

# The paws4vets Advocate™

The Official paws4vets™ News & Opinion Journal

November 15, 2011

P.O. Box 491, Round Hill, VA 20142-0491  
www.paws4people.org | www.paws4vets.org | www.HelpKyria.com

Volume 2, Issue 1

## THE DOGS OF WAR the unabridged version

By Bob Drury, Photographs by Peter Lang, Photographs by paws4vets™' staff



Jeff Mitchell & CAROLINE  
June 2010 intervention  
transfer training

**“He made it past the sushi.”**

Word spread in low voices. More Soldiers from the Wounded Warrior Battalion gathered in the parking lot. Mesmerized; drawn to the drama of Sergeant Jeff Mitchell being coaxed past the sushi bar and down the crowded cereal aisle of the base PX by his Psychiatric Service Dog, a Golden Retriever named CAROLINE.

No big deal, you say? You make it past the sushi all the time. You, in fact, may have never even thought about not making it past the sushi? The thing is, the sushi bar is ten feet into the foyer of the commis-

sary on Fort Stewart, a sprawling U.S. Army base on the outskirts of Savannah, Georgia. And the last time Jeff Mitchell entered this brightly-lit and bustling emporium he had barely inched through the plate glass doors before melting down, dropping to the linoleum, and folding into a fetal ball like a hothouse orchid at first frost. Took his fellow Soldiers 30 minutes to get him up and out.

This is all by way of saying that not long ago I spent time with the some of the bravest men and women in the United States. They were all veterans of our overseas wars, and they had returned home battered, physically and mentally. Some, like Jeff Mitchell, refused to leave their darkened barracks rooms. Others became spooked by the sights and sounds of, say, a fireworks display, a shadowed highway overpass, or a brightly-lit and crowded grocery store. Still others lashed out with words and fists at their fellow GIs and superior officers. All had one thing in common. War had changed them, infected them. Beaten them. Until they met their Service Dogs.

This is a story about dogs, and the powerful healing powers they have on bruised human psyches. Unless you are a dog lover, or at least a dog owner, you may not believe that premise. I had my own doubts. No more. The lyrical W.G. Sebald once wrote, “Men and animals regard each other across a gulf of mutual incomprehension.” With all respect to Sebald’s genius, I beg to differ.

At Fort Stewart – where the Army has been experimenting with a pilot program pairing Psychiatric Service Dogs with Soldiers suffering from various forms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder – I watched chary veterans brighten and step out of their shell-shocked cocoons at the mere sight of their canine trainees bounding toward them. Lt. Colonel William Reitemeyer, a buff, hard-bitten

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### Bob Drury

Mr. Drury is a Contributing Editor and Chief, Military Correspondent for *Men’s Health* magazine. Mr. Drury has been nominated for three National Magazine Awards and a Pulitzer Prize. He has reported from Iraq, Afghanistan, Liberia, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, and Darfur among other sites. He is also the author, co-author, or editor of nine nonfiction books, including *The Last Stand of Fox Company: A True Story of U.S. Marines in Combat* (Grove-Atlantic Press), for which he is the recipient of the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation’s 2010 General Wallace M. Greene Jr. Award for Nonfiction. Mr. Drury very graciously gave paws4vets™ permission to publish his unabridged version of this article. paws4vets™, its volunteers and Clients, all express their heartfelt appreciation to Mr. Drury for his permission to publish this article and his research and efforts to write this story.

**Editor’s Notes:** Mr. Drury visited the paws4vets™ Wounded Warrior Assistance Dog Training Program at Ft. Stewart, GA, in August of 2010, five months into the program. Mr. Drury’s article (abridged version) was published in the October issue of Men’s Health magazine. The program is now in its 18th month of operation. Many situations have evolved or changed since Mr. Drury’s visit. Therefore, throughout this unabridged version of his article, “program update” boxes will be inserted to provide current information or to direct the reader to various links where they may obtain current information.

combat veteran and the commander of the base's Wounded Warrior Battalion, seemed to say it best when he told me, ***"It's almost like there are electric currents coursing through the leashes, connecting the minds of the Soldiers and the minds of their dogs."***

Reitemeyer realizes, as he put it, that "Enough things have gone wrong in the Army's medical community, where we've made mistakes." He was alluding, of course, to the 2007 scandal at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center that precipitated the Army's creation of 29 nation-wide Warrior Transition Units, or WTUs, ranging in size from Company to Brigade. He added, ***"I was a little skeptical of this dog idea at first. But I'm willing to try anything. Of course I want to help thousands of wounded Soldiers. But if I help just one, I will consider this pilot program a success."***

There are plenty who need it. According to a recent study by the Rand Corporation, about 19 percent of US troops deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan may have sustained physical or psychiatric brain disorders from explosive devices or exposure to traumatic events. That would be almost one quarter of a million Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines. The Rand study also notes that different combat veterans react to stress in different ways. One of these responses is to shut down Psychiatricly. In that sense, Jeff Mitchell's story is typical, one I am certain you are familiar with after 10 years of America's battles on multiple fronts.

In Mitchell's case there were two deployments to Iraq with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Howitzer Battery of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment. He saw friends die, heads explode, sucking chest wounds, lost limbs. Roadside IEDs were hidden in deflated soccer balls or dead animals. Asymmetrical war by its very nature breeds tension, distrust, guilt. And awe. Mitchell fell prey to each. This, for instance, from the raw letter to his mother after his first firefight in 2003:

"The first explosion shook everything and the shock waves caused ripples in the ground as if you threw a stone into a pond. I saw a civilian running from the blast; he was thrown 200 feet into the air. (There were) earth-rattling explosions, huge balls of fire and mushroom clouds and red, white and orange pieces of burning metal blown into the sky. I heard the whistling of incoming rounds and saw hunks of metal flying through the air along with tracer rounds and still more explosions. That same night ... grenades were thrown; 6 of my buddies were hit. I wasn't afraid at the time because everything happened so fast and I reacted automatically because of my training. We are lucky to be alive."

Much the same occurred during Mitchell's second deployment to Tel Afar, north of Baghdad. More combat.

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## Ft. Stewart, GA



Home of the  
U.S. Army's  
3rd Infantry Division



Home of the  
paws4vets™  
Wounded Warrior  
Assistance Dog  
Training Program



## K-9 Boot Camp

MARCH 2010



L to R:  
WYATT, BRADIE, ADDIE, SALLY, CHAENEY, LILLY



More IEDs. More deaths of friends. In 2006 he returned home riven with flashbacks and hallucinations. Events came to a head when he struck his girlfriend, hard, when she woke him from a nightmare. He finally refused to leave his barracks, and was medically discharged. He returned to his parents' home in Atlanta, entered his old bedroom, dimmed the lights, locked the door. He found the name of a liquor store that delivered. He became – in the military jargon – a “cave dweller.”

And in that cave he remained. Until one day his mother knocked and asked if he might be interested in meeting a Psychiatric Service Dog named CAROLINE.

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The female Specialist, barely out of her teens, rarely speaks. She is a pretty girl, with thick brown hair, a pert nose, and an athletic gait. She is a member of Florida's National Guard, and she was sexually assaulted by one of her fellow Soldiers in Afghanistan. I've watched her now over several group therapy sessions, where she sits nearly hidden in a corner, head lowered, cap pulled low over her eyes, deferring to the men, blocking out the world. She is new, and has not yet been assigned a permanent Psychiatric Service Dog, but today she has been chosen to train with a tawny mutt named “MISSY.”

