

Veterans'

FALL • 2005

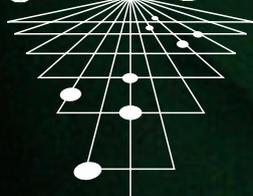
THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS

Health

Readjusting
to life
after war

Vet Centers
help you come
down from
high alert

VA Healthcare
System of Ohio



To our readers



We dedicate our fall issue to the brave men and women returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many of them are facing readjustment problems, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse and depression.

In this issue, we tell you the many ways we're helping returning service members ease back into civilian life. On pages 4–5, get an overview of our behavioral and mental health treatments and services. On pages 6–7, learn about Vet Centers—special facilities that help returning service members cope with readjustment issues.

We also recognize our staff members who serve in war. Our cover and page 3 story features Ed Tassy, a physician assistant at Chillicothe VA Medical Center, who provided medical care to service members wounded in Iraqi combat.

We're grateful to our service members overseas and will continue to support them when they return home. Best wishes for a safe and healthy season.

—Clyde Parkis, Network Director



About our mailing list

We make every effort to ensure our mailing lists are accurate. If you have questions or would like to be added to or deleted from the list, let us know. Please include your entire address. To make a change, you *must* mail the mailing panel to:

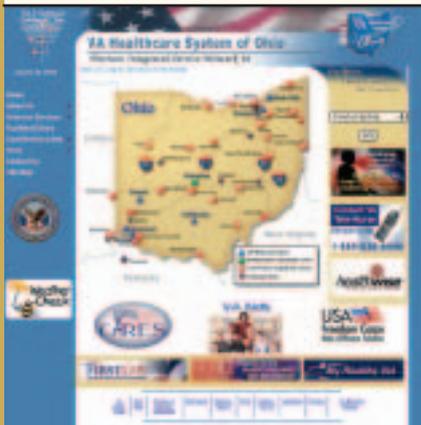
Veterans' Health

VA Healthcare System of Ohio
Network Office
11500 Northlake Drive, Suite 200
Cincinnati, OH 45249

Veterans' Health is online at www.va.gov/visn10/. Visit this site to view back issues or subscribe.

Remembering our fallen heroes

VA Healthcare System of Ohio honors the service members who sacrificed their lives in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. We're grateful to these men and women who proudly served us. **VH**



Your online guide to VA care

Want a quick and easy way to learn what VA can do for you? Visit www.va.gov/visn10/, VA Healthcare System of Ohio's Web site. Our site provides one-stop shopping on a wealth of health matters, including how to:

- find out what VA benefits and services you may be eligible for
- access My Health_{Vet} and the Healthwise Knowledgebase
- locate a VA facility near you
- connect to the U.S. Government's official Web site

The site also lets you download past *Veterans' Health* issues so you can revisit health topics important to you. Better health is at your fingertips! **VH**

Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 21 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

ON THE COVER: ED TASSY, PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT AT CHILLICOTHE VA MEDICAL CENTER, SERVED HONORABLY IN IRAQ.

Veterans' Health Editorial Directors

Suzanne Tate
VA Healthcare System of Ohio

Debbie Crabtree
Chillicothe VAMC

Debbie Page
VA Healthcare System of Ohio

Joyce Seltzer
Cincinnati VAMC

Kristen Fortner
VA Healthcare System of Ohio

From the front lines

A VA staff member shares his experience in Iraq

It was a minor incident, but it had an impact on Ed Tassy, a physician assistant at Chillicothe VA Medical Center, who spent a year in Iraq. “My four-year-old son dropped the toilet seat, and the bang startled me,” Tassy says. “Loud noises are still a problem. I’m always on edge, always ready for combat. It takes a moment for me to realize where I am.”

Tassy’s anxiety is understandable. He served as a medical officer with the Army Reserve’s 391st Military Police Battalion at Abu Ghraib prison. Abu Ghraib was a constant target for mortar and rocket attacks. “Not knowing when we would be hit was the toughest part,” Tassy says. “We had to be on guard all the time.”

