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Operation Mend Helps Injured Military Members

FONTANA, Calif. (CBS) -- Marine Staff Sergeant Octavio Sanchez considers himself lucky to be alive. Six years ago, while serving in Iraq, his squad rolled over a roadside bomb: "It launched the vehicle about 40 feet...Three of us made it out alive...One of my marines told me I was engulfed from head to toe."

The father of 4 suffered third degree burns over 70 percent of his face and body.

"I just said please do whatever you can to save his life," his wife, Vanette, said.

Military doctors amputated one of his hands, and some fingers on the other one. After several skin grafts, he went home ... healed, but badly scarred. Sanchez thought there was nothing more he could do, until he heard about [Operation Mend](#), a unique program that's helping mend veterans with disfiguring wounds.

The UCLA program provides reconstructive surgery to service members at no cost.

Dr. Timothy Miller with the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center said, "They've been through a tremendous amount I mean more than I think anyone can comprehend."

Using skin from the forehead, ear cartilage and a piece of rib, Dr. Timothy Miller, a veteran who served in Vietnam, was able to construct a nose, lips and cheeks for Sanchez.

Sanchez' wife said, "It looks amazing and it made all the difference."

"I'm at a loss for words, how do you talk about somebody who has done so much for us and has taken his time, and given back to us and given us a little peace of mind," Sanchez said.

He says [Operation Mend](#) not only made him look better it made him feel better about himself.

To date, 48 service members from all branches of the military have been helped by [Operation Mend](#).