She leads MISSY outside, onto a grassy expanse about the circumference of a baseball infield. The transformation is mind-boggling. The two run the length of the greensward pace for pace before starting in on “doggie basic training:” down, set, come, stay.

I interrupt the reverie – for that is what it is – and there is a sparkle in the Specialist's eyes as the words pour from her mouth. It is the most I have heard her speak. Ever. Even the other Soldiers are surprised. She tells me she used to work part time as a “fish wrangler” at Sea World, and before that at several roadside zoos in Florida, although rarely with dogs. She says she's always so loved animals, here, today, MISSY is the best thing to ever, ever, ever happen to her. As she speaks she subconsciously runs her hand through the thick scruff of MISSY's neck and ... suddenly a human bark.

“Are you going to train that dog or just play with it!”  
It is not a question.

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Terry Henry can seem a real prick. Although a civilian, he treats his military charges as might a drill sergeant, minus the drill sergeant's noted compassion and understanding. And the penalty he holds over their heads for missteps is far worse than any brig. It is having their Service Dogs taken away from them and being bounced from the Fort Stewart pilot program.

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## PROGRAM UPDATE

# MISSY

Psychiatric Service Dog

MISSY was rescued from a shelter in the Charlotte, NC area, shortly before she was to be euthanized. MISSY was placed into the paws4prisons. Assistance Dog Training Program at FPC Alderson, in Alderson, WV. There she began her rehabilitative training. She progressed rapidly and was soon receiving high marks for her ability to learn. MISSY was next transferred to FPC Jesup, Jesup, GA where she continued her training. After a short period she was transferred up the road to Ft. Stewart. Here she became part of the 2nd generation of dogs to enter the paws4vets. Wounded Warrior Assistance Dog Training Program. MISSY worked with several Soldiers until she settled in with SPC Raymond Roberts, USA. SPC Roberts and MISSY quickly became a training team, and were soon trying to earn MISSY's public access certification which she needed in order to become a certified Psychiatric Service Dog. After hundreds of hours of training, affection, and bonding, SPC Roberts and MISSY passed their public access test and MISSY became a certified Psychiatric Service Dog. MISSY was officially presented to SPC Roberts at a ceremony in late Summer 2011.

MISSY was just our third "shelter rescue-to-Service Dog" to date. MISSY tragically passed away in October 2011 due to an apparent intestinal obstruction. She is desperately missed by SPC Roberts, and her loss is mourned by all who knew her and her cute little "woof-woof" tune she so often sang.



Photograph by Peter Lang

## THE DOGS OF WAR the unabridged version continued from Page 3

Henry is the co-founder, organizer, and chief bottle washer of the non-profit "paws4people." and its military spinoff, "paws4vets.." A gruff TK-year-old, a former U.S. Air Force intelligence operative with a salt-and-pepper brush cut as thick as otter fur, Henry started his organization 12 years ago from his Virginia home after watching his 12-year-old daughter, Kyria, visit a nursing home with her Golden Retriever as part of a grade-school project. Suddenly the frail and ill senior citizens were mentally, physically, and verbally engaging with the dog, with each other, and with the facility's staff as they had never before. The animal's emotional effect on the elderly shut-ins struck Henry as an epiphany. In what he calls, "a blindingly idiotic idea," he quit his lucrative job as a telecommunications executive and threw himself into the cause.



Special Education classrooms and children's hospitals were next. Youngsters with special needs, or born with birth defects, were introduced to dogs Henry was, by now, breeding or buying as puppies. Beginning at eight-weeks old the animals were started on an 18-to-24 month "basic training" – the time divergence depending on their ultimate occupations as either short-term "intervention" or "lifetime assistance" animals. To help shoulder the workload he reached out to wardens at vari-

ous minimum security prisons and requested volunteers to teach the dogs to respond to rudimentary commands such as *down*, *sit*, *come*, and *stay*. Over 75 inmates at several prisons are now training paws4people.'s dogs.

As he had with the elderly, Henry witnessed "more miracles" with the kids. One child born with a portion of his brain missing so took to the dogs that he learned to count and recite the alphabet, another with cerebral palsy began to walk with a dog's help. It struck Henry that if a dog's presence could open up new vistas for children suffering so, why could they not do the same for combat veterans with physical and/or psychiatric disorders? Service medical centers such as Walter Reed and the Bethesda Naval Hospital were already employing visiting "therapy dogs" to, in essence, raise the spirits of wounded troops. Long-term Service Dogs, however, particularly Psychiatric Service Dogs, seemed to go against the military's martial DNA. Nevertheless, after seven years of attempting to convince the Department of Defense that his was indeed a worthwhile experiment, in early 2010 Henry received the go-ahead to stand up the pilot program at Fort Stewart.

Trial and error, combined with the extant service-dog literature, led Henry to the conclusion that Labradors and Golden Retrievers, or some mutt-mix thereof, were the ideal breeds with which to work. Poodles, for instance, are too intelligent, and thus quickly bored by repetitive real-world applications such as turning light switches on and off or fetching medicine or water bottles from closed cabinets and refrigerators. Irish Setters (it goes without saying for anyone who has ever known one), are too high strung. And some dogs that Henry suspects would fare well as all-round Service Dogs – he mentioned Rott-

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WOUNDED WARRIOR  
ASSISTANCE DOG TRAINING PROGRAM  
Warrior Transition Battalion, Ft. Stewart, GA

Due to the overwhelming need within the U.S. Army active-duty and Veteran ranks for Assistance Dogs, paws4vets™ initiated the paws4vetsWWADTP™ Program. In concert with the Commander, WINN Army Hospital, Ft. Stewart, and the Commander, U.S. Army Warrior Transition Battalion, Ft. Stewart, the paws4vetsWWADTP™ Program brings to the Ft. Stewart WTB Soldier the same rehabilitation program and its capabilities of aiding Wounded Warrior Battalion (WTB) Soldiers with PTSD, C-PTSD, and TBI to recover, or at the very least, better cope with, their PTSD, C-PTSD, TBI and its symptoms by utilizing the therapeutic benefits of “Special K-9 Powers.”

The paws4vets™ / Ft. Stewart WWADTP, PTSD Recovery/Intervention Program teaches members of the WTB to train various types of Assistance Dogs. Members of the program first learn how to train “shelter-rescue dogs,” then progress to training very highly-trained Service Dogs, some of which know in excess of 130 commands. Members of the program also participate in the selection, customized training, public access training, certification testing and final placement processes for their dogs, including the transfer training process of the dog’s “Service Dog Team Partner.”

## PAISLEY joins the ARMY to help SFC Ed Boleyn, USA



SFC Ed Boleyn with JACKIE,  
Psychiatric Service Dog  
[In-Training]  
at Ft. Stewart, GA

SFC Ed Boleyn, USA, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, Warrior Transition Battalion, Ft. Stewart, GA, has served for over 24 years. Due to his multiple deployments and duties, SFC Boleyn is struggling with the effects of severe anxiety and depression. SFC Boleyn applied to paws4vets™ seeking a Psychiatric Service Dog to enable him to combat these debilitating symptoms as he plans to retire and transition to civilian life. During the bumps, PAISLEY showed a great affinity to SFC Boleyn, and he was able to show her affection and connect with her as well. The pair returned to our Wounded Warrior Assistance Dog Training Program in Ft. Stewart, GA to continue working together towards PAISLEY’s Psychiatric Service Dog certification.