Tassy’s skills were put to the test last April when two mortar attacks killed 29 people and wounded hundreds more at the facility. He rose to the challenge, providing trauma management and triage support to the many wounded. Tassy later received the Bronze Star for exceptionally meritorious service during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

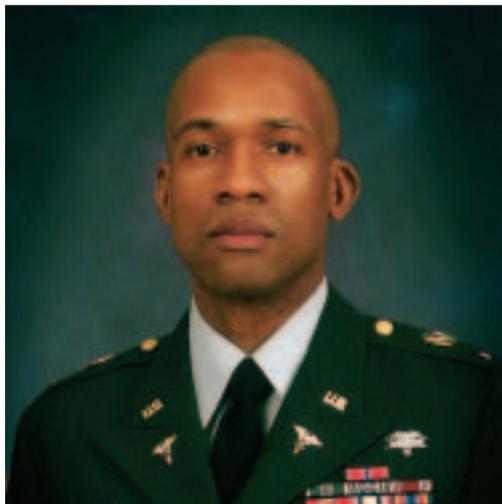
Forever changed

Given the horrors of what he experienced, Tassy considers himself lucky his readjustment to civilian life went so well. Aside from lingering combat readiness, he has no signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, severe anxiety or sleep problems. What *has* changed, though, is the way he views certain things in his life, like his

loved ones. “I spend more time with my family now at a small lake home,” says Tassy. “Family is more important than ever.”

Tassy’s wife Kristen (shown below) is a retiree from the Army Reserve. She says, “I was a little worried when Ed came home, but now I feel blessed things went so smoothly. I believe it’s because both of us have military backgrounds.”

Tassy is reminded daily of how hard readjustment can be. That’s because he works closely with returning veterans. “I believe the more you’ve seen, the better a healthcare provider you are,” Tassy says. “That’s why serving in Iraq was my most rewarding professional experience. I understand what returning veterans have been through. I’ve seen a lot.” **VH**



Right: Ed Tassy, physician assistant at Chillicothe VA Medical Center, uses his combat experience to help returning service members cope with readjustment problems. Far right: The Tassys are closer than ever since Ed’s return home from Iraq.



Back from war?

VA can help you readjust to life at home

If you're a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom and you're having flashbacks or trouble sleeping, you're not alone. Many service members coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan are coping with a range of behavioral and mental health issues. These include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, substance abuse, marital problems and job conflicts.

Troubled times

“Our newest veterans have faced car bombs, explosive devices, suicide bombers, ambushes and attacks,” says Terry Washam, Mental Health Care Line manager at Cleveland VA Medical Center and a Vietnam veteran. “And unlike past wars, the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts have involved more than combat-arms soldiers. They’ve included truck drivers, clerical and civil affairs staff, and many women.”

PTSD most often affects returning service mem-

bers who've faced the trauma of combat and terrorist attacks. Some people who have PTSD relive events through nightmares and flashbacks. Others have:

- anxiety
- depression
- trouble sleeping
- irritability and frequent arguments with family and friends
- angry outbursts and rage
- a loss of interest in social or sexual activities
- feelings of isolation
- problems concentrating

Many others struggle with substance abuse and depression. In fact, substance abuse often results from PTSD as people turn to alcohol or drugs to try to feel better.

Telltale signs of depression include feelings of hopelessness, a loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, withdrawal from family members and

Community care for those who serve

The Ohio National Guard Bureau, under the leadership of Major General Gregory Wayt and with the support of Governor Bob Taft, formed a work group in October 2004. This work group was established with community partners to address deployment-related stress concerns of Ohio National Guard Bureau service members and their families.

To better meet these needs, the work group evolved into the **OHIO CARES** initiative. OHIO CARES is a collaboration between the Ohio National Guard Bureau and these agencies:

- Department of Veterans Affairs
- VA Healthcare System of Ohio
- Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services
- Ohio Department of Mental Health
- Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities
- Ohio Council of Health Providers

OHIO CARES ensures that Ohio's returning service members and their families have access to a full range of behavioral health services in their communities through all deployment phases. It coordinates outreach, education and referral efforts with National Guard units and family support groups. OHIO CARES also provides training on deployment-related stress issues to behavioral health professionals and others at the state level.

To learn more about OHIO CARES, call Lieutenant Colonel Laura Monteith at **614-336-7358**.

friends, changes in eating or sleeping habits and, in some cases, thoughts of suicide.

Help is near

Fortunately, VA Healthcare System of Ohio provides skilled staff and special programs to help returning service members cope with these types of problems. According to Washam, no patient is more than 30 miles from VA care. The network offers five medical centers, more than 21 clinics and five Vet Centers (see pages 6–7).

