



# Building Homes for Heroes

## Staff Sergeant Aaron Hale



## Santa Rosa Beach, Florida





# US Army SSG Aaron Hale

## Hero Story



Army Staff Sergeant Aaron Hale was severely injured in Afghanistan when an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated. Hale, of the 760th EOD (explosive ordnance disposal), served a tour in Iraq and two tours in Afghanistan. EOD technicians are the Army's tactical and technical explosives experts, who are trained to destroy and disable unexploded ordnance, improvised explosive devices and weapons of mass destruction. Their activities were portrayed in graphic detail in the film *The Hurt Locker*. SSG Hale's unit completed 1,100 counter-IED missions, destroying more than 20,000 pounds of enemy explosives. SSG Hale estimates he disabled as many as 50 explosive devices during his last tour in Afghanistan.

On December 8, 2011, SSG Hale approached an IED, which he had worked on from a distance using a robotic device. He was about 30 feet away when it exploded, sending shrapnel everywhere. Every bone in Hale's face was broken, and he had severe burns to his face and upper thighs. His right eye was ripped completely out in the blast, his right eye lids were fused together from the severity of the burns, his left eye exploded leaving half in the socket, and his left eye lids were torn. Exploratory eye surgery to remove shrapnel and assess the extent of his injuries concluded that he is completely blind. SSG Hale's skull was cracked and leaking spinal fluid, his carotid artery was nearly severed with shrapnel piercing it, both eardrums were completely blown out, his sinuses were crushed, and his nostrils were torn.

Despite suffering severe injuries and being left sightless, SSG Hale, who landed on his hands and knees after being sent airborne, felt to see if all his limbs were intact, and then got up and tried to find his way back to his unit. A medevac unit arrived 10 minutes later, and SSG Hale passed out.

Hale was quickly transported to Bagram Air Force Base for treatment, then on to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, before finally arriving at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. After a month of treatment at Walter Reed, he was transported to the James A. Haley Veterans Hospital in Tampa, Florida, and then to the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center in Augusta, Georgia which specializes in blind rehabilitation. SSG Hale's recovery has been remarkable. The spinal leak from his brain is closed, he has regained his hearing, his face is healing nicely, and he has graduated from the blind rehabilitation center.

SSG Hale received the Purple Heart, Bronze Star, two Army Good Conduct Medals, Army Achievement Medal, two Navy Achievement Medals, Joint Meritorious Unit Award, Navy Unit Commendation, Navy Excellence, Navy Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, two Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medals, Naval Sea Service Deployment Ribbon, Navy Enlisted Surface Warfare Pin, NATO Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, Iraq Campaign Medal, and five NCO Non-Commissioned Officer Professional Development Ribbons.

SSG Hale, his wife, Kelly, and their four children, Sheldon, Bailey, McKenzie, and Cameron have been gifted a home in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida.



# US Army SSG Aaron Hale

## Kelly's Story



In December of 2011, Kelly Hale received a horrifying late night knock on her door; the one that every spouse of a deployed soldier dreads. The men in uniform who informed her of her husband's incident stayed by Kelly's side for hours and she waited for updates on SSG Aaron Hale's condition. She was unsure whether or not her husband would survive. The lives of the family had suddenly changed forever.

When she first saw him in Bethesda, he was unrecognizable. His face and head were swollen beyond belief, he was bloodied, and the cuts and burns were horrendous. Thankfully, SSG Hale's prognosis was good. After a month at Walter Reed, and two weeks at the Veterans Hospital in Tampa, he was sent to the to a VA Medical Center in Augusta, Georgia which specializes in blind rehabilitation.

Just when it appeared that the worst was over, Kelly's life took an unexpected turn as she settled her family in at The Augusta CNVAMC Fisher House, a home away from home for families of military service members. A resident at the Fisher House noticed a lesion on Kelly's collarbone and insisted she get it checked out. Before she knew it, she was being told by doctors that surgery would be performed hours later. The result was melanoma, the most dangerous type of skin cancer. Her cancer was at Stage II.

Kelly was numb. Her thoughts immediately went to her husband and her four children. Her youngest child hasn't reached the age of two. Three surgeries later, Kelly is in remission, but she still faces numerous tests and may need additional surgical procedures.

She sees her husband's injury as an example of divine direction. If not for SSG Hale being severely injured in Afghanistan, she would have been dressed for the brutal winter at Fort Drum, NY, just miles from the border of Canada, and her lesion would not have been seen.





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## Hero Story



SSG Hale hitting golf balls in EOD uniform in Afghanistan.





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SSG Hale with wife Kelly. This was his first time back in uniform after the blast.





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## Hero Story



CAMERON



BAILEY



MAKENZIE



SHELDON





# US Army SSG Aaron Hale

## Hero Story



SSG Hale playing with Cameron.





# US Army SSG Aaron Hale

## Hero Story



Cooking is one of SSG Hale's passions.





# US Army SSG Aaron Hale

## Hero Story



SSG Hale is led by a blind rehabilitation specialist at a golf event.





# US Army SSG Aaron Hale

## Hero Story



Aaron & Kelly Hale