PAISLEY  
Psychiatric Service Dog  
[In-Training]

## LANGLEY teams with SPC Michael Vernon, USA



LANGLEY, Psychiatric Service Dog [In-Training]

SPC Michael Vernon, USA, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, Warrior Transition Battalion, Ft. Stewart, GA, is an extremely motivated young soldier. In 2010, SPC Vernon returned from a deployment to Iraq during which he sustained serious injuries resulting from a military vehicle accident. As a result of his injuries, SPC Vernon had a below-the-elbow amputation of his right arm, and now utilizes an advanced prosthetic device. SPC Vernon’s Mobility Service Dog will not only mitigate the affects of his physical disabilities; but will also serve as a Psychiatric Service Dog to enable SPC Vernon to face and conquer the symptoms of his combat PTSD. At the bump event, LANGLEY quickly showed bonding behaviors with SPC Vernon. Additionally, she readily accepted and understood his prosthesis.



weilers – are stigmatized by a negative public perception.

Although staffed now by a few volunteers, including Henry's daughter, paws4people. remains something of a one-man band operating on a shoestring budget. It survives on private donations, and Henry supplies his dogs – now numbering over 200 with TK bound for veterans – and their services to all clients, including the U.S. Army, free of charge. "If you could put in your story that we're looking for a millionaire guardian angel, that would be helpful," he told me the night he arrived in Savannah for his monthly "check-up" at Fort Stewart. The joking plea was anomalous. For after watching Henry interact with the Soldiers in the canine program the next day, I felt as if it should have been a direct order.

We were gathered in a modular trailer on a far corner of the base that serves as the program's work space and headquarters. Seated semi-circle around Henry were the veteran Jeff Mitchell and the half-dozen, still-active-duty wounded warriors – five males and a female – who serve as his dog trainers. The back and forth – mostly Henry's forth – reminded me of one of those tough-love prison sessions. The men and woman were the first class of volunteer trainers at Fort Stewart. Most hoped to take one of Henry's dogs home with them upon their discharge. They understood that this would depend upon his judgment of their progress not only as trainers, but on their ability to instruct the next generation of Soldiers who would take their places.



SFC Joshua Campbell, USA  
NCOIC of the paws4vets.  
Wounded Warrior ADTP  
Ft. Stewart, GA  
w/  
JACKIE  
Psychiatric Service Dog  
[In-Training]

Henry had spent the morning at the base overseeing a drill that instructs the Service Dogs to ignore all other dogs while "working" – admittedly, hard for a dog to do. And he was not happy. He scolded one enlisted man for allowing his dog to remain so "growly" toward another canine, and admonished another for giving his dog a treat despite the fact that she had left his side to sniff another dog's ass.

"Since last time I was here what has your dog taught you and

## PROGRAM UPDATE

# DEJA

Psychiatric Service Dog  
Seizure Alert/Response Service Dog

DEJA was rescued from a shelter in the Martinsburg, WV. She was one of scores of dogs rescued from an alleged "shelter" that was closed by authorities. She, like many of the others, were chained to

trees behind the so-called rescue shelter. DEJA was placed into the paws4prisons. Assistance Dog Training Program at USP Hazelton's Secure Female Facility in Bruceton Mills, WV. There she began her rehabilitative training. DEJA was a slow learner as her "trust" issues were foremost in her mind. Once she learned she was going to be cared for and was receiving more attention than she had ever received in her life - she began to open up.



DEJA ended up in the 2nd generation of dogs into the Ft. Stewart WWADTP. She very quickly adopted SSG Daniel Tully, USA. SSG Tully have several combat tours under his belt, with his last in Iraq leaving him with a broken neck which resulted from an IED explosion. SSG Tully spent several months in the Shepard Center in Atlanta, GA recovery from his injuries.

DEJA helps SSG Tully with his PTSD symptoms, and his balance issues, and she soon began alerting SSG Tully that his blood sugar is falling, and falling fast.

DEJA was just our second "shelter rescue-to-Service Dog" to date. DEJA and SSG Tully, now retired, live in northern Louisiana.

what have you taught it?" he demanded in a gatling gun delivery to a hulking Staff Sergeant ruffling the scruff of a 2-1/2 year old mixed Lab-Golden Retriever named DEJA. DEJA and the sergeant had been together since the program's inception – about half the time it would take to complete her Psychiatric Service Dog training – and when the Non-Com, whose neck had been broken in Iraq and who suffers from PTSD, failed to answer quickly enough, Henry pounced. "People, I got to be honest. I'm more concerned about my dogs than I am with you."

It is all a bluff, of course. At least I think it is. From the looks on their faces, however, the Soldiers did not. The training group included another sergeant suffering from post-combat depression as he recovers from a rifle wound and three more Soldiers with the rank of specialist – two men seriously injured by IED blasts and subsequently diagnosed with PTSD, and a female member of the Florida National Guard who had been sexually assaulted and now suffers from severe depression and anxiety that leads to panic attacks. They all shook their heads slowly or stared at their scuffed combat boots when Henry reminded them that paws4vets. retained the right to take back any dog at any time.

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Afterward, as the Soldiers ran the dogs through a set of physical paces in the fenced kennel adjacent to the modular trailer – think Siegfried and Roy with their tigers ... except for that one time – I pulled aside the First Sergeant in charge of the pilot program, a grizzled infantry veteran named Vernon Ward. The 44-year-old Ward has 27 years of service on his resume, including combat deployments to Panama, Somalia, Kuwait during Operation Desert Storm, and two tours to Iraq in Operation Iraqi Freedom. He was old school, and looked and sounded it.

He told me that the base's Wounded Warrior Battalion roster fluctuates as Soldiers ship in and out. Of its current 300 men and women – down from 600 one year ago, before U.S. hostile engagements in Iraq ebbed – about 5 percent have been diagnosed with PTSD. "When I first enlisted, the word *malingerer* was in common usage in the service," he said. "We don't use it anymore."

Ward admitted that if you had told him 20 years ago that the Army would be treating combat-addled Soldiers with art classes and Transcendental Meditation – as is the case in some WTUs – or, particularly, with Psychiatric Service Dogs, he would have laughed in your face. "Things were different then. We didn't know as much about the human mind as we do now. With this pilot program, it's just a fact, sir, not a theory; how these dogs reduce the level of anxiety in my wounded warriors."

I could detect the pride in Ward's voice, and later that night over dinner with Henry and one of his paws4vets. volunteers, a dirty-blonde twenty something named Karen Owen who hopes to become the first service-dog trainer/teacher in an accredited college course, Jeff Mitchell was more specific.

"In these last six months I've done things, gone places, for the first time in four or five years. The grocery store. To get my hair cut. Out to dinner with my parents. These were things that I'd stopped doing. I'd stopped participating in the society around me. I just withdrew and stayed locked in my room. For years."

As he spoke Mitchell reached below the table and subconsciously ran his fingers through CAROLINE's coat. "It provides some level of comfort having CAROLINE here, having the connection with her. I've been pretty far removed from any feelings or emotions for such a long time. And sometimes I'm still overwhelmed thinking about the future. But as we go forward, CAROLINE and me, over months or years, I know I'll get better."

With that Terry Henry cleared his throat rather dramatically. "Jeff will never be able to make that decision. That is our decision."

He turned and stared at Mitchell. "We have the final say-

"Our daughter Samantha, who has special needs, received her Seizure Response / Mobility Service Dog, named CORINA. CORINA received some of her training at the Ft. Stewart Wounded Warrior Assistance Dog Training Program. In addition to receiving CORINA, our family was blessed to work with and to get to know



Samantha and CORINA  
Atlanta, GA

these gentle giant wounded Soldiers who have served our country. These interactions also gave my son, Grayson, the opportunity to know these Soldiers who have gone to war for our country. They will always be part of our lives and have taught all of us valuable lessons in selfless giving at all levels."