If you come to a VA treatment site showing signs of post-war stress, a provider may refer you to a VA PTSD clinic near you. There, a mental health provider may suggest group therapy, where you share your feelings and difficult experiences with your peers. Or, based on your needs, a mental health professional may counsel you privately and teach you skills to help you cope with PTSD symptoms. You may also be given medicines to ease your symptoms, be referred to a residential care setting or receive a combination of treatments.

If you visit a VA treatment facility for help with depression or substance abuse, a provider will most likely refer you to a mental health clinic. Because depression and substance abuse are often seen together, you will be screened for both conditions. VA Healthcare System of Ohio provides special substance abuse programs that include medication treatment, counseling and support groups. Teams of psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical nurse specialists, social workers, counselors, therapists and others will work closely together to treat your problem.

Don't wait

Many returning service members are new to the VA system and don't know about the range of benefits available to them. Others feel they can work out their problems on their own. "It's normal for new veterans to have some issues after serving in a war zone," says Washam. "But the sooner we can provide

New vets, act now!

VA wants to help all recently discharged veterans or reservists deactivated from federal duty make easy transitions from the military to the VA healthcare system. Perhaps you've been having symptoms but aren't sure what they are. VA has experience in diagnosing and treating combat-related conditions that your family doctor may not have encountered. To start receiving VA medical benefits, here's what you need to know:

- You have two years from your date of discharge to receive VA healthcare.
- You can enroll for care by:
 - going to a VA medical center or community-based outpatient clinic near you (see this issue's back page for a list of facility locations)
 - mailing or faxing the completed 10-10EZ form to your nearest VA medical center or community-based outpatient clinic
 - completing the 10-10EZ online enrollment form (visit www.va.gov/visn10/ and click on "10-10EZ Online")

you with education, support and treatment, the less likely your symptoms will worsen."

If you're having any of these mental health or behavioral problems, call your nearest VA treatment facility (see this issue's back page) and make an appointment to get screened. **VH**

Targeting your post-



Vet Centers can help you come down from high alert

Along with your loved ones, a Vet Center can be one of your best friends after you return from the Iraq or Afghanistan war zones. That's because Vet Centers are ready to provide you with the services, referrals and professional help you may need to make an easier adjustment back home.

"We have the resources to help returning service members, so people shouldn't wait to get help. All they have to do is call us," says David Roby, a Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) outreach worker with Cincinnati Vet Center, one of the five Vet Centers in Ohio.

Vet Centers offer a range of benefits. They include:

- post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) treatment
- sexual trauma counseling
- bereavement counseling
- other readjustment counseling, which often involves family members
 - referrals to community programs, such as OHIO CARES (see page 5, "Community Care" sidebar)
 - employment and educational counseling
 - referrals to VA medical centers as needed

Some stress is normal

Not every veteran who feels jumpy, nervous or extra cautious after coming home has PTSD, says Roby, who's served for 11 years in the Ohio National Guard. He recently spent 15 months in Iraq and Kuwait. "You may feel like hitting the ground at the first sound of a car backfiring. Or, you may constantly look behind your back in crowded places. That may be normal for your particular experience," Roby says. "Give yourself time to adjust and come down from that high alert level."

How long can it take? "Some veterans take weeks or even months to feel themselves again," says Roby. "If you find over time you can't relax, if the anxiety is starting to affect your family or social life, or if you've turned to substance abuse for comfort, then it's time to seek professional help."

deployment blues

A team effort

Vet Centers are well staffed to handle your readjustment problems. A team of psychologists, licensed social workers, counselors and outreach workers—many of them combat veterans like Roby—will help you work through the trauma of your war experiences. After completing an initial screening, you may receive counseling and referrals to other VA behavioral health programs. If you need more intense treatment, you may be referred to a PTSD clinic or mental health clinic at your local VA medical center. (See pages 4–5 for an overview of mental health services offered by VA Healthcare System of Ohio.)

If you finish treatment through another VA program, you still may return to a Vet Center. It's part of VA Healthcare System of Ohio's continuum of care. "We're ready to work with you again to keep an eye on your condition and make sure you maintain progress," says Roby.

Beyond healthcare

Vet Centers may also provide employment guidance. This may involve a referral to a training center or potential employer. Vet Centers also offer bereavement counseling to the families of soldiers who died while on active duty, including those who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom.

A seasoned outreach worker, Roby often meets with service members before they head to Iraq or Afghanistan, as well as after they return. Families attend, too. Roby's goal is to provide

useful information, which includes referrals to resources both inside and outside the VA network. "I let people know help is out there and how to get it," he says.

