

WASHINGTON — Two nightmares haunt Robin Milonas.

While serving in Afghanistan in 2004 as an Army Reserve civil affairs officer, the former lieutenant colonel got lost in a minefield while leading a small convoy delivering school supplies to civilians. Even more troubling is the memory of a man who arrived at the main gate of Bagram Air Base carrying a young boy whose leg had been blown off by a land mine.

"I was an outgoing, energetic, determined good soldier who wanted to make the Army a career," said Milonas, of Puyallup, Wash., who just turned 50. "Now I am broken."

Milonas is one of roughly 180,000 women who've been deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq. While they don't officially serve in combat, they have experienced life in a war zone where there are no front lines.

And as they return home, they're increasingly turning to an already overtaxed Department of Veterans Affairs for help. Last year, the VA treated more than 255,000 female veterans. The number is expected to double within five years.

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