Amy Leiter, Atlanta, GA  
Mother of Samantha and Grayson - and CORINA

so on whether CAROLINE stays with you. It all depends on your progress."

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The kinship between dogs and humans dates back 14,000 years, when late-Stone Age man recognized that in return for food and shelter *Canis lupus familiaris* – which had separated from the gray wolf family over 80,000 years earlier – could be domesticated to provide help in herding and hunting as well **servicing** as a loyal early-warning system against predators and enemies.

And though references to guide dogs for the blind can be found in literature from the early Middle Ages, it was not until World War I that the first seeing-eye dog training schools were opened, specifically for returning veterans. It was also during "The Great War" that an American doughboy named Lee Duncan rescued a German Shepherd puppy from a bombed out kennel in Lorraine, France and named him after a small puppet that French children handed out to American servicemen. Duncan later wrote that the animal so lifted the spirits of his unit that there was never a question of abandoning him at the war's end. And thus Rin Tin Tin, prior to his movie career, may well have been the U.S. Army's first Psychiatric Service Dog.

Since then the evolution of the role dogs play in human health has been striking. One Japanese study found that pet owners made 30 percent fewer visits to doctors, and an Australian study determined that dog owners had lower cholesterol, blood pressure and heart attack risk than non-dog owners. Researchers from universities from Florida to Maine have studied dogs as early-warning cancer alarms; the British Medical Journal ex-

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amined case studies of dogs alerting people with diabetes of coming hypoglycemic episodes. In addition, the medical journal *Integrative Cancer Therapies* reported that untrained house dogs could identify breast and lung cancer sufferers by smelling their breath.

“So it’s only natural that veterans suffering from Psychiatric maladies would be such a good fit for dogs,” says the psychotherapist Jane Miller, the author of “Healing Companions: Ordinary Dogs and Their Extraordinary Power to Transform Lives.” Miller, who is also a certified Service Dog trainer, notes that she has taught dogs assigned to veterans afflicted with PTSD to do room checks in a darkened house before a skittish veteran enters, to soothe war zone veterans during and after combat nightmares, to sense oncoming panic attacks, and to create physical space between strangers and “hypervigilant” vets like Jeff Mitchell.

“It works because the dogs are trained to make it work,” she says. “Reinforcement is the key. When the dog does the right thing, the dog gets positive attention. A treat. A pet, a hug. It’s all a cue. This isn’t magic. These are not companion animals. They’re not emotional-support animals. They are task-trained animals, taught to help veterans lead more productive, more whole, lives.”

Moreover, adds Debra DeHart, the Chief Occupational Therapist for Fort Stewart’s Warrior Transition Battalion, “Animals, dogs and horses in particular, are more naturally intuitive of any chemical change in a human body. A dog’s nose can smell a medical change in a patient, sense the acute chemical reaction occurring, often before the patient himself feels it. That’s the science we know about. And part of it is beyond our understanding right now, an evolution of the mind-body-spirit connection to a wounded warrior’s physical, emotional, and cognitive issues.”

DeHart, who considers it a “privilege” to work with the returning Soldiers, also mentions that the the connection runs both way – Col. Reitemeyer’s “electric currents coursing through the leashes.” She says that returning Soldiers suffering from Psychiatric maladies soon learn that, “unlike humans, a dog is nonjudgmental. No matter the circumstances, the dog will always have the Soldiers back, so to speak.”

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One afternoon at Fort Stewart I sat in the shade of a gazebo near the dog-training kennel with the 28-year-old Specialist Evan McQuiston, a personification of what DeHart was talking about. “Before, to me, dogs were just, well, dogs,” McQuiston told me in a halting drawl. “But, now, don’t ask me how, but the dogs, they somehow calm me down. I still get the anxiety and anger. But working with the dogs, I’ve learned to control it. It forces



SPC McQuiston working with PUMPKIN

me to have more patience.”

McQuiston, a self described “Good Ole Boy” from Florida’s panhandle, is the newest member of the base’s pilot program. I am not being unkind when I tell you that he is a scary man. With his broad shoulders, barrel chest, and beaked nose he reminds me of a more twitchy John Belushi – if Belushi had shaved his head to reveal a jagged and angry red scar coursing down the right side of his skull and face. Others had told me stories about McQuiston and his grease-fire temper. About his brawling with fellow Soldiers. About his attacking police officers while home on leave. About his perpetual itch for a fight.

Some would say he had his reasons. In May of 2007 McQuiston had only recently re-upped for his second tour of duty when his unit, traveling by convoy from an observation point southwest of Baghdad, was re-routed to search for suspected insurgents. As his Humvee crested a small hill adjacent to a canal he heard the tell-tale sound of metal on metal. As they say, if you hear it, it is too late. The IED blast tore through the right side of the vehicle, shredding McQuiston’s right arm – which now contains titanium plates from his elbow to his wrist held in place by 13 screws – and ripping apart his right knee and thigh. The shrapnel also fractured his skull and blew out the teeth along his upper right jaw bone. He has since undergone two reconstructive surgeries to his head and three dental implants. His mind was also seared; in August of 2009 he was formally diagnosed with PTSD by an Army medical board.

“When he came here he was non-trusting of people, and

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his personality was so volatile that he had limited patience with the system, let alone anybody in the system,” said Crystal Lastinger, who has been McQuiston’s nurse case manager since his arrival at Fort Stewart a year ago. “He was angry. Another Soldier would say something in passing, about the war, about what he had for breakfast, and McQuiston would just verbally go off on him. Then it would kind of escalate, blow up.”

And though Lastinger told me that McQuiston has never been abusive or violent with her, as she related tales of his temper I detected a small shudder in her countenance. Each wounded warrior is assigned a case manager like Lastinger, who not only tend to the Soldiers’ medical and Psychiatric needs, but, as she described it, “act as a sort of traffic cop to help these guys steer through the massive medical red tape paperwork as well as help transition them into the VA (Veterans Administration) system when they are discharged.”

Lastinger said that when she initially heard about the paws4vets. program, “I was thinking, I’m not so sure about this.” But the more she learned, the more she thought of Specialist Evan McQuiston. One day she approached Sgt. Ward.

“I don’t know how you get into this program,” she told him, “but I think I have a good candidate.” McQuiston showed up at Ward’s work trailer the next morning to volunteer.

Although McQuiston has yet to be assigned a specific dog – he takes turns working with the other Soldiers trainees – he is developing a bond with the mixed lab-retriever DEJA. “Because of my physical injuries I still have some trouble walking. And DEJA picks up on my balance problems. She sort of sticks next to me and guides me.”

Then he jerked a thumb toward the kennel, where his new squad mates were working with DEJA and the other dogs. “And, well, anxiety-wise, I’ve found that being around this group of people, like when we do the training, it gets me a little more used to being around all other people. This program, it makes me feel like I’m giving something back. Knowing that these dogs are going to be going to somebody who needs ‘em – not necessarily us, but maybe someday I get one – that’s helped, too.”

