

Operation MEND: The Right To Look Human

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Los Angeles, CA -

(FOX 11) Wounded in war, Army Ranger Michael Schlitz (Ret.) is lucky to be alive. He credits modern medicine for saving his life after an IED explosion in Iraq. He credits Operation Mend for rebuilding him.

His plastic surgeon, Dr. Timothy Miller, literally had to build him a new face. Surgery on Schlitz was beyond difficult. Burns over 75 percent of his body also left no circulation in his forehead and with that the first three surgeries to rebuild his nose did not take. After every operation the patient has to heal and the scars soften. It's been three years since they first met. Miller adds "he's tough. He's a Ranger."

Operation Mend is also about healing the inside. Miller points out "he was blown up, suffered incredible pain, with burns in which he could have died at any moment." Then there's the psychological trauma. Dr. Miller says it took time for the best of Schlitz to surface.

Dr. Miller has worked on the severest of war wounded. His specialty is plastic surgery. Miller estimates fifteen-thousand Americans were injured by IED's in Iraq. He knows there are many more in need of Operation Mend.

Operation Mend got its start in 2007. UCLA is partnered with Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio which deals with severe burns. The UCLA program has helped about 75 members of the military. Their photos, many with disfigured faces, are on full

display on the program's website. It all began with facial reconstruction and grew from there. He adds, getting the injured out quickly has also changed the nature of surviving war wounds.

After 80-plus surgeries there is reason to celebrate. A surgery in March was among the last for Schlitz and he now has a nose. Says Miller "Oh yeah. He does. And I'm proud of it!"

Go to our website to learn more about Operation Mend. To donate, volunteer, become a Buddy Family or if you know someone from the military in need.

<http://operationmend.ucla.edu/>

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