

Post-traumatic-stress Disorder (PTSD): US Military Neglects Soldiers' Medical Needs

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At least 50 soldiers from Fort Hood who have medical profiles that should prohibit them from military training have been sent to the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California, regardless of their conditions.

Truthout spoke with some of these soldiers on June 7, before they were to fly back to Fort Hood the next day.

"We were brought out here to NTC after being told we would be given some of the best medical treatment out here," a soldier who is an Iraq war veteran diagnosed with post-traumatic-stress disorder (PTSD), speaking on condition of anonymity because he feared military reprisals, told Truthout. "But when we were here at Ft. Irwin, nobody would see us. It took my wife calling the Chaplain to get my medication refilled. We've gone a month without seeing a psychiatrist. Some of us see them weekly, some twice a week, and we haven't been able to receive any of this."

This, despite the soldier having been given his PTSD diagnosis by the military itself.

He admitted to Truthout that he needs the medication because of anxiety, depression, and homicidal thoughts.

"There're people out here who've had to cancel 17 psychiatric appointments to be out here," the soldier added. "There are people needing physical treatment that have thrown out their backs."

The soldier, who is based at Fort Hood, explained that his commander, Captain Ryan McDonald, "talked to my doctor and told him I could continue my treatment at Ft. Irwin. This obviously isn't happening, so my doctor has been trying to get me back, and I've been unable to see anyone. They are two months behind here and can't see us, but said they couldn't help anyway because we're not permanently stationed there, we're supposed to be at Ft. Hood."

Captain McDonald heads a unit that has, according to the soldiers Truthout spoke with at Ft. Irwin, at least 55 members at the NTC who have medical profiles that are supposed to exclude them from being around combat training, weapons, and ammunition.

Brandi Owen, whose husband was sent to the NTC along with the rest of the [3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment](#) told Truthout she believes that Capt. McDonald is responsible for pressuring doctors of many of the 3rd ACR soldiers into allowing them to be sent to the NTC.

"[My husband's] psychiatrist here at Ft. Hood cleared him to go [to NTC] at the last minute because his commander told him he'd get the same treatment there as he did here," Owen explained to Truthout. "He left here May 16, and his next appointment was supposed to be the next day. He had none of his sedating medication. He was given a profile by his doctor saying he was not to have combat training exposure, but NTC is training soldiers for deployment."

Owen's husband, an Iraq war veteran who has also been diagnosed with PTSD, suffers from that, along with anxiety disorder and depression.

"His doctor released him to go to NTC, assuming he'd get treatment," she continued. "Since he's been there, not once has he seen a doctor. It took them three days to fill his meds. Once you're off those meds, you get suicidal."

Cynthia Thomas runs the [Under the Hood Café](#) in Killeen, Texas, on the outskirts of the base. The café is described as a place meant to provide support for soldiers and their families.

"There are dozens of spouses here at Fort Hood whose husbands who are soldiers here have been diagnosed with PTSD, traumatic brain injury (TBI) and other problems and they are being sent to NTC anyway," Thomas told Truthout. "Even though their doctors are telling them they can't be around live-fire or weapons, they are being sent there anyway."

Capt. McDonald, who is in charge of many of the soldiers, has, according to Thomas and all of the spouses Truthout spoke with, been "calling their doctors and telling them the soldiers can be taken to NTC, and that they would be given medical treatment there."

Brandi Owen, outraged at the lack of medical treatment for her husband, contacted her congressman, [John Carter](#), of the 31st District of Texas.

"I contacted Congressman Carter on May 13, just before my husband was sent to NTC, and his aid told me that there had already been 26 Congressional complaints about these guys being sent to NTC," Owen explained.

Her attempts to get answers via her husbands' chain of command and various generals have only been met with frustration.

"I've talked to all of his chain of command, the generals here, and at Ft. Irwin, they always transfer me to someone else, or say they can't help me or there is nothing they can do," Owen said. "I have a notebook full of numbers they refer me to, or tell me to make an IG [Inspector General] complaint, which I do, but I still haven't heard from any of them. The Chain of Command doesn't do anything. He's going on two and a half months without seeing a doctor. He needs meds! He needs a doctor! NTC has given him flashbacks from Iraq. He can't sleep and can't eat. Now I'm worried about what he'll be like when he gets back. It's going to be worse than when he left."

Truthout spoke with another soldier at the NTC, a facility that describes itself as "[The World's Premier Training Center for the World's Finest Military](#)."

"About three days before I was told I was leaving for NTC, I went home to pack and flipped out and tore my house apart," the soldier, speaking on condition of anonymity because he too feared reprisals for speaking to the media, told Truthout. "I went to the ER, they talked

about putting me in the psych ward, but they put me on homicide watch because they feared I would kill my chain of command. They sent me out here, supposedly with a 30-day supply of narcotics, but I ran out. I went four days without my meds, and they didn't even fill one of them."