McQuiston, a high school graduate, told me that after his discharge he hopes to return to school and earn either a two-year or a four-year degree to prep him for some kind of career in “security,” perhaps one that entailed working with dogs. Lastinger, the nurse case manager, was being diplomatic when she allowed that before joining the Service Dog pilot program, McQuiston’s goals were a “long shot.” But the changes she has since seen in the Sol-



SPC McQuiston, USA w/ CHANCE  
a Rehabilitative Assistance Dog

***“My son is Evan McQuiston. He was recently discharged from the Army. I would like to sincerely thank the paws4vets. program for giving him his dog CHANCE. CHANCE has helped Evan more than I would have ever believed possible. He is a different person, so much more relaxed and not as angry. Thank you for helping my son,”*** wrote Mary Britten, Tallahassee, FL, via email.

dier’s demeanor and self-esteem, she said, “are astounding. The benefits he’s received from the program, he’ll take that into the civilian sector with him. He’s found a purpose.”

Because of his criminal record stemming from his dust-up with his hometown police, McQuiston is not allowed on the grounds of federal and state prisons. (The ban will be dropped if completes his probation without further incident.) Thus we left him behind the morning I joined Terry Henry, Karen Owen, and the “dog Soldiers” leaving for a co-training session with the volunteer inmates of the nearby Jessup minimum security facility. There the Soldiers and prisoners “double teamed” the dogs to run them through what Henry calls a “Basic Training refresher course.”

But the experience at the prison was nowhere near as insightful, at least to me, as what happened on the way back to Fort Stewart. We drove in a convoy, Henry’s kennel truck followed by two Army vans, and decided to stop for lunch at a roadhouse nestled along the edge of a spinney of piney woods. Henry’s is just one of myriad, unregulated private Service Dog programs springing up about the country – some with good credentials; some run by con men preying on distraught parents – and the previous evening he had told me about businesses from airlines to convenience stores turning away Soldiers accompanied by Service Dogs. I had not given the matter

Continued on Page 10

much thought. What American would try to bar a disabled Soldier from walking into a mall or movie theater? Guess what?

The restaurant's hostess immediately freaked at the sight of the squad of uniformed Soldiers and their dogs – on leashes – and summoned a manager. I turned to hide my notebook and recorded the exchange between him and Henry.

"I'm sorry, sir, but we only allow seeing-eye dogs in the restaurant."

"No, I am sorry, because under Federal law as well as Georgia law, you must accommodate us."

"That's not what I have been told, sir."

"In that case, we either eat here, or we call the police and when they arrive I will cite the specific Federal and State statutes to them."

Henry whipped out his cell phone and waited. You could almost hear the gears turning in the manager's head. As the other diners looked on the room fell quiet and a brief game of chicken ensued. Finally a compromise was reached. The manager instructed the hostess to escort our party through a far door and into an empty banquet room. Henry didn't push it. We thanked her and sat down to our menus.

"Happens all the time," Henry said. He pulled out what looked like a laminated business card and handed it to me. "I usually carry the federal laws as well as whatever state laws I am visiting on one of these."

---

A few weeks after I departed Fort Stewart the Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, General Peter Chiarelli, visited the base to personally inspect the Service Dog pilot program. According to Fort Stewart's senior commander, Chiarelli liked what he saw.

"All in all, he was quite taken by these dogs and the program," General Jeffrey Phillips told me over the phone.

While I was at Fort Stewart several of the Soldiers I interviewed, including Lt. Col. Reitemeyer and Sgt. Ward, told me that Phillips, who was unavailable during my visit, had acted as the "point man" for the program. In our conversation the general was too shrewd to directly answer whether he thought the Vice Chief's positive take would signal an expansion of the program to other bases. But it was obvious Phillips had high hopes. He also spoke about his personal empathy for Service Dogs, probably,

"I am so pleased that JAKE received some of his Service Dog training through the Wounded Warrior program at Ft. Stewart, GA. They contributed greatly to JAKE's success as a Service Dog and as a wounded warrior myself, I truly appreciate their efforts. JAKE has given me a new lease on life. I never would have imagined, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans training a Service Dog for an old Vietnam Veteran like me - this is the power of the paws4vets. program."



Col. Morrow and JAKE visit church at Ft. Belvoir, VA

Col. Sonny Morrow, USA (ret.), Alexandria, VA

he said, derived from growing up next door to a young blind boy to whom Phillips' mother, a registered nurse, administered medical shots. He also brought up a point that had escaped my thought process – the dog's, if you will, point of view.

"I'm not a dog, and I don't know what a dog is thinking," he said. "But I cannot imagine that a dog's life is not enhanced by being of great utility to someone. A dog just has its own sense ... it will choose its own trainer, its own human. And that's what they do here."

This jibed with something Henry had told me about the Soldiers and dogs, "finding each other." Moreover, General Phillips told me he was prepared to up the program's ante by experimenting with a service-horse program. This led, naturally, to my asking him how the program could possibly square with the old-school, pick-up-your-rucksack-or-get-a-kick-in-the-ass Army attitude.

"Well, sometimes it is just time to pick up that rucksack and follow orders," he said, before adding a caveat. The Army has learned, he added, hard lessons over the last decade. One in particular is to value a Soldier's "mental and behavioral dimensions" as well as his or her physical health. "And when you start valuing those kinds of intangibles, I think you automatically start opening up to consideration of unorthodox approaches."

Here Phillips paused, and laughed. "Or at least approaches that might seem unorthodox to us, but perfectly predictable to others. I mean, there are people out there who probably say, 'Why didn't you do this ten years ago?'"

One reason, of course, is that droves of Soldiers were

Continued on Page 11

not returning home from combat with damaged psyches 10 years ago. Another could be due to a distinctive trait of the American character. Speaking of another generation of U.S. military leaders, for instance, it was Winston Churchill who once noted that, “Americans can always be counted on to do the right thing ... after they’ve exhausted all other possibilities.”

Once past the sushi bar, once down the cereal aisle of the PX, Jeff Mitchell took a left past the frozen foods and then another at the laundry soap aisle. Some shoppers gave him a quick glance, most breezed past he and CAROLINE oblivious. Trailing Mitchell at some remove, Sergeant Ward asked Terry Henry if Mitchell was doing well enough to actually purchase something – anything – and “deal with” the cashier’s counter.

“Next time,” said Henry. “Let him get through this first.”

