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# Area dentists team up to give Iraq War veteran a reason to smile



**The team works on Adam Taylor's dental surgery.**  
*Courtesy of Salute Inc.*

**After and before**  
*Courtesy of Salute Inc.*

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**Daily Herald correspondent**

For one returning veteran and Purple Heart recipient, with two tours in Iraq and one in Afghanistan under his belt, the stars finally aligned.

His story -- losing his teeth after being exposed to radiation in Iraq -- drew a pair of former dental school classmates to work together again on one of their most challenging cases.

During a tour in Iraq, Adam Taylor was posted near a facility, which, he says, exposed him and his 14-member unit to dangerous levels of radiation. He says every soldier in that unit has developed serious health problems.

In Taylor's case, his teeth disintegrated.

Enter Dr. James McShane, a dentist in Elk Grove Village, and Dr. William Nickel, an oral surgeon in Northbrook, who attended Loyola University Dental School together in the 1970s.

Both have done extensive international traveling on dental mission trips since getting established. McShane is a member of the Alexian Brothers Medical Center Dental Associates, who travels to Honduras with the Global Medical Brigade.

Nickel retired from the Navy as a full colonel before going into private practice. He travels on medical missions every year, including for El Nino Rey, which helps children in Guerrero, Mexico. El Nino Rey was founded by Fr. Matt Foley, now pastor of St. James Church in Arlington Heights.

That's where this story picks up.

Foley attended a fundraiser for Salute Inc., the Palatine-based organization dedicated to helping returning military members and their families. He sat beside one of his parishioners and the co-founder of Salute, Mary Beth Beiersdorf, who told him Taylor's agonizing story.

Little did Beiersdorf know that Foley, a veteran himself who came to St. James after four tours in Afghanistan, had traveled on 27 dental missions as part of El Nino Rey.

"I told her I knew some dentists who could help," Foley said. "A soldier needed help. It was as simple as that. Hey, we fly all over the world helping people like this, why not help someone here?"

Taylor and his mother drove from their out of state home for the first of what would be two, eight-hour visits.

"His mouth was a complete disaster," McShane says. "The teeth just disintegrated. There wasn't a tooth in his head that didn't need to be fixed."

McShane did the preliminary, general dentistry work, cleaning him up and preparing him for the oral surgery and dental implants.

"We're so lucky to be here at Alexian Brothers," McShane added, "where we have access to the latest equipment and could pull together all these disciplines to make this happen."

Nickel capped the six teeth he could save, and inserted a series of titanium implants on each side, with temporary dentures in front. Once the implants fuse into the bone over the next six months, he will replace the prosthetic dentures with implants.

"It was pretty much a total restoration," Nickel said. "As an oral and maxillofacial surgeon, I see this all the time, but this was the first time from the result of serving in Iraq."

In addition to the extensive dental work, Salute Inc., was able to secure the implant systems -- donated by Nobel Biocare, based in Zurich, Switzerland, -- to complete Taylor's transformation.

"There are so many miracles in this story," says Beiersdorf.

Taylor, himself, describes the whole experience as "mind-blowing."

"I'd given up hope on getting my teeth fixed, until Salute got involved," Adam says. "Since then it has been one blessing after another."

He credits Foley for his divine intervention, as well as McShane and Nickel with keeping him comfortable during the procedure and transforming his looks. He also thanked Nobel Biocare for its donation of all the materials.

"I will be eternally in their debt for giving me back my smile -- and my self-esteem," Taylor adds. "It was a team effort and I was humbled by their care and compassion. They have changed my life forever."