm not over the hill, yet.

Mech: Why did you want to tell your story?

Love: It may be cliché and obvious, but I don't

want another shipmate to have to go through what I did. I don't want another family to go through what mine has. If I can tell my story, maybe someone else won't make a mistake. I want people to learn from what I did. ✨



Photograph by LCdr. Greg J. Burgess