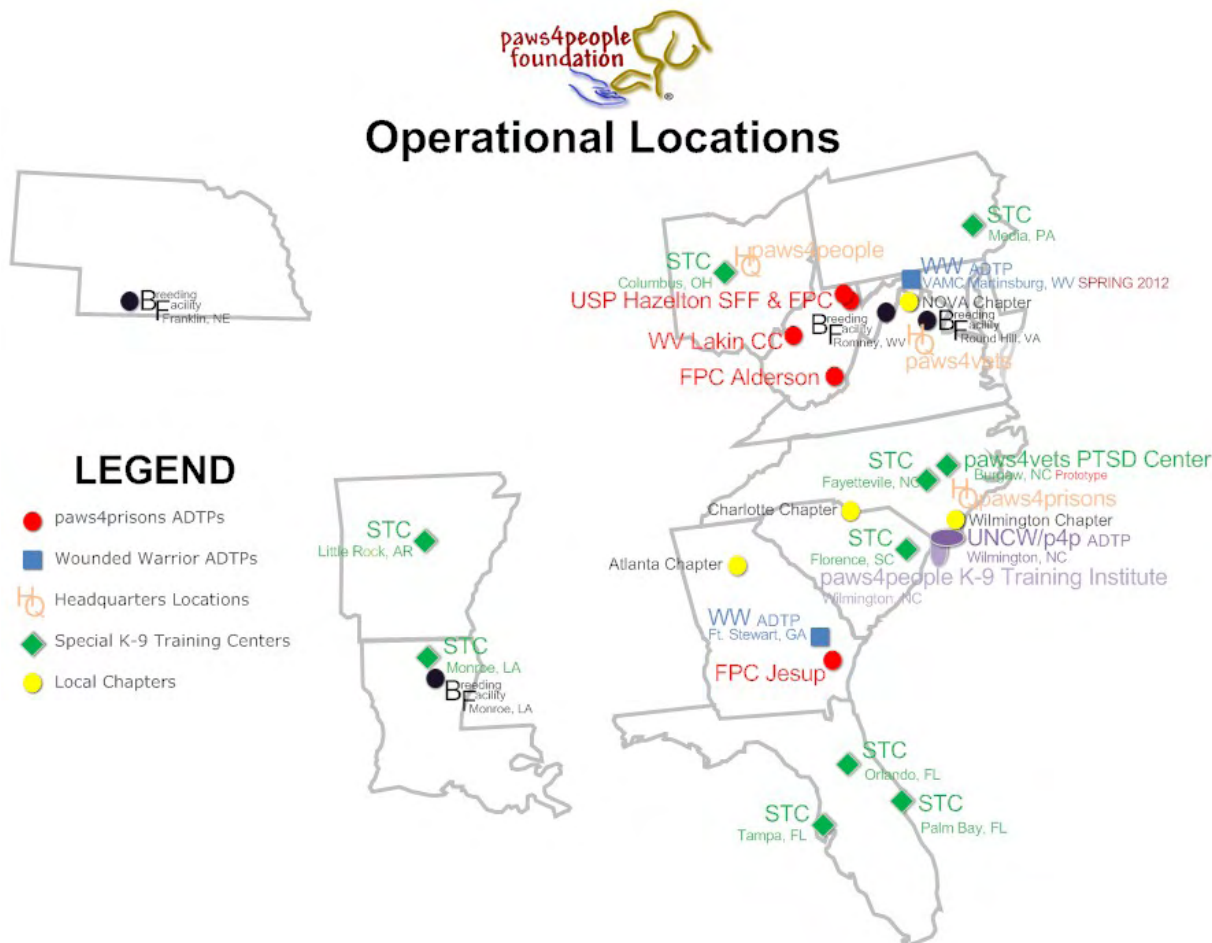
Mitchell made it around the commissary and back outside. Once there, he seemed to deflate, the strength draining from his body as if he had sprouted holes. He sat down on the curb, his head between his knees, breathing hard.

“Pay attention to CAROLINE,” Henry barked. “Give her a treat. Yes, you did it. But you couldn’t have without her. Thank her. Show her some love.”

Mitchell hopped up, his hands still shaking, and cuddled the dog. He fed her several treats.

Henry turned to Sgt. Ward and his demeanor softened. A goofy smile creased his face. “I don’t know, Sergeant, the kid might be getting it. You think?”

“Like a boy and his dog,” the veteran Non-Com answered. “Or, maybe, a dog and his boy.”





Lt. Colonel William Reitemeyer, Commander, Wounded Warrior Battalion, Ft. Stewart, GA. LTC Reitemeyer said in August 2010; *“I was a little skeptical of this dog idea at first. . . It’s almost like there are electric currents coursing through the leashes, connecting the minds of the Soldiers and the minds of their dogs. . . Of course I want to help thousands of wounded Soldiers, but if I help just one, I will consider this pilot program a success.”*

Well here are the 20 month statistics:

**paws4vets** Wounded Warrior Assistance Dog Placement Program  
as of 11-15-2011

USP Hazelton /SFF  
USP Hazelton /FPC  
FPC Alderson  
FPC Jesup  
WV DOC Lakin CC

DRAKE  
PUMPKIN  
DEJA  
MISSY  
CHANCE  
SANDIE  
JAKE  
SALLY  
CAROLINE  
CORINA  
TAZIE  
BIFF  
JACKIE  
PAISLEY  
GIEGER

**15 Dogs**



March 8, 2010  
To  
November 15, 2011

**20 Months**

**In-Training Status w/in Program**

SFC Joshua Campbell, USA  
JACKIE [SD-PSY] [In-Training]  
SFC Ed Boleyn, USA  
PAISLEY [SD-PSY] [In-Training]  
SGT Candice Tuttle, USA  
SPC John Brooks, USA  
SPC Marcus Williams, USA  
GIEGER [SD-PSY] [In-Training]  
SPC Michael Vernon, USA  
SANDIE [RAD In-Training]

**4 Dogs In-Training**

**Private Placements from Program**

MAJ Scott McIver, USA (ret.)  
PUMPKIN [RAD]  
HM2 Buf Kloppenborg, USN (ret.)  
SALLY [SD-PSY]  
SSG Daniel Tully, USA (ret.)  
DEJA [SD-SER & SD-PSY]  
SPC Raymond Roberts, USA [Ft. Stewart WTU]  
MISSY [SD-PSY]  
SPC Evan McQuiston, USA (ret.)  
CHANCE [RAD]  
Samantha Leiter [6-yr old civilian]  
CORINA [SD-SER]  
COL Sonny Morrow, USA (ret.)  
JAKE [SD-PND & BAL]  
SPC Kim Kushmer, USA  
DRAKE [RAD]  
SPC James Hicks, USA (ret.)  
BIFF [RAD]  
SGT Jeff Mitchell, USA (ret.)  
TAZIE [RAD] [AFGHANDOG]  
Nancy Kiger (civilian)  
CAROLINE [SD-SER]

**11 Dogs Placed**

**SUCCESS**

as defined by LTC Reitemeyer:

In 20 months, the paws4vets. Ft. Stewart Wounded Warrior Assistance Dog Training Program has produced:

- 4 Rehabilitative Assistance Dogs for 4 former Ft. Stewart WWB Soldiers
- 5 Psychiatric/Mobility Service Dogs :
  - 4 Psychiatric Service Dog (for Veterans; one Navy, three Army)
  - 1 Mobility Service Dog ( for a Vietnam Army Veteran)
- 1 Seizure Response / Mobility Service Dog for a 6-year old civilian
- 1 Mobility Service Dog for a Physical Therapist (civilian)

# Iraq + Afghanistan = HEALING

Photographs by Peter Lang; Photographs by Carol Mitchell



Photograph by Peter Lang

TAZIE & Jeff  
August 2011

## Iraq: SGT Jeff Mitchell, USA (ret.)

Jeff was medically retired from the Army in 2007 after two combat tours in Iraq. Jeff spent the next three(+) years living in isolation in his old bedroom in his parent's home outside Atlanta, GA – in Army nomenclature Jeff was a “cave dweller.”

