

# WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A BATTLE BUDDY

By Specialist James V. Dunz

*The following story was relayed to me about a Soldier named Eddie. It underscores the importance of Army policy in supporting your battle buddy.*

One weekend many years ago when I was a young Soldier, I saw a fellow Soldier (who I soon learned was Eddie) packing all his belongings into his car. It looked as if he were leaving. I thought to myself, Why would anyone be packing up all his stuff? Since we were in the Army, it was not as though we could just go home whenever we wanted to.

As I was watching him, I saw some other Soldiers going toward him. They started picking on him and making fun of him—pushing Eddie around and knocking some things out of his hands. Then they tripped him, and he landed in the dirt. Poor Eddie looked up, and I saw a terrible sadness in his eyes. My heart went out to him. I walked quickly over to him to see if I could help.

As I pulled him to his feet, he looked at me and said, “Thanks.” A big smile transformed his face then—one of those smiles that shows real gratitude. I helped him pick up his gear and asked where he was from. I was surprised to learn that he was from my home state and asked him why I had never seen him before. He told me he hadn’t been in the Army that long. As we talked, I helped him carry his belongings to his car. Normally, I would not have hung out with a boot private like him, but as it turned out, he was a pretty good guy. In fact, the more I got to know Eddie, the more I liked him. I invited him to hang out with me and some of my friends over the weekend.

On Monday morning, I saw Eddie in the parking lot, taking everything out of his car and back to his room. I stopped him and said, “Eddie, you are going to really build some serious muscles moving all your stuff back and forth like this!” He just laughed and handed me some of it.

Over the next few years, Eddie and I became battle buddies. Even though I left the Army while Eddie continued his Service career, we remained friends. Years later, I was invited to Eddie’s retirement ceremony. On that day, Eddie was expected to say a few words. He looked great—one of those guys who really found himself in the military. I was proud of Eddie.

I could see that he was nervous about his speech. So I smacked him on the back and said, “Hey, big guy, you’ll be

okay!” He looked at me, smiled, and said, “Thanks, battle.” He cleared his throat and began: “Retirement is a time to thank those who helped you make it through all the tough years: your parents, your family, even your sergeants—but mostly your friends. I am here to tell all of you that being a battle buddy to someone is the best gift you can give him.”

Then Eddie started telling the story of how we first met. He explained that he had planned on taking his life that weekend. He talked of how he had cleaned out his room and carried his stuff to his car, so that his family wouldn’t have

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to do it later. I just sat there, looking at my battle buddy with disbelief. He looked hard at me and gave me a little smile. “Thankfully,” he said, “I was saved. My battle buddy, who is here today, saved me from doing the unspeakable.” I heard the gasp go through the crowd as he told us all about his weakest moment. I saw his family looking at me and smiling that same grateful smile; not until that moment did I realize its depth.

We should never underestimate the power of our actions. With one small gesture, we can change a person’s outlook...or frame of reference...or prospects. So what does it mean to be a battle buddy to someone? It could mean

# Have the Courage to Help a Buddy

**“One suicide is one too many.”**

Kenneth O. Preston  
Sergeant Major of the Army

**Talk to your Chaplain or a  
Behavioral Health Professional or  
call Military OneSource**

**1-800-342-9647**

[www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com)

USACHPPM

Photo courtesy U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine

saving a life. So take advantage of every opportunity to make a positive impact on others. You can make a profound difference; just look around and you'll find a way. 

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**Note:** If you need help, your battle buddy may be your nearest and most valuable source of support. In difficult moments, always be there for your buddy. You can sustain each other through stress, loss, and other trauma by showing you care. If you would like to talk to someone else, call any of the three following hotlines—available 24 hours a day to help you. Just remember, no Soldier stands alone.<sup>1</sup> In the Army's ACE Suicide Intervention Program, the acronym guides actions to take with a buddy to prevent suicide:

**ACE** (Ask your buddy, Care for your buddy, Escort your buddy).<sup>2</sup>

- Military OneSource, 1-800-342-9647. Offers 6 free counseling sessions to Service members and their families. <[www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com)>
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255). Calls are routed to the closest crisis center in your area. <[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)>
- National Hopeline Network, 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433). Calls are connected to the nearest certified crisis center. <[www.hopeline.com](http://www.hopeline.com)>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>U. S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, Directorate of Health Promotion and Wellness Suicide Prevention Resources and Services, <<https://www.us.army.mil/suite/portal/index.jsp>>

<sup>2</sup>ACE Suicide Intervention Tipcard, “ACE Suicide Intervention (SI) Program,” <<http://phc.amedd.army.mil/home>>