Vet Centers have been around since 1979. Their original purpose was to provide readjustment counseling to Vietnam veterans. Today, 207 Vet Centers across the country serve veterans who've fought in any theater of combat, including the most recent Global War on Terrorism.

You don't need to have a service-related disability to be eligible for treatment at a Vet Center. Service in a combat theater and an honorable discharge are the only requirements. **VA**

David Roby, Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) outreach worker with Cincinnati Vet Center (left), helps a returning service member readjust to civilian life.



Where to find us

If you're a returning service member from Iraq or Afghanistan and you need help readjusting to civilian life, call your local Vet Center. We're ready to assist you.

Cincinnati Vet Center

801-B West 8th Street
Cincinnati, OH 45203
513-763-3500

Cleveland Heights Vet Center

2022 Lee Road
Cleveland, OH 44118
216-932-8471

Columbus Vet Center

30 Spruce Street
Columbus, OH 43215
614-257-5550

Dayton Vet Center

627 Edwin C. Moses Boulevard,
6th floor
Dayton, OH 45408
937-461-9150

Parma Vet Center

5700 Pearl Road, Suite 102
Cleveland, OH 44129
440-845-5023

Reaching us is easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

Chillicothe VAMC

17273 State Route 104
Chillicothe, OH 45601
740-773-1141

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics Athens

510 West Union Street
Athens, OH 45701
740-593-7314

Lancaster

1550 Sheridan Drive,
Suite 100
Colonnade Medical Building
Lancaster, OH 43130
740-653-6145

Marietta

418 Colegate Drive
Marietta, OH 45750
740-568-0412

Portsmouth

621 Broadway Street
Portsmouth, OH 45662
740-353-3236

Cincinnati VAMC

3200 Vine Street
Cincinnati, OH 45220
513-861-3100

Ft. Thomas VA Campus

1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075
859-572-6202

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics Bellevue

103 Landmark Drive
Bellevue, KY 41073
859-392-3840

Clermont County

Eastgate Professional
Office Park
4355 Ferguson Drive,
Suite 270
Cincinnati, OH 45245
513-943-3680

Dearborn County

710 W. Eads Parkway
Lawrenceburg, IN 47025
812-539-2313

Louis Stokes Wade Park VAMC

10701 East Boulevard
Cleveland, OH 44106
216-791-3800

Brecksville VA Medical Center

10000 Brecksville Road
Brecksville, OH 44141
440-526-3030

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics Akron

55 West Waterloo
Akron, OH 44319
330-724-7715

Canton

733 Market Avenue South
Canton, OH 44702
330-489-4600

East Liverpool

332 West 6th Street
East Liverpool, OH 43920
330-386-4303

Lorain

205 West 20th Street
Lorain, OH 44052
440-244-3833

Mansfield

1456 Park Avenue West
Mansfield, OH 44906
419-529-4602

McCafferty

4242 Lorain Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44113
216-939-0699

New Philadelphia

1260 Monroe Avenue, #15H
New Philadelphia, OH 44663
330-602-5339

Painesville

7 West Jackson Street
Painesville, OH 44077
440-357-6740

Ravenna

6751 North Chestnut Street
Ravenna, OH 44266
330-296-3641

Sandusky

3416 Columbus Avenue
Sandusky, OH 44870
419-625-7350

Warren

Riverside Square
1400 Tod Avenue NW
Warren, OH 44485
330-392-0311

Youngstown

2031 Belmont Avenue
Youngstown, OH 44505
330-740-9200

Chalmers P. Wylie Outpatient Clinic

543 Taylor Avenue
Columbus, OH 43203
614-257-5200

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Grove City

1953 Ohio Avenue
Grove City, OH 43123
614-257-5800

Marion

1203 Delaware Avenue
Marion, OH 43302
740-223-8089

Zanesville

840 Bethesda Drive
Building 3A
Zanesville, OH 43701
740-453-7725

Dayton VAMC

4100 West Third Street
Dayton, OH 45428
937-268-6511

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics Lima

1303 Bellefontaine Avenue
Lima, OH 45804
419-222-5788

Middletown

675 North University Boulevard
Middletown, OH 45042
513-423-8387

Richmond

4351 South A Street
Richmond, IN 47374
765-973-6915

Springfield

512 South Burnett Road
Springfield, OH 45505
937-328-3385

Call Tele-Nurse at 1-888-838-6446. • Visit us online at www.va.gov/visn10/.

VA Healthcare System of Ohio Network Office
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