*“January 2010 I was beat. I had just come home from a 10 day stay at the VA Hospital in Atlanta. Drastic changes were made to my medications over those 10 days, and I was just starting to adjust to the new meds. At that point in my life it was difficult for me to be anywhere except my room, if I came downstairs at all it was just to eat. I am not sure I have ever felt as hopeless and out of control as the previous months leading up to my hospitalization. Friends that I served with had killed themselves and the path that I was on I would probably have become one of the statistics. I had been out of the Army for a little over three years and not a whole lot had improved. I hadn't had a drink in a couple of years, but that hadn't stopped me from finding anything I could to make me numb, to not remember, to not think. Ultimately that is what led me to the VA Hospital,” wrote Jeff in one of his recent blogs.*

*“I am not sure if any of you have ever met a doctor that genuinely cared for your well being. When I was in Colorado going to all of the groups, all of the meetings, all of the psychiatrists, all of the social workers, it seemed like everyone was going through the motions. “Take two of these, I will see you next week,” except it was about 16 of these in my case. I was a walking zombie. I slurred my speech. . . serious anti-depressants and anti-psychotics, not to mention the medications that I have to take to keep my migraines under control, and the ones that I take when I start getting a migraine. These medications have some pretty serious side effects, . . . I was hospitalized . . . to make changes . . . It was not easy. There were several anxiety attacks, several migraines, several nights where I didn't sleep a minute, several flashbacks. Suicidal? No. Homicidal? Without a doubt. . . My Mom brought a Wounded Warrior news letter with her and had me read the article on the front page. It was a story about a Veteran who had a Service Dog and how the dog had impacted his life. My parents asked if that was something I was interested in, and of course it was.”*

*“I was at a bottom. I have hit several bottoms, but I have always seemed to dig a little deeper each time. Willingness is the key to recovery, I don't have to do anything, but if I am willing to give something a shot, then I believe that is a step in the right direction. . . I was broke. My parents were beat, but they were willing to try whatever they thought might help me improve my quality of life. paws4vets. was the next thing to try.”*

Jeff became a paws4vets.™ client in January 2010. In March 2010, Jeff visited the paws4prisons. Assistance Dog Training Program at the Federal Prison Camp Alderson (FPCA), Alderson, WV. [NOTE: This was the first time in over three years that Jeff had been anywhere other than his house or his therapy sessions. FPCA is over six hours from Jeff's house.] Jeff “bumped” [see insert box] with several potential Service Dogs at FPCA, and was thereafter assigned to a Golden Retriever named CARLOINE.

The paws4vets.™ PTSD Intervention training staff worked with Jeff and CARLOINE for the next nine months. Jeff and CARLOINE trained at Ft. Stewart, the Federal Prison Camp Jesup (FPCJ), Jesup, GA, and Charlotte, NC. Each training session pushed Jeff past his “comfort zone” and required Jeff and CARLOINE to train in retail stores, grocery stores, malls, parks, restaurants, etc. Jeff had numerous anxiety / panic attacks, he “melted down” in public places, he stressed and strained his limits in an attempt to learn how to use

### What is a “bump?”

A bump is the process of a dog choosing their partner. Bumps traditionally take place at our training locations, almost always in the correctional institution where the dog is being trained. This is done so that the potential client is the only “variable” in the dogs' perception and environment during the bump. Dogs who are identified as having the potential to fulfill the particular client's needs are considered for the bump. During a bump, dogs are introduced to the potential client and family in turn. paws4people™ staff and trainers observe for bonding behaviors. Over the course of the bump, a strong bond is almost always identified. Once this relationship is prolonged and confirmed in the eyes of the client and staff, the dog is matched with that client. The rest of the dog's training is spent customizing its skills for the needs of that particular client and, assuming that all graduation requirements are met during the duration of the dogs training, graduation is planned and a successful team is created!

Continued on Page 14

# Iraq + Afghanistan = HEALING continued from Page 13



**TAZIE**  
Psychiatric  
Service Dog  
[In-Training]

CAROLINE to control or mitigate his PTSD symptoms. Jeff was unable to emotionally bond with CAROLINE, or for that matter with anyone or anything. Since the ability of a Psychiatric Service Dog, to help a person with PTSD relies very heavily on the “human-animal bond” that is created between the dog and its service team member, the relationship between Jeff and CAROLINE never reached the point where they could function appropriately. In December 2010 / January 2011 Jeff was informed that CAROLINE was being reassigned to training status, and that she could not longer be considered as a candidate to be his Service Dog.

Jeff was recommended back to his treatment team and requested to work on his inability to emotionally connect to/with anyone or anything. This was an extremely difficult time for Jeff.

*“I spent almost a year working with CAROLINE . . . I spent almost a year wondering what the hell was wrong with me, what was wrong with this dog? I have done EVERYTHING (the paws4vets’s training staff had asked me to do, and all [they wanted was] more! I made several trips to Ft. Stewart, watched people that had been in the program less than half the time I was in walk home with their [Service Dogs]. . . I made several trips to Charlotte only to get emails asking what I had done to CAROLINE. Why is it taking her four days to recover from spending two [days] with you? The decision was made to not place CAROLINE with me. That gave me three choices: 1.) Wait for the possibility of having another Service Dog placed with me; 2.) Get a RAD (a Rehabilitative Assistance Dog); or, 3.) Find another organization that [would] place an animal with me. Not only [were these] my three options, but I also had six objectives [I would have to ] meet BEFORE paws4vets. would even consider the first two. Really? REALLY!?!?”*

*“I needed some time to think about his one.” “In March 2011, [after several weeks of thinking] the phone rings one afternoon, and it is [the Executive Director of paws4vets.]. He asked if I would [consider] fostering TAZIE for a couple of weeks. I had decided that I wanted to go ahead and get a RAD, I had invested quite a bit of myself in paws4vets. and really did not see the sense in starting over with [a different organization]. I believed that [paws4vets.’s] had my best interest in mind, accepting that was a different story, but everyone that I had met [all of the other Veterans or Active-duty people who had already received their Service Dogs were] doing amazing things.”*

## Afghanistan: TAZIE

TAZIE was rescued from Afghanistan in the Spring of 2009. Having survived the war-ravaged environment and the Afghan “anti-dog” cultural environment, she was lucky to be alive. She also had Chronic / Complex “doggie” PTSD.

Here is TAZIE when she arrived at JFK. TAZIE entered the paws4prisons. Assistance Dog Training Program at the U.S.



**TAZIE**  
JFK Airport  
May 7, 2009

Penitentiary Hazelton, Secure Female Facility twelve hours after she got off of the airplane. She began her rehabilitative training after a bath and a good nights sleep. TAZIE had several aggressive resource guarding issues: food, territory, and possessions. She had major trust issues and didn't like males in uniforms (I wonder why).

Over the next two years, TAZIE was transferred from training location to training location in an attempt to find the right combination of “trainer” and “environment”. TAZIE was eventually “kicked out” of every training facility she entered due to her behavioral issues. Finally in February, 2011, she was kicked out of the last training facility. This left paws4vets. with only one choice – find her a home – and fast.

**Afghanistan Veteran**

LOOKING FOR A VERY SPECIAL VETERAN TO HELP ME OVERCOME MY ISSUES: I CAN'T TRUST VERY EASILY, I DON'T LIKE LOUD, SUDDEN NOISES OR FAST MOVEMENTS, BRIGHT FLASHES SOMETIMES CAUSE ME PROBLEMS.

**CAN YOU HELP ME?**

Hello,

My name is TAZIE. I was in Afghanistan for about 2 years. I was rescued from there by an organization called AfghanDogZ. I was placed into a paws4people. rehabilitative K-9 training program in a federal prison in West Virginia. Some very nice inmates are providing me with a nurturing "temporary" home, and are training me (in English) in basic and advanced obedience skills. They tell me that this will help me find a home.

What I really need is a fellow Veteran who understands the trauma I have been through. Maybe someone who has some of the same issues I have, and then we can help each other return to a regular life. If you know someone who might be interested in helping me, and letting me help them, please let the people at paws4vets. know, and they can get us together.

Thank you!  
TAZIE

**paws4vets**  
www.paws4vets.org  
Contact Us / Application - Tabs

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## HEALING: TAZIE & Jeff

Since Jeff did not have a dog at the time TAZIE was “kicked out” of her last training facility, Jeff was asked if he would “foster” TAZIE, until a suitable home could be found for her. Reluctantly, Jeff agreed.