The soldier, an Iraq war veteran, said of his time there, "I had friends blown up. I've seen all kinds of shit I'd really preferred not to have seen and it is messing with my head."

"I can't be around simulated combat or combat exposure," he explained while talking with Truthout from the NTC on June 7. "But I'm here on a FOB, there are 50 caliber machine guns and ammo everywhere, and I have access to all this, and nobody in my chain of command gives a shit. I can't sleep at night. It's ruthless shit out here. I haven't seen anything like this before."

The soldier believes he is not going to be deployed because his medical profile lists him as being "non-deployable."

Truthout asked him why, he believed, he was sent to NTC.

"I got sent out here because they get \$8,000 per head for every soldier out here for their budget," he said. "You have people here on respirators, people with cervical cancer, it's not just me...there are about 50 soldiers here that should not be here, just from my unit, 3rd ACR. There're about 5,500 soldiers in the regiment right now, and about 50 of us that are absolutely not supposed to be out here, period."

Crystal Hess, herself a veteran of two tours in Iraq and two in Afghanistan, is dismayed by the fact that her husband, Specialist Cory Hess, despite his having a broken hand and PTSD, was sent to NTC.

"He was sent to NTC in order to prepare to deploy to Iraq in August," Hess told Truthout. "He's got anger and depression issues. He's been blown up multiple times in Iraq, he has issues with his knees, back, shoulder, and I'm pushing for him to be screened for TBI, because he has persistent headaches."

Hess explained that she has tried talking with commanders at Fort Hood about her situation, "and asked them to step up and take care of this, because it's affecting our home life. Cory has anger issues because of his deployment."

While her husband was sent back to Fort Hood early from NTC only because "I called the Department of Army IG, and bitched them all out and said, 'fix it.' So they said he needed immediate surgery and sent him home. Now he's been home for six days, he has no medicine, he's in pain, every move he makes with his hand leaves him on the ground in pain. I'm probably going to have to take him to the ER to get him pain meds. They are doing nothing to help him."

Hess also blames Capt. McDonald for having pressured Cory's doctor into sending him to NTC, despite his injuries.

Capt. McDonald was deployed to Iraq from 2007-2008 out of Ft. Riley, Kansas, as a Logistics Advisor, with the National Police Transition Team and the Iraq Assistance Group. In 2009 he became the Deputy Regimental S4 with the 3rd ACR. This is apparently his first time in direct command of soldiers.

“Capt. McDonald was not deployed with the guys in 3rd ACR but took command of the unit after they came back from Iraq in January 2009,” Thomas explained. “The soldiers could not tell me much about him other than that McDonald has no leadership skills and does not take the family members into consideration.”

According to Thomas, McDonald is not married, “Which could explain why he doesn’t give a crap what the spouses have to say.”

She added, however, that the problem is not only with Capt. McDonald, but with “the entire chain of command at Fort Hood.”

When asked about this situation, a public affairs officer at Ft. Hood told Truthout, “All the soldiers sent to NTC have, when necessary, been cleared to go by both their commanders and their doctors.”

“The military are not taking care of our husbands,” Stephanie Wallin, whose husband was also sent to NTC despite his having a medical profile, told Truthout. “Honestly they don’t care about our soldiers, or the families. My husband has PTSD and should not have been sent to NTC, but they sent him. And when they sent him, they said he’d get meds and attention, and he didn’t.”

Wallin explained that she and several other wives called a military chaplain to plead for help.

“I told them I was scared because my husband was saying he didn’t know what to do and couldn’t deal with it anymore,” she said. “It’s really hard on me. My husband has homicidal thoughts, and I have three kids. So I don’t know how he’s going to deal with the kids. I want to know why the chain of command lies. I don’t know why they say they are all about soldiers and families and they’ll make sure they’ll get the help they need. They don’t. He was diagnosed with PTSD. It’s very, very hard. I’m very, very stressed out. My husband is not the man I married. They pushed him until he broke, and then they’ve pushed him beyond that.”

Wallin said that she has “talked to everyone; generals, chaplains, commanders, and nobody wants to listen to us spouses.”

Wallin said that when she attempted to talk to her husband’s commander about the situation to ask for help, “they told my husband, ‘Why don’t you have your wife on a leash?’ Then they tried to punish him for my coming there to try to help him and said I was trying to get him in trouble.”

“The Army is not what it says it is,” Wallin continued. “Recruiters make it sound so good, but once you sign up, you’re screwed. My kids wonder what they did wrong because of what the Army is doing to their father. They feel like they’ve lost their father. I don’t know what to do anymore. There’s a whole bunch of soldiers who need this story out. They need help, and they are not getting the medical help they need.”

Dahr Jamail, an independent journalist, is the author of *The Will to Resist: Soldiers Who Refuse to Fight in Iraq and Afghanistan*, (Haymarket Books, 2009), and *Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches From an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq*, (Haymarket Books, 2007). Jamail reported from occupied Iraq for nine months as well as from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Turkey over the last five years.

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