



## WAR IS HELL (on fertility)

Army Captain Derrick Carver, 28, doesn't know how long he was lying in the Afghan desert, his legs destroyed by an IED. But he did have plenty of time to think about his first question for the medic. "How's my dick look?" he remembers asking. "My scrotum had to be cut open because the trauma of the blast was filling it with blood."

The Ranger-trained Carver was leading his outfit on a dismounted patrol to, ironically, clear IEDs from an area where U.S. troops were soon to open a school for 2,000 children. "We were trying to improve the Afghan children's lives," he says. "And now I'm not even sure I can have children."

He still carries tiny metal shards in one testicle and has five pieces of shrapnel "the size of a pea or larger" embedded in his penis. "Two of those pieces are actually in the tip," he says. "So you can imagine, you know, you have residual metal in the tip of your penis... well, there is a lot of involvement with that in sex." The trauma to his testicles has also severely compromised his sperm quality.

If Carver and his wife hope to conceive, they'll need to use in vitro fertilization. The problem: Tricare, the military-affiliated health-care provider for active-duty soldiers and veterans and their dependents, will cover the diagnosis and treatment of causes of infertility, but not assistance with fertilization treatment.

IVF remains an expensive proposition for a partially disabled veteran. Carver says the VA offered him a discounted rate—\$6,000, about half of what a private citizen would pay. "Funds won't be allocated to anybody who needs help conceiving a child regardless of the reason," he says. "I was told off the record that the congressional mandate is in place as a compromise that keeps the federal government neutral

on pro-life, pro-choice issues. It's the tragic, dirty secret of Tricare. It's like, 'Hey, thanks for playing the game. Sorry you got blown up.'"

Carver's other wounds are extensive: He lost his left leg almost to the pelvis, and about 50 percent of his right thigh. His suffered a serious shrapnel wound to his left elbow, the index finger on his right hand had to be partially amputated, and the pinkie and index finger on his left hand were fused to their neighboring digits to form, as he says with a gentle laugh, "a kind of Texas hook-'em-horns sign, if you know what I mean. Then I have a Harry Potter scar on my forehead."

But he remains focused on what he considers his most serious wounds: those to his genitals. He is growing increasingly embittered about the lack of compensation on the part of the army and the VA for reproductive malfunctions caused by war trauma. "It makes no sense," Carver says. "I'm 28 years old. I made a conscious effort not to have a baby for 27 years. And now they're telling me the federal government will subsidize only part of the cost of our in vitro? It's a \$6,000 coin flip. If it doesn't work, then we have to do it again." IVF success rates average less than 50 percent.

"My wife and I always talked about having kids," he says. But they delayed, in part because he didn't want to leave a pregnant wife behind when he deployed to Afghanistan. "Now that it's a question mark, who's to say my wife won't divorce me? And who could blame her? It wouldn't be the first time injuries ended a soldier's relationship."

You can be an advocate for men like Carver: Visit [urologyhealth.org/outreach/advocacy.cfm](http://urologyhealth.org/outreach/advocacy.cfm) and ask your rep in Congress to support HR 1612. The bill would establish a national commission on urotrauma to help improve treatment of soldiers' genital injuries and fertility issues.

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