About a month into the foster, Jeff was supposed to bring TAZIE up to VA for placement, when the night before the trip was to take place, he called and asked if he could keep her.

Since then (March 2011) Jeff and TAZIE have been working together to become a Service Dog Team. Jeff has made absolutely incredible progress, doing things and going places never before imagined. TAZIE has become a completely different dog, totally focused on Jeff and minus almost all of her previous stress and anxiety induced behaviors. One could describe it and as a “match made from heaven.”

*“It is amazing to me to look back at the series of events that led me to where I am today. I am grateful that everything has happened exactly as it has, if one minor thing was different I may not be in the position I am today. Amidst all of this chaos, I was being taken care of. No matter what I did, a positive resulted from it. Thinking about these things really makes me question what my purpose is, why me? Why am I here?”*

*“To say that TAZIE has impacted my life in a positive way wouldn’t even begin to describe what she has done. I have gone places with 200+ people, I have spoken several times to groups of people about PTSD, about TAZIE, about what she is doing for me. I did a couple of Summer Camps at the Humane Society for kids, with TAZIE. I actually go downstairs to talk with my parents, for no real reason at all. I guess I have a hard time describing the difference, and if you did not know me a couple of years ago, this may not seem like much. The work that I have done in my recovery from both PTSD and alcoholism has led me to new understandings, new insights on what makes me tick, why I do the things I do. I have learned more about myself in the last two years than I knew about myself in the previous 32. It is almost like a new realization comes to me weekly, new discoveries, new chapters in my life are being written. To actually be grateful for something, anything, was once a foreign concept. To see that I can actually develop and nurture a bond with TAZIE was something that I could never wrap my brain around. If I can do this with TAZIE, why can I not do this with people?”*

*“I had no idea what Terry and the rest of paws4vets. was hoping they would see one day with CAROLINE. I know exactly what they were looking for now.”*

**You may read more about Jeff and TAZIE’s by going to:**

<http://www.helpkyria.com/category/paws4vets-clients/jeff-and-tazie/>



# Mother's View of PTSD Intervention Therapy



Carol Mitchell, with son Jeff and Psychiatric Service Dog, TAZIE.

*"Thousands of veterans around the country are homeless, in jail, in hospitals, locked in their rooms or have committed suicide because they can't face living every day with the never ending, relentless symptoms of PTSD,"* wrote Carol Mitchell, Mother of Sgt. Jeff Mitchell, USA (ret.), in a recent blog.

Carol, and her husband, Doug Mitchell, survived, as thousands of other Military parents did, the countless hours, days, weeks, months of their son's/daughter's combat tours. The Mitchell's were relieved and thankful that their son returned home from war physically whole. They would soon learn that his 'invisible wounds' would affect him in ways they never imagined possible.

Jeff's Chronic/Complex PTSD and alcoholism were so bad, that the Mitchell's had to go out to Ft. Carson, CO, to bring their son home after his discharge from the Army. That was 2007. Since his arrival home, the Mitchell's have learned a new term: "cave dweller."

This term is used to describe a Veteran who completely withdraws from society and lives in near or total isolation. In Jeff's case that meant he moved back into his old bedroom in the Mitchell's home, just outside of Atlanta, GA. Until the Spring of 2010, Jeff would only come out of his room (cave) to be taken to medical appointments or to attend his weekly recovery meeting.

*". . . paws4vets. did our home visit in Jan 2010. paws4vets. offered a (PTSD Intervention) therapy that didn't include mind numbing drugs, that actually encouraged Jeff to feel (experience) his PTSD, to acknowledge it and challenge it."*

The PTSD Intervention Therapy that Jeff was to undergo is a K-9 centric Cognitive Behavioral / Exposure Therapy methodology that teaches individuals with PTSD how to use the abilities of a Psychiatric Service dog to manage, control and/or mitigate their PTSD symptoms.

Jeff began his paws4vets. PTSD Intervention program in March 2010. Jeff worked with his first Psychiatric Service Dog; CAROLINE for over nine months. Due to some of Jeff's PTSD symptoms he and CAROLINE could not form the "bond" required for their continuation as a working service dog team. Jeff lost CAROLINE, and had to face many difficult decisions and personal treatment options. Then in March 2011, Jeff received a dog rescued from Afghanistan; named: TAZIE. TAZIE has "doggie" PTSD as bad as Jeff has human PTSD. The two of them have forged a "bond" that no one could have ever imagined possible.

*"What TAZIE does for Jeff is provide a distraction to the constant (PTSD) symptoms - she helps him get out of his own head and concentrate on her and her needs."*

*"TAZIE makes him laugh - that doesn't sound like much, but Jeff hadn't laughed in years. Now he laughs every day at something silly that she does. She loves him unconditionally in a way that no human being can. She has opened his heart to the possibility of hope."*

*"No matter how much his Dad and I love him, it wasn't enough to help him see the goodness in himself. He didn't believe that he was worthy of love - no matter what we did or said - he felt "less than"."*

*"I can't explain why a dog's love and devotion fills a void that another human being cannot fill - I just know that it does - because I've witnessed it."*

*"My son is alive and moving forward with his life because of the love of a dog, because of the love of TAZIE."*



**The TAZIE SMILE!**  
*priceless*

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# Mother's View of PTSD Intervention Therapy continued from Page 16

*"Speaking in public is terrifying for most people, but especially for someone with PTSD. Jeff doesn't want to draw attention to himself - he wants to melt into the background."*

*"The irony is that a service dog draws attention - everybody wants to come over and pet the dog and ask questions. Without TAZIE, when Jeff is in public, he puts up his "armor" and avoids making eye contact. But with TAZIE, he can't hide. People are curious and come up to him to ask about her. Sometimes he comes home and says - "I can't believe that I just spent thirty minutes talking to a complete stranger about TAZIE and paws4vets.. It's all part of the healing and breaking down the barriers of PTSD."*

*"Jeff often speaks at his group session at the Vet Center on Tuesdays. He has spoken at the Northeast Georgia Humane Society, at Mercer University and at UNC-Wilmington, to a college level Assistance Dog Training class. He was part of the "Heroes First" golf tournament at Stone Mountain last spring and will take part in the next one on May 3, 2012."*

*"Yesterday was "Military Appreciation Day" at Home Depot world headquarters. paw4vets, along with many other veteran/military support groups like the USO, had a table with information about the paws4vets. Jeff and TAZIE . . . spoke with people and answered questions about how TAZIE helped him live with PTSD."*

*"It's hard for him - he usually gets a migraine and sometimes a nose bleed, (PTSD manifests physically as well as mentally and emotionally) but it's important to make the public aware of what a Psychiatric Service Dog can do and it is part of Jeff's healing process. The best way for Jeff to heal is to help others and even though it's often physically and emotionally painful, in the long run, it's how Jeff will learn to live with PTSD."*

*Jeff was unable to do any of these things before paws4vets. and TAZIE.*

*TAZIE is to Jeff what a wheelchair is to someone who can't walk.*

*TAZIE is so much more - she is a constant source of unconditional love and encouragement.*

*The main reason that Jeff puts himself out there is in the hopes that somebody else who is in pain and feeling hopeless will find a spark of hope."*

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A Non-Profit Corporation  
FEIN: 54-1948479  
A 501(c)(3) Charitable Foundation  
DLN: 17053274781095

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20142-0491

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