

April 19, 2023

Submission to members of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs
Tony Macie

Dear The Canadian Senate Subcommittee on Veteran Affairs,

I am writing to provide my testimony on my experience with the legal trial I participated in, which involved using MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for my treatment-resistant PTSD.

Before delving into the trial, I would like to share some background information about myself.

I joined the US Army after completing high school in 2005 and was assigned the role of a forward observer in an airborne reconnaissance unit. As a forward observer, my primary responsibility was to call in artillery and air strikes when in combat, which is why our job is almost always attached to infantry or recon units.

In October 2006, my unit, 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment (Airborne) conducted its first deployment as part of the 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne) in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. During this time, my unit and I conducted 14 months of counterinsurgency operations throughout Southern Baghdad, including, leading a decisive effort during the 2007 Iraqi Surge Campaign. For our extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy, 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment was awarded the Valorous Unit Award.

Upon returning from our deployment, due to an injury to my back that occurred during combat in Iraq, I received an honorable medical discharge from the Army in 2008. At this time, my PTSD was already severe. However, due to the high rates of combat rotations at that time, the Army did not treat my PTSD and told me to seek help from the US Department of Veteran Affairs upon discharge.

Upon discharge, I was given a three-month prescription for Oxycodone, SSRI, sleep medication, and Xanax, then I was once again a civilian. This prescription quickly turned into my dosage for two months to one month for Oxycodone. It was not until my session with MDMA-assisted psychotherapy that I finally admitted to myself that using Oxycodone was not only treating my physical pain, but also the mental pain that I experienced due to my inability to cope with the deaths of my friends in Iraq.

After my discharge, I tried many different therapies but had negative experiences with some. For instance, during the first-year anniversary of a vehicle-borne IED that hit my troop's patrol base, killing two of my friends, two interpreters, and injuring 15 people, I sought therapy. Before the therapy session, I was overcome with emotion and was crying in my car in the parking lot. After the therapy session, I was accused of smoking marijuana by the therapist and doctor because my eyes were red during the session, despite not having used it. This caused me to undergo a drug test to continue accessing the legal medication that had been prescribed to me by them. Although I passed the drug test, I was told I could not return to their care, for the anger I had shown and disrespect after being falsely accused. This was my first experience with a therapist post-army and my last for a few years. I resorted to finding a doctor to prescribe me medication and not seeking talk therapy.

Looking back five years later, it's ironic that after the MDMA-assisted psychotherapy, marijuana became the very thing that helped me overcome the harsh oxycodone withdrawals and regain a sense of normalcy in my life. When used in the appropriate set and setting, both marijuana and MDMA can be as effective, if not more so, than other pharmaceuticals I was haphazardly prescribed when I was discharged from the Army. Although I used marijuana for sleep and pain management over a few years, I haven't used it since 2014. The key point I want

to make is that I didn't substitute one addiction for another; marijuana was simply a tool that helped me ultimately achieve the point I am at today, where I don't rely on any medications.

In 2011, after four years of dependence on legal prescription medication and severe PTSD, I found an MDMA-assisted psychotherapy trial in South Carolina, which I was able to participate in. The trial incorporated a combination of talk therapy administered by a nurse and doctor couple. In preparation, I had an initial meeting with the couple to discuss medication detoxification prior to the MDMA session and to gain an understanding of what to expect during the session.

During my first MDMA therapy session, I was extremely on edge and not sure what to expect when the MDMA kicked in. When the medicine started taking effect, I went from a feeling of panic to complete relaxation. For the first time since my back injury, I was able to relax and not feel any pain. This led me to go inward with the encouragement of the therapist. What happened next was one of the most powerful experiences of my life, on par with combat. Each time I tried to avoid a memory when thinking about it, my body would feel anxiety. But each time I went into the memory and came to terms with it, my body would feel pleasure.

The MDMA therapy also helped me gain a deeper understanding of the underlying causes of my PTSD. It wasn't just the survivor's guilt of losing my friends and witnessing the destruction around me. There was also a powerful aspect related to the long-term habits and routines that I had developed during my time in combat. In that environment, hypervigilance and attention to detail were necessary for survival. However, these habits became ingrained over the course of a 14-month deployment, and shedding them proved to be a challenge when returning to civilian life.

Through the MDMA-assisted therapy, I was able to recognize and address these negative habits, and understand that they were no longer serving me in my current environment. This realization allowed me to begin creating new, healthier habits to replace the old ones.

For me, the MDMA-assisted therapy helped me realize that my PTSD was not just due to one specific factor, but rather a combination of different experiences and behaviors that had become deeply ingrained over time. It was a mixture of the tragic loss and destruction I had witnessed, the daily panic and anxiety, and the survivor's guilt that weighed heavily on me. The therapy allowed me to confront these various components of my PTSD and understand how they were all interconnected, and how they had been hindering my recovery into civilian life. By working through these issues with the help of the MDMA and the therapist couple, I was able to let go of these negative patterns of thinking and behavior, and start anew with a renewed sense of hope and purpose.

During the MDMA assisted psychotherapy experience, I came to the realization and believed wholeheartedly that the best way to honor my friends is to live. And to live, I needed to be honest with myself and stop taking oxycodone. After the MDMA experience, my life has been substantially better. I am more aware of when I have PTSD symptoms and will seek help if needed. There have been periods where I do not feel like it is a burden on my life anymore. Recently, I graduated with my masters in law and diplomacy from Tufts Fletcher School. This July, I will be heading back to another one-year graduate program at Harvard Kennedy School. Without the assistance of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy, I could have never made the progress I have made today. This treatment allowed me to regain my trust in myself and provided me with a much-needed reset to establish healthy habits and routines.

I believe that MDMA therapy can provide significant insights into one's habits and the ability to come to terms with these things to vastly improve one's life. When taking SSRIs or other medications, I never expected they could cure my PTSD. But it was always that they would help improve my life in a month or two after taking daily, maybe. I can say that MDMA therapy will do this in a day and, from my experience, in a more beneficial and rebuilding way. The MDMA therapy allows you to truly face yourself and the root causes of the problems you are facing. However, I do not believe that MDMA is a one-dose cure for PTSD. I believe that it can be a valuable tool in a comprehensive treatment plan, but it should not be seen as a quick fix.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize that the results I experienced with MDMA-assisted psychotherapy are not unique. Many veterans have also reported significant improvements in their PTSD symptoms after participating in similar trials. However, the legal status of MDMA as a Schedule I drug makes it extremely difficult for veterans to access this treatment option. This is especially concerning given the high rates of suicide and mental health challenges faced by veterans.

I urge the Canadian Senate Subcommittee on Veteran Affairs to consider the potential benefits of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy for treating PTSD and to explore ways to make this treatment immediately more accessible to veterans.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. I hope that my experience can shed some light on the potential benefits of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy and contribute to a larger discussion on improving mental health care for veterans. If there are any further questions or information required, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony Louis Macie". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Anthony